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**Teaching History in Postmodern Times: History Teachers'  
Thinking about the Nature and Purposes of Their Subject**

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Professional Doctorate in Education

University of Sussex

May 2010

## Statement

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature.....

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the following for their role in the completion of this thesis. I am grateful for the ongoing support and feedback of my supervisors Dr John Pryor and Dr Pat Drake. I am indebted to all the teachers who participated in the research whose accounts are presented here. I would like to thank Dr Keith Grieves for the encouragement that led me to embark on the EdD and for his ongoing support. I benefitted greatly from my membership of the EdD cohort of 2004. This thesis was made possible by the support of the institutions in which I was employed during its completion. Finally I owe the deepest gratitude for the unconditional support of Luke Tredinnick and Joan and Harry McCrum.

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## Summary

This thesis investigates how secondary school history teachers at the start of their teaching careers view the nature and purposes of their subject and how they think these views impact on their practice. Data were collected through in depth individual qualitative interviews with eleven teachers completing their initial training. These focused on: how these beginning teachers conceived of the nature of their discipline; the rationale they presented for the purposes of their subject in the school curriculum; the origins of their views on the nature and purposes of history; and how they are manifest in what and how they teach. In order to maintain coherence and to represent the richness and complexity of each teacher's own story these were written, analysed and presented as narrative accounts. A summary is given of each the accounts with three presented in full.

The accounts show these beginning history teachers' views on the nature of history as reflecting the dominant discourse that characterises history as an academic subject, being largely Constructionist and emphasising the objective analysis of historical evidence. The teachers' rationales for the purpose of history emphasised broader educational, social and moral purposes. More postmodern perspectives are apparent in the emphasis given to the importance of historical interpretations. Family background, lived experiences, literature and the media are significant influences on the teachers' beliefs about the nature and purposes of history. These beliefs seem to impact on classroom practice and pupil learning in the subject. They influence teaching style, choice of learning activities and the areas of historical understanding emphasised, with, for example, views of the past as an uncontested body of knowledge leading to a pedagogy dominated by the transmission of substantive knowledge; and views which emphasise the more constructed nature of history leading to more pupil centred skills based approaches.

Teachers' views on the nature and purpose of the subject are a significant influence on their mediation of the National Curriculum. The National Curriculum for History has increasingly provided opportunities for interpretations more sympathetic to the postmodern orientation but research and inspection evidence suggest that these opportunities are often poorly realised in schools. One reason for this is proposed as history teachers' lack of engagement with postmodern perspectives on history. It is important for teachers to engage with such approaches as without further consideration of their implications history



teachers are unable to teach aspects of secondary History. Teachers also need to recognise and make explicit different orientations towards history in order to facilitate pupil learning, to engage pupils and to provide them with the skills necessary to be critical consumers of the range of histories presented to them in society.

The research has implications for history teaching, pupil learning and the initial training and professional development of teachers. The case is made for further consideration being given to postmodern perspectives on the nature of history in initial and continuing teacher education in order to improve teaching and learning. The initial teacher education of history teachers needs to ensure that those on programmes have the syntactical knowledge necessary to develop effective teaching strategies and approaches, to enable pupil learning, and to develop their own subject knowledge and ability to reflect on their own practice and development. This research also emphasises the need for all those involved in training to critically engage with subject orientations as where beginning teachers' beliefs conflict with the dominant discourse of history teaching this can lead to problematic experiences of teaching and of teacher training.

## **PART 1 CONTEXT**

### **Chapter 1- Introduction Establishing the Context of the Research**

#### **Introduction**

This thesis investigates how secondary school history teachers at the start of their teaching careers view the nature and purposes of their subject. It gives consideration to different academic discourses in relation to the nature of history and looks at how these are represented in the school curriculum. How the history teachers position themselves in relation to these debates and the relationship between these positionings and their rationales for the purposes of their subject are explored. Detailed attention is given to the origins and influences of their views on the nature and purpose of history. The ways in which their thinking about the nature and purposes of history could impact on their classroom practice are explored with a view to informing courses of initial teacher education and programmes aiming to influence the practice of school history teachers. The research questions which focus the research are: how do beginning history teachers conceive of the nature of their discipline?; what rationale do beginning history teachers present for the purpose of their subject in the school curriculum?; what are the origins of these views on the nature and purpose of history?; how are they manifest in what and how history teachers choose to teach in their classrooms?

#### **Rationale**

My interest in this area was shaped in part by my own experiences as a learner of history, as a school history teacher and particularly as a history teacher educator. As a student of history I was unsure of the purpose of my own study. I was aware that I was, particularly considering my limited engagement with its traces, not actually engaged in any kind of representation of what happened in the past. My study, at all levels, primarily involved summarising and synthesising secondary sources into pieces of discursive writing. Where I was engaged in using the traces of the past this occasionally involved a decontextualised critique but more often interweaving given sources into a narrative. Success came from

presenting an accepted or often an expected account. I was aware that this was a largely textual undertaking at some distance from the past. In a time before historiographical courses were common I had no explicit opportunities to consider issues concerning the nature and purposes of history in my own study. There were moments that caused me to think more explicitly about the nature of the subject, for example in considering the influence of Marxist perspectives on medieval society on historians' accounts of the period, and reflecting on the influence of anthropology on history. These experiences raised awareness of the way in which accounts of people or the past have different motivations and are rooted in different traditions.

My lack of clarity about the nature and purposes of history was heightened by my early experiences as a secondary history teacher. I was engaged in teaching pupils about the interpretive nature of history whilst at the same time supposedly inculcating them into the ways of the historian in coming to the truth of the past through the objective critical analysis of sources. I found it difficult to reconcile these two apparently contradictory endeavours. My teaching of history, within the context of early versions of the National Curriculum for History and contemporary examination specification requirements, aimed to develop pupils' skills and understanding of history, but more often focused on enabling pupils to produce acceptable accounts of the past. An example of this was the GCSE coursework tasks that focused on the development of pupils' empathetic skills. Rather than developing their ability to empathise with others (leaving aside whether it was possible or desirable for 15 year olds to empathise with, for example, women working in mines in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century) these tasks actually involved pupils in reproduced accepted accounts of the ways in which people in the past experienced events and changes.

It was only as I made the transition between secondary history teaching and working as a history teacher educator that I was able to explore more fully the competing debates on the nature of history and to give consideration to the ways in which these were represented in different aspects of the school curriculum. A particular interest in history teachers' understanding of the nature of their discipline arose out of my experiences in my professional setting. In leading a secondary history Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course I encountered a range of understandings of history amongst beginning teachers, which seemed to be influential during their training year and beyond (Pendry 1997). These included diverse conceptions of the nature of history as a discipline and a

variety of rationales for its value as a school subject. For example, where students had undertaken degree programmes in history in which historiographical and methodological issues had been less explicit they seemed to articulate an understanding of the subject which emphasised singular narratives, factualisms and the discovery of truths; these then had to be reconsidered in the light of teaching in school in relation to the National Curriculum for the subject.

This reconsideration was not always straightforward. Deep-seated beliefs about their discipline were often difficult to challenge within the context of a nine month course, most of which was undertaken in practice based settings. Patrick's (1988) analysis of the design and content of PGCE history courses found that PGCE history tutors were most often in favour of a 'new' history characterised by a skills-based approach to history as a process of enquiry and that they preferred to place their students in schools where the teachers shared this thinking. This led me to reflect on the experiences of those students on programmes of history education whose thinking about history was at odds with dominant discourses of history teaching.

Existing literature gives little consideration to the thinking of teachers in England about their discipline and its impact on their practice. Strongly held, competing views on the nature and purposes of school history by a wide range of stakeholders have resulted in fierce debates played out in a variety of fora (Phillips 1998) but the actual professional practice of history teachers has been largely absent from such debates. Research into the thinking and practice of history teachers reveals the richness and complexity of their professional decision-making, but little consideration has been given to the influence of their thinking about their subject discipline beyond the extent to which it underpins more detailed understandings of its substance and procedures (Husbands et al 2003). I decided to undertake this study in order to make good this gap in the literature with the hope that my findings would inform programmes of initial teacher education and programmes of later professional development which aim to impact on classroom practice.

### **Relevance of the study**

A better understanding of the knowledge of teachers can extend our understanding of what they do in their classrooms and the ways in which they impact on pupil learning in their subjects. Research undertaken in the United States in a range of subject areas

recognises the important influence that a teacher's subject knowledge has on their teaching, highlighting the important influence of their understanding of the nature of their subject on student learning, Shulman (1987: 9) argues that:

The teacher has special responsibilities in relation to content knowledge, serving as the primary source of student understanding of subject matter. The manner in which that understanding is communicated conveys to students what is essential about a subject and what is peripheral...The teacher also communicates, whether consciously or not, ideas about the ways in which 'truth' is determined in a field and a set of attitudes and values that markedly influence students understanding.

Grossman (1991) outlines how the goals for instruction, curriculum choices, instructional assignments and classroom questions of secondary school English teachers are governed by their interpretive stance or what she refers to as their orientation to literature such as towards readers, text or context. In addressing the subject matter understanding of mathematics teachers Ball (1991: 1-2) elaborates on this idea:

teachers' subject matter knowledge interacts with their assumptions and explicit beliefs about teaching and learning, about students, and about context to shape the ways in which they teach mathematics students.

Understanding of mathematics is also coloured by emotional responses to the subject and inclinations and sense of self in relation to it. Teachers, whether consciously or unconsciously, represent the substance and nature of mathematical knowledge to their students through their teaching (Ball 1991).

Grossman et al (1989) argue that a teacher's content knowledge (the factual information, organising principles, and central concepts of the discipline) guides their choice of resources and materials, course structure and mode of instruction. Their substantive knowledge (the structures, explanatory frameworks or paradigms that guide inquiry within the discipline), which might have been acquired in previous studies within the discipline but may never have been explicitly addressed and can be held tacitly or explicitly, influence what and how they choose to teach. Grossman et al (1989) use the example of a history teacher who may be more likely to present historical information that is relevant to questions they find interesting which may be social, cultural, political or intellectual. They argue that teachers need a knowledge of the syntactical structures of a discipline (the way in which new knowledge is produced within a discipline) if they are to incorporate these into their teaching and, if a history lesson is going to become a place where children 'do' history as well as learn about the past. They also highlight how beliefs about the subject

(its content and substantive structures) influence curriculum choices and the selection of goals, activities and assignments.

An understanding of the thinking that underpins teaching can help in the process of preparing and developing teachers. A better understanding of what beginning teachers know can help to clarify for them the knowledge which informs teaching, what they need to know and understand not just what they need to be able to do (Turner-Bisset 1999). It can also help to make sense of government requirements. For example, in order to be awarded Qualified Teacher Status beginning teachers need to 'demonstrate that they have a secure knowledge and understanding of their subjects/curriculum areas and related pedagogy' (TDA 2007). Consideration of the knowledge of history teachers can help us to understand what this might mean, what this knowledge is, how it might be acquired, understood and transformed in the classroom. Consideration of the impact of different orientations to the subject on classroom practice can also help beginning teachers make sense of the practice of those experienced teachers with whom they work; and make explicit different approaches which might impact on the mentoring relationship.

Understanding of history teachers' knowledge could also be beneficial to the continuing professional education of more experienced teachers. It can inform the delivery of professional training and interventions and innovations in teaching and learning. Research on effective professional development by Soler et al 2001 shows that change comes about by encouraging teachers to explore their practice critically, involving them in understanding what they know and how they use their knowledge. Current initiatives, such as the Secondary National Strategy, aimed at improving standards of teaching and learning in schools, often attempt to impose upon teachers' generic practices that have been deemed to be 'effective'. However, initiatives such as these often fail, culminating in 'superficial and temporary change' (Gravett 2004: 260). They do not take into consideration the knowledge of those teachers charged with their implementation, they are not related to those teachers' familiar routines, do not fit with their perceptions of their domain or they conflict with their school culture (Verloop et al 2001). They fail to recognise and to build on what Husbands et al (2003) identify within the context of school history as: 'the complexity, richness and sophistication of history teachers' thinking and the skill, sensitivity and range of their practice' (2003: 144). Husbands et al (2003: 144) warn that 'history teachers have the knowledge and skill to implement reform programmes of great sophistication; equally,

they have the knowledge and skill – perhaps fortunately – to thwart ill-conceived innovation’. An understanding of the knowledge and beliefs of teachers should be a starting point for interventions and innovations as they are more likely to be successful if they relate to what teachers already know and how they perceive what they do in their classrooms (Brown and McIntyre 1993; Verloop et al 2001).

## **Methodology**

The research process and the writing of this thesis have been influenced by my own methodological assumptions. My conception of knowledge and of social reality have shaped all that I have done. I have been concerned to avoid a separation between orientation – methodology in its widest sense – and method. I characterise my methodology as within a broadly postmodern paradigm. Through the process of engaging with this research I have sought to find ways of ensuring coherence between methodology and method by incorporating my understanding of postmodernism into all aspects from the conception and design of the research through the research methods and tools to the data collection and analysis and the writing of the thesis. The problem with this approach throughout the research has been the infinite opportunities that it offers to find myself in self contradictory situations that lead to a degree of research inertia.

The nature of postmodernism makes it difficult to define, it is not a systematic or coherent movement and it is a term that even those we might most closely associate with it reject. It draws on a range of theories: poststructuralism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, semiotics, critical theory, all of which reject aspects of modernist epistemology and ontology. The notion of attempting a fixed, unambiguous, shared meaning of the term postmodernism would be an anathema to those who would position themselves within it as a discourse. It is a term like all others that derives meaning through its many and varied uses and attempts to fix a meaning would run contrary to the rejection of modernist attempts to reduce equivocity (Alvesson 2002). I attempt not to define or express any standardised or shared meaning of postmodernism but to explicate the meanings I have attributed to it in order to elucidate the ways in which these have influenced my research and my thinking about history and social research. The work of Derrida, Foucault, Baudrillard, Rorty, and Lyotard are understood to exemplify the aspects of postmodernism.

More detailed consideration is given to competing perspectives on the nature of knowledge and of social reality within the context of a discussion of debates concerning the nature of history in chapter 2. Some aspects of postmodernist theory that have been generally influential on my conception of social reality, and therefore constitute my pre-theoretical epistemological position, include: scepticism toward rationalist claims to truth associated with positivistic and scientific outlooks (Foucault 2003, 1970) and a recognition of the socially situated nature of scientific enquiry (Kuhn 1970); an incredulity towards metanarratives (Lyotard 1984); scepticism towards sites of authority and claims to truth (Lyotard 1984); the perpetuation of power through discourse (Foucault 1980); the non-referentiality of linguistic representation (Saussure 1966) and absence of the 'transcendental signified' (Derrida 1976, 1978); 'precession of simulacra' (Baudrillard 1994); epistemological scepticism; the 'death of meaning' (Baudrillard 1994), death of the author (Barthes 1968, Foucault 1984) and death of centres (Derrida 1978); and the culturally-situated and linguistic nature of epistemes and their perpetuation and validation through 'regimes of truth' (Foucault 1980, 1984).

I have chosen to label my approach as postmodern rather than poststructural. Again there is a lack of consensus and so clarity about the relationship between the two, largely because of the different conceptions and usages already outlined. Poststructuralism focuses particularly on the destabilisation of discursive and linguistic patterns which lead to meaning. I want to move away from too close an association with the deconstruction of text to use postmodernism as a broader more holistic approach to rethinking dominant ideas and coming to new ways of understanding while retaining an emphasis on discourse and the power that produces it. The nebulous nature of postmodernism poses certain methodological problems discussed in chapter 4, but this can also be understood as a characteristic advantage of postmodernist research, allowing the researcher to resist rigid paradigmatic boundaries.

I am attracted to postmodernism perhaps because of its emancipatory potential. My understanding of it comes from my considerations of its influence on the discipline of history. I identify with its application to the subject made variously by Ankersmit (2005), Jenkins (1991, 1995, 1997, 1999), Munslow (1997, 2006), and by Southgate (1996) all of whom draw on aspects of postmodernism to argue for a reflexive historical discipline. I identify less, perhaps because of the risks to my professional positioning, with the



radicalisation and ultimate rejection of history by Jenkins from 1997. Despite the origins of my understandings within the context of the subject I am taking the understandings that underpin this discourse and showing that they are shaped from without and as such transcend academic disciplines, so that in this thesis I hope to bring together what might have separately been conceived of as history, philosophy of history and social science.

Part of the process of doing my research has been reconciling these theoretical orientations and perspectives that shaped my views about history with my approach to doing social research. For many postmodernists social research is a 'rhetorical device giving legitimacy to the making of ... truth claims' (Alvesson 2002: 1) as the emphasis on language, text and discourse leaves them sceptical of the 'social' as language constructs rather than mirrors phenomena. I recognise that postmodernism problematises the process of doing empirical research and acknowledge that our understandings are necessarily prefigured. I adopt Alvesson's (2002) distinction between sceptical and affirmative postmodernism, with sceptical postmodernism concerned with deconstructing texts to show contradictions, repressed meanings, and the fragility of superficial claims to validity, an approach that would discourage empirical work. My research is more like what is characterised as affirmative postmodernism which while also questioning truth and validity recognises diversity of interpretation, methodological pluralism and the local situatedness of knowledge. Whilst rejecting the search for abstract universal truths this approach does not preclude the possibility of producing new knowledge as well as new understandings.

I do, as is appropriate to the scepticism of postmodernism, take a critical approach to postmodernism. I recognise that one criticism of postmodernism is the way in which it characterises modernism and runs the risk of being its own grand narrative that merely rejects all others. This is particularly apparent in considering postmodern characterisations of Constructionist history in chapter 2. I accept that within modernism there is a long tradition of scepticism and questioning.

### **Contextualising my research within literature on teacher knowledge**

My consideration of teachers' knowledge of the nature and purposes of history take its place within the field of research undertaken into teachers' knowledge and beliefs. I mapped out this research on teacher knowledge as part of my Critical Analytical Study,

identifying different ways in which teacher knowledge has been conceptualised, investigated and referred to, arguing that the fundamental difference between research studies in this area are the epistemological assumptions that underpin them (McCrum 2006). What and how I have chosen to research have been determined by my conceptualisation of teacher knowledge – particularly my position in relation to three key themes which emerged from this literature: how knowledge is conceived, principally the extent to which this includes beliefs and values; the extent to which knowledge is personal and context bound, leading to considerations of the extent to which research is able to generalise beyond the context in which it was undertaken; and the ways in which knowledge is used in classroom practice.

I do not believe that it is possible to explicate knowledge and beliefs. I do not accept an epistemological distinction in which knowledge has a superior claim to truth (Fenstermacher 1994). Teacher knowledge encompasses all aspects of what teachers know which guide their actions. I adopt a definition of teacher knowledge as;

an overarching, inclusive concept, summarizing a large variety of cognitions, from conscious and well-balanced opinions to unconscious and unreflected intuition. This is related to the fact that, in the mind of the teacher, components of knowledge, beliefs, conceptions and intuitions are inextricably intertwined (Verloop et al 2001: 446).

References within this thesis to teacher knowledge, to what teachers know, their views or beliefs are made within this context and definition.

I emphasise the personal, context-dependent dimension to a teacher's knowledge. This does not mean that there are not aspects of teachers' knowledge that may be shared across contexts; it is possible to elicit commonalities and illuminative insights of value in alternative contexts particularly as my research is undertaken with a group who share characteristics such as teaching the same subject and age range (Verloop et al 2001).

My thinking on how knowledge might be used relates to its use in action, in shaping classroom teaching. This is a model that is most closely associated with Hegarty's (2000) in which teachers access a diverse knowledge base in the classroom. His account focuses on the 'teaching moment' of interaction with the learner, which I would broaden to include the use of knowledge in all teaching-related activities, not always undertaken in direct contact with the learner, such as knowledge use in for example, lesson and curriculum

planning. Part of this knowledge use includes those beliefs – in this case particularly relating to the nature of their subject, within the context of which, implicitly or explicitly all professional decisions are made.

My research is particularly concerned with those aspects of teachers' knowledge, outlined in my Critical Analytical Study, which relate to their knowledge of and beliefs about their subject. Central to existing research on teachers' knowledge of their subject is the work of Lee Shulman and his colleagues which emerged out of the United States in the 1980s. Shulman (1986, 1987) introduced the concept of pedagogical content knowledge to differentiate that aspect of a teacher's knowledge, an amalgam of content and pedagogy, that constitutes their subject matter knowledge *for teaching*.

My Critical Analytical Study looked in detail at the influential concept of pedagogical content knowledge, its adaptations and applications. It argues that there is a degree of ambiguity in the ways in which the concept of pedagogical content knowledge has been conceived and used; insufficient account is taken of the influence of individual teachers or the specific context of knowledge use; and that conceptions of pedagogical content knowledge are premised on a positivist epistemology. In response to these limitations a reconceptualisation of the concept, according to a constructivist perspective, is adopted which incorporates teachers' beliefs and recognises a personal and contextual aspect to knowledge, and which clarifies the relationship between domains of knowledge (Cochran, DeRuiter and King 1993; Hashweh 2005).

Discussion in this thesis relates a lot to the types of knowledge that history teacher might have. A detailed overview of research on the knowledge of history teachers, particularly their knowledge of the nature and purposes of their subject and the way it influences their practice, can be found in my Critical Analytical Study. My findings take their place within this research. The aspect of teacher knowledge considered, teachers' knowledge of history, is just one aspect of typologies such as that of Turner-Bissett (1999) and John (1991). A broad distinction is made between knowledge of what 'happened in the past' and the methods and processes of the subject. This is a distinction which is referred to in the literature variously as being between: substantive and syntactic knowledge, propositional and procedural knowledge, content and process and first and second order concepts. Where possible I adopt the former to refer to the distinction. My research builds

on the initial consideration given to this area: in the context of English secondary history by those such as Husbands et al (2003); research drawing on primary teachers (Harnett 2000: Turner-Bissett 1999); and in an American context (Evans 1988: 1994). It gives consideration to the impact of this knowledge on secondary school teachers' development; building on Guyver and Nichol's (2004) research with primary teachers.

### **Synopsis of chapters**

This thesis is presented in three parts. Part one, consisting of chapters 1, 2 and 3, establishes the context of the research. Part 2, chapters 4 and 5, addresses the research undertaken. Part 3, chapters 6, 7 and 8, addresses the findings and implications of the research.

In Chapter 2 I set out my understanding of the debates on the nature of history, outlining the main areas of contention and positioning myself in relation to these debates. A broad distinction is made between modernist and postmodern perspectives and three distinct paradigms within these, Reconstructionist, Constructionist and Deconstructionist, are considered in some depth making reference to the central tenets and key proponents of each. It is argued that while reconstructionist history is sometimes presented as representing the mainstream of historical thinking, the constructionist perspective is more dominant and that postmodern perspectives have had less impact on history as an academic undertaking or as an area of study.

In Chapter 3 I take the National Curriculum for History as representing dominant discourses about history teaching. I consider how different conceptualisations of history are apparent within it, arguing that there has been a change over time from its inception when it represented a compromise between competing orientations through successive versions which have increasingly reflected more postmodern orientations. The gap between the intentions of the curriculum and the way that it is implemented are highlighted emphasising the mediating role of teachers and the way in which those aspects of the curriculum most influenced by more postmodern perspectives have been poorly realised.

Chapter 4 explicitly addresses the research process. It charts my attempt to design the research within a coherent epistemological framework. My choice of data collection method, qualitative interviewing, is justified making reference to issues of sample size,

representativeness and access. Consideration is given to the design and implementation of the interview schedule including discussion of the ways in which this was amended in the light of piloting and use and the sources of tension and ethical issues that arose. The way in which the interview data was analysed in relation to the research questions but also as complete accounts is explained. I outline how I chose to present the teachers' accounts in a way which represented the richness and complexity of their stories and which maintained the coherence of their accounts. Issues of verification are addressed emphasizing my desire to present a trustworthy, credible argument written with due reflexivity.

The teachers' accounts are presented in Chapter 5. The teachers who took part in the research are introduced. A summary is given of the account of those teachers: Helen, Jasbir, Jenny, Lizzie, Mary, Richard, Sam and Tina, who are referred to throughout chapters 6 and 7. The accounts of three teachers whose accounts are considered in depth, Anne, Charlotte and Patrick, are presented in full.

Chapter 6 draws on the teachers' accounts in considering their knowledge of the nature and purposes of history. This is related to the central areas of debate outlined in Chapter 2. It is argued that they reflect a similar emphasis to these academic debates. Influenced by their academic background their views on the nature of history are broadly characterised as Constructionist, emphasising the objective analysis of historical evidence. Their rationales for the purpose of history emphasised broader educational purposes. More postmodern perspectives were given greater weight in considering these purposes than they were in thinking about the nature of history in the emphasis given to the importance of historical interpretations.

The origins of these beliefs about the nature and purposes of history are considered in Chapter 7. It is argued that family background in the form of their family's interest in history or their lived experiences of past events are a significant influence on the teachers; as are their own experiences of contemporary events or travelling to other countries and cultures and encountering their histories. Books, television and film also seem to be influential, the teachers' own educational experiences less so. A case is made for the impact of these beliefs about the nature and purposes of history on the teachers' classroom practice, and pupil learning in the subject, influencing teaching style, choice of learning activities and the

areas of historical understanding emphasised. Particular consideration is given to the experiences of teaching and of teacher training of those teachers whose beliefs are in conflict with dominant discourses of history teaching.

Chapter 8 considers the implications of these findings on history teaching, pupil learning and the initial training and professional development of teachers. It is argued that further consideration must be given to postmodern perspectives on the nature of history in order to improve the teaching of those areas of the school history curriculum most influenced by postmodernism; which account for a significant part of the current National Curriculum for history. The case is made for the need for teachers to be more prepared to make explicit to pupils the different orientations that inform the uses of the past in order that all pupils are not only able to learn all aspects of school history but are also able to become critical consumers of the range of histories presented to them in current society. This has implications for the initial teacher education of history teachers which needs to ensure that those on these programmes have the syntactical knowledge necessary to develop effective teaching strategies and approaches, to enable pupil learning, and to develop their own subject knowledge and ability to reflect on their own practice and development.

## **Chapter 2 Debates on the Nature of History**

### **Introduction- characterising the debates**

This chapter outlines those debates on the nature of history that I explored with respondents and within which their responses have been analysed and situated. The process of outlining these debates is a partial one. The issues raised are those that I have identified from literature that I have selected and I have adopted a particular organising framework within which to present them. In discussing relevant debates I will self-consciously position myself and my understanding of the nature of history, which might be broadly characterised as one in which history is seen as a narrative discourse created in the present by socially situated and ideologically positioned historians and which is necessarily partial, selective, textual, intertextual and relativistic, created within and gaining meaning from dominant discourses of power.

Central to debates on the nature of history are beliefs about the extent to which it is possible to recover and represent the content of the past through the form of the narrative (Munslow 1997). A distinction will be drawn between modernist and postmodernist perspectives, based on their conceptions of the ontological nature of existence and resulting epistemology, with modernist perspectives characterised according to their belief in the knowability of past reality, accessible through its traces, and able to be represented in the text of the historian. Postmodernist perspectives are characterised as those that reject the possibility of a knowable past reality. They are characterised instead as conceiving of knowledge as the construction of the historian, gaining meaning only through narrative discourse.

Within both modernist and postmodernist perspectives on the nature of history the central issues of debate which I have identified concern: the knowability of the past; the role of the historian in acquiring knowledge of the past; the nature and use of evidence; the use of social theory and explanatory frameworks and the significance to historical explanation of the narrative form. Positionings in relation to these debates vary within the broad categories of modernism and postmodernism. I have therefore chosen to categorise debates further. In line with my own view of the nature of history I draw on

conceptualisations of the nature of history by Munslow (1997, 2006) and Jenkins and Munslow (2004). Organising debates according to literary genre as organising principle with genre attributed according to ways of knowing. Reconstructionists and Constructionists share a belief in a knowable past reality, discoverable through the traces of the past, and which it is possible to represent in narrative form. The Reconstructionist historian privileges the events of the past over social processes and structures and emphasises the methodology of the professional distanced historian in striving for objectivity. For Constructionist historians notions of objectivity are more problematic although they retain a fundamental belief in the knowability of the past. They shift in emphasis from the actions of individuals to groups, believing in the possibility of discerning laws or patterns in human behaviour which help to explain the past. Postmodernist perspectives are categorised as Deconstructionists. For Deconstructionists history is a figural narrative creation of the historian in the present. Social theories and concepts are imposed upon the past by historians. They emphasise the role of language in the depiction of reality.

### **Reconstructionist**

The Reconstructionist paradigm is an empiricist one emphasising the objective inference of facts from sources and their re-presentation in historical accounts. The Reconstructionist emphasis on history as a methodology has resulted in a number of works which elucidate method, such as Marwick's *The Nature of History* (1970) and *The New Nature of History* (2001) and Hexter's *The History Primer* (1972). Most notable of the reconstructionist historians is Geoffrey Elton, a Cambridge historian, primarily of the Tudor era, who mounted a fierce defence of reconstructionist history in *Return to Essentials* (1991) and whose *The Practice of History* (1967) is still, despite its age, used as a foundational introduction to the discipline, setting the agenda for debates in the subject (Jenkins 1995; Evans 1997).

Reconstructionist historians share as a fundamental tenet a belief in a subject centred knowable reality, based on a view of human reason, identifiable in the Greek philosophy of Plato and Aristotle and more recently in the 18<sup>th</sup> century intellectual movement of The Enlightenment, within which observation and experience enable the identification and subsequent description of what is real. The reconstructionist historian believes that it is possible to gain access to the past as it was, enabling the truth of the past to be found by



the historian. Influenced by the 19<sup>th</sup> century German empiricist historian Leopold von Ranke reconstructionist historians believe in studying the past for its own sake; are interested in history as it happened accessible through documentary research by the professional historian.

Reconstructionist historians claim that history has its own epistemology. The observation and inference of meaning from historical sources enables historians to come closest to what Ranke referred to as *wie eigentlich gewesen* knowing history as it actually was. It is the historian's methodology in working with these sources which renders history as a distinct 'discipline' or 'craft'. This requires objectivity on the part of the historian. If the truth of the past is discoverable in the sources then in order to let the past speak through the sources the historian must be distanced, rational, independent and impartial (Elton 1991). The exercise of this method is the domain of the trained and therefore the professional historian, who is able to recognise and consequently eliminate their preoccupations (Elton 1967: 84). The objective historian must then subject the evidence to critical analysis. Marwick (1970) outlines a set of methodological rules, the proper application of which can guard against the subjectivity that could come from the evidence. He provides a checklist of questions to ask of primary source materials which employ a mixture of internal textual criticism and external contextual criticism which address the authenticity; provenance; validity and reliability of the source.

Reconstructionist history is a *posteriori* study. Explanation comes from the evidence through a process of abductive inference. Elton (1967) provides an account of how the historian opens their mind to the evidence, they do not ask specific questions of it, rather they respond to the questions suggested by it. They then outline hypothetical but potentially explanatory concepts which are tested and verified or rejected by further reference to the evidence. Reconstructionist history is fiercely opposed to the potential influence on history from other disciplines or discourses in which explanation might come from outside the evidential base. Reconstructionists oppose the influence on history (and the past, because they are *de facto* the same thing) of the present or of theoretical models which might be used as explanatory frameworks. Elton (1991) argues that these frameworks are essentially predictive in that they produce their intended outcomes precisely because they are designed to do so. He rejects approaches to the past which seek to interpret it in response to the concerns of the present or which aim to identify

generalisations which can be used as the basis for predictive laws, an approach which, he contends, deprives mankind of its humanity and capacity for free will. His approach to the past is idiographic; he believes that the past should be studied on its own terms and for its own sake. The purpose of historical study lies in its ability to illuminate the ways in which people have acted in given circumstances providing insight into the possibilities of human thought and action, highlighting their essential unpredictability.

This rejection of theoretical models and emphasis on history as offering insights into human behaviour and relationships leads to the primacy of events rather than social processes and structures in reconstructionist histories. Elton, for example, opposed views of the English Civil War as caused by socio-economic changes in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, arguing that it was the result of the failure of Stuart kings (Elton 1974). His *Reformation in Europe 1517-59* (1963) is concerned in large part with the duel between Martin Luther and Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. So if as Elton suggests the historian's questions arise from the sources, then for empirical historians from Ranke to Elton the sources they encounter would all seem to suggest the study of elites and diplomatic and political history.

For the reconstructionist historian, content, in the form of the past itself, is more important than form, in the guise of the historical narrative. The past can be literally re-presented in an historical account. The past and history are the same thing. Elton (1967) outlines how the past should be retold accurately by the historian who should minimise their presence in the text, writing: with clarity; avoiding unnecessary jargon; in an appropriate style; to the appropriate length; keeping their audience in mind. An historical account can be judged according to its correspondence to the reality or truth of the knowable past. Historical prose is therefore referential in that there is a direct and transparent relationship between the representation and what has been represented, what might be referred to as a mimetic tradition.

### **Constructionist**

The constructionist paradigm refers to a range of approaches and wide variety of orientations to the past which share a belief in the truth of history being made by way of the conceptualisation of evidence. The reality of the past is knowable through its traces and can be understood according to social theories and explanatory frameworks- 'empiricism plus concepts' (Jenkins and Munslow 2004: 10). It emerged in the early

twentieth century but has its antecedents in the 19<sup>th</sup> century positivism of French sociologist Auguste Comte. Constructionist history discovers patterns or laws of human behaviour, makes generalisations and uses concepts and arguments to help explain the past. It can be seen in such diverse forms as the social science inspired total history of the French *Annales* school of Lucien Febvre (1973) and Marc Bloch (1965); the Marxist and neo-Marxist stress on the social theory of class exploitation as the model for historical change of Christopher Hill (1940, 1971), Eric Hobsbawm (1997) and E. P. Thompson (1991); and the anthropological and sociological influences of Clifford Geertz (1960) and Anthony Giddens (1995). In contrast to reconstructionist historians' focus on events and individuals, constructionist history often focuses on the action of people in groups which in Britain can be seen in the rise of its dominant form –social history, epitomised by George Trevelyan's *English Social History* (1944).

The British social historian John Tosh (2006) accounts for the need for theory in history because of: the enlargement in scope of historical enquiry; the need for explanations of historical change; and a desire for some insight in to human destiny. Theory is central to the Marxist history of lifelong communist Eric Hobsbawm. For Hobsbawm (1997) historical enquiry is always politically motivated. History has an important social and political function, which is inextricably bound with contemporary politics. This can be seen, for example, in the use of history in the traditions invented by elites in order to legitimise the existence of nation states. Constructionist history is therefore not idiographic like that of the reconstructionists. Agency becomes less individual and subject more to larger structures such as politics, economics and culture.

Like the reconstructionist historians, constructionists still uphold the primacy of the evidential base and the empirical method. The distinction between truth and falsehood is not ideological but is verifiable according to the sources. Hobsbawm (1997) likens history to the law courts with its insistence on the supremacy of the evidence. Tosh (2006: 219) outlines how the historian ensures that their application of theory is not just speculative through the testing of explicit hypotheses against a representative selection of evidence in order that theory is 'compatible with the weight of the evidence overall'. In this way the historian must be detached from their theory and ready to change it in the light of the evidence. The onus is on the historian to be sufficiently self reflective and self aware in identifying their own values and assumptions, but there are also scholarly procedures

within the profession which 'enforce standards of scholarship' and 'restrain waywardness of interpretations' with peer review operating as a mechanism for ensuring 'historians are as true as they can be to the surviving evidence of the past' (Tosh 2006: 206).

Constructionist history recognises the mediating influence of the historian on the evidence, facts are selected and historical explanation is subject to the predilections of the historian. But it is not entirely relative, establishing the truth of the past is still possible in principle. Constructionists maintain the primacy of content over form. The truth of the past can be accurately represented in language and their concepts and theories are believed to be narrative free and so narrative is not important in their analysis and explanation of the past.

### **Challenges to empiricism?**

The post-empiricist challenge to questions of representation and referentiality of post modernism is predated by earlier challenges to these modernist principles. Although the extent to which the challenges were real or just perceived is argued. Both R.G. Collingwood and E.H. Carr, for example, highlighted the active role of the historian in their endeavours. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century philosopher of history Collingwood rejected the ability of empiricism alone to explain the past because no historian just scissors and pastes evidence and sources (Collingwood 1946). He highlights how in order to understand the past, in terms of why things happened and what is said in the sources, the historian needs to know what the intentions of the people in the past were. This requires inference of their purpose, achieved through the empathetic rethinking of their thoughts through the exercise of the historical imagination. This places the present situated historian in a central role in their construction of history. In order to minimise the potential effect of the present on the past Collingwood argues that the historian must be self-reflexive ensuring that the imagined past: is bound by time and space; is consistent with itself; and is true to the evidence (Collingwood 1946). These constraints demonstrate Collingwood's ultimate belief in an empirically verifiable and objectively knowable past reality.

E.H Carr is popularly held to be a relativist historian, but is the subject of conflicting interpretations, to the extent that Munslow argues that 'his legacy can readily be appropriated by all sides, proper and postmodern' (2000: 49). What is certain is that his vision of the relationship between the past and present has been widely influential. Tosh

devotes over half of the preface to the revised third edition of *The Pursuit of History* (2006) to discussing the continued significance of Carr's *What is history?* on the shape of academic history today, pointing to the fact that it has never been out of print and that it is still a reliable fixture on student reading lists as a starting point for thinking about the nature and practice of history. In it Carr draws a distinction between the 'facts' of the past and 'historical facts'. He argues that the facts of the past only become historical facts when they are taken up by the historian and put in an account, which if subsequently accepted, turns these facts into part of our shared historical memory. He outlines how the historian is necessarily selective in their choice of facts so their account is always an interpretation. The facts that the historians finds are determined by where they look for them and what they are looking for. The historian then decides what facts they will use, in what order and in what context. In this way the historian, a product of their own time and ideologies, plays an active role in shaping the interpretation of the past that is presented, so Carr argues that we should 'study the historian before you begin to study the facts' (1987: 22) and that when we read a work of history we must

always listen for the buzzing. If you can detect none, either you are tone deaf or your historian is a dull dog' (1987: 23).

Carr's discussion of the historians' relationship with their facts recognises that when we view the past we do so only through the eyes of the present, this includes a recognition of the constraints of language as the very words which the historian uses – 'words like democracy, empire, war, revolution – have current connotations from which he cannot divorce them'. (1987:28).

Jenkins (1995) highlights how Carr's epistemological rejection of empiricism has led to him being characterised as a sceptical relativist. Jenkins re-evaluates Carr, focusing on the neglected ideological aspects of his argument. He outlines how Carr rejected positivist, empiricist history as an ideological expression of liberalism within which historians' faith in the ability of the facts to speak for themselves amounted to a sort of intellectual *Laissez-faire* (Jenkins 1995: 47). Jenkins argues that Carr contradicts his previously stated epistemological position presenting a certainist case which privileges his own ideological position in the form of his belief in progress (Jenkins 1995: 52). In order to do this, to present his account as *the* account and not one of many of equal value, Carr rejects the total scepticism that he sees as the logical conclusion of Collingwood's view of history. Instead Carr advocates the historian's obligations to the facts, to ensuring they are

accurate, and that all relevant facts are included in a balanced account. While, for Carr, total objectivity might not be possible he outlines how the historian comes closest to objectivity when their account looks to the future in order to provide insight into the past. This leads Jenkins to conclude that 'Carr's final answer to the question of what is history is neither sceptical nor relativistic, but is expressed explicitly as a belief in objectivity, in real historical progress and in truth' (1995: 44). This is the dichotomy of an objective world subjectively interpreted.

### **Postmodernism**

A range of developments within history and related discourses has challenged some of the modernist certainties so far outlined (Southgate 1996). From within history Marxism's revision of accounts of the past for ideological purposes; feminism's recognition of bias in historical accounts in their production of counter balanced histories; and post-colonialism's recognition of the changeable nature of a history written from the ideological perspective of the dominant power all highlight the relativism, partiality and contingency of historical accounts. Questions raised in philosophy relating to the claims that can be made for knowledge or truth and the study of perception in psychology challenge notions of objectivity. The contention from within linguistics that language is autonomous with no relationship to anything outside itself makes notions of truth as determined by correspondence with reality problematic.

Within history modernist certainties are presented as a doxa against which postmodern approaches are counterposed (Jenkins 1997). The term deconstructionist history is used to refer to the application of these postmodern approaches by historians such as Michel Foucault, Hayden White, Keith Jenkins, Alan Munslow, Frank R. Ankersmit and cultural theorists such as Derrida. Deconstructionists reject the possibility of a knowable past reality, accessible through sources, which can be represented in the text of the historian. For the deconstructionist, history is constructed in the present by the historian and its meaning is determined through language.

Deconstructionist historians challenge the fundamental tenet of Reconstructionist history—that it is possible to gain access to a knowable past reality. The very nature of the past means that it has gone and that we have no direct access to it. Our only connection to the past is through language. The structuralist contention, based on the work of Swiss linguist

Saussure, that language operates according to its own rules and not in relation to an external reality makes the possibility of there being an unmediated correspondence between language and the actuality of the past untenable. If words do not correspond to the things to which they refer, their referents, but are only signs consisting of a signifier (the word) and the signified (what the word represents) and they have no natural relationship with what they signify then any referentiality derives from social conventions, and the past must always be mediated in some way. As there is no correspondence between language and reality and so no ultimately knowable past reality, it is not possible for the historian to re-present the truth of the past in their accounts. Deconstructionist historians therefore draw a distinction between the past and history. The past is no longer accessible and no longer exists; history refers to the accounts of the historian.

The possibility of representing historical truth is further challenged by the post-structuralist recognition of the lack of fixity in the relationship between the signifier and the signified; meaning is therefore unstable so there can be no immutable historical truth. Derrida's (1981) conception of *différance* where words are defined by their difference to other words and the meaning of texts is subject to a continuous process of deferral, with meaning continuously deferred: as each word leads to another makes language uncertain, so the knowledge gained through it can only be tentative. There can be no truthful narratives or explanation, just interpretations. There can be no definitive reading of texts, just interpretations. This places the reader in an active role in deriving meaning, rejecting the possibility of a knowing subject providing a fixed origin of meaning. As there is no reality against which texts can be judged they derive their meaning from other texts.

The reading of texts intertextually enables the identification of common connections between texts such as epistemic and discursive frameworks such as power and ideology. Reading texts in this way, as emphasised by the emergence of New Historicism, highlights how history texts are generated within a wider social and institutional context making them time and space specific. There can therefore be no universal historical truths to be discovered or transcendental values. Deconstructionist historians deny the possibility of there being a single narrative that human reason can impose on the past. The historian cannot be objective and they cannot stand outside their own context. The historian generates explanatory theories and concepts which cannot be checked against the past because the past was not lived in this way. The historian's account of the past cannot

correspond to the reality of the past because language cannot reflect reality, all we have is the language with no access to the past 'The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not' (Rorty 1989: 5). In this way deconstructionist history takes its place with a wider postmodern context, famously characterised by French cultural critic Lyotard (1995) as one of incredulity to metanarratives such as science, religion and history. Munslow (1997) outlines how modernist certainties such as scientific objectivity and the unfolding of progress that legitimised discourses such as science and history have been challenged by 20<sup>th</sup> century events. Historical explanations cannot transcend their context. Jenkins (1991) refers to historical concepts, such as time, cause and effect and change and continuity not as 'universal heartlands' but 'specific, local expressions' linked to dominant discourses and power (1991: 16)

Deconstructionist historians do not deny that the past existed. They recognise the possibility of single statements of justified belief derived from archival research. It is possible for there to be verifiable statements or chronicles that correspond to the evidence, but they deny the possibility that we can know the truth of the past when these are joined together into a narrative (Ankersmit 2005). The evidence itself pre-exists within narrative structures and is freighted with cultural meanings (Munslow 1997). The process of putting statements together into a narrative requires selection, weighting and deployment by the historian. The sheer amount of the past and the incompleteness of traces available mean that it is never possible for this account to be complete therefore the context the historian constructs to contextualise these statements is always imagined (White 1973, 1978).

A common criticism of postmodernism is the danger of relativism, a criticism that Rorty (1982: 166-167) counters,

Relativism is the view that every belief on a certain topic, or perhaps about *any* topic, is as good as every other. No one holds this view. Except for the occasional cooperative freshman, one cannot find anybody who says that two incompatible opinions on an important topic are equally good.

For the Deconstructionist historian notions of historical truth are linked to the power which produce and sustain them. The past has gone, so accounts of the past cannot be checked against it. There can be no one true account. Historical truth is culturally dependent: every epoch or episteme has their criteria by which to resolve what is truthful knowledge, for example, historical truth might be commended because it is ethical i.e. good or socially responsible to believe within a community or time.



Deconstructionist historians negate the Reconstructionists' claim to a distinct epistemology for history in the form of empiricism. If there is no correspondence between history and the past, then there can be no fixed meaning to the past, meaning is relative and multiple interpretations are possible. There can then be no certainty from sources. Sources are not proof of a recoverable past. A source cannot be read for a single meaning or truth. There can be no incontestable inference from sources. The historian creates meaning through language. For deconstructionists 'evidence only signposts possible realities and possible interpretations because all contexts are inevitably textualised or narrativised or texts within texts' Munslow (1997, 2006). So history cannot stake a claim to its own epistemology; historicising the past becomes a literary rather than an empirical undertaking.

Deconstructionist historians explore the ways in which the meaning of facts are constituted through organisation into a narrative. For American historian and philosopher Hayden White historical narratives are verbal fictions 'the contents of which are as much invented as found and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in sciences' (White 1978: 36). In *Metahistory* (1973) White provides an explanation of how he believes the historian puts together a narrative. Historical explanation is generated within ideological modes (conservatism, liberalism, radicalism, anarchism) which attract historians to types of figurative language, or tropological modes of configuration (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony). The historian imposes on the traces of the past an argument which might be formist, mechanist, organicist, or contextualist. These arguments are linked by the kind of story being told, what White calls emplotments (romance, tragedy, comedy and satire). This process of turning, or troping facts into a narrative is an imaginative act, this makes history fictive, not a piece of fiction, but created or fashioned. It might contain facts but it will always be more than the sum of those facts.

History as a literary undertaking is firmly situated in the present. Representations of the past are culturally determined. The ways in which a culture acquires and organises knowledge, what Foucault (1989) refers to as the episteme, inflects history, as the nature of the episteme is apparent in the figurative and narrative structure of human thought. The episteme revolves around the social distribution of power. This power works through language by presenting a certain type of knowledge as if it were real or true. Written

history is then the vehicle for the distribution and use of power. Jenkins (1991) suggests that it should therefore not be *what is history?* that we ask but *who is history for?* because history is always for someone. Positions put forward are often in the interests of stronger ruling blocs within social formations. These are constantly being re-worked and re-ordered by all those who are affected by power relationships,

because the dominated as well as the dominant also have their versions of the past to legitimate their practices, versions which have to be excluded as improper from any place on the agenda of the dominant discourse. Jenkins (1991: 17-18).

Historical accounts are then not privileged by the supposed closeness of their correspondence to the past or by virtue of the historian's evidential rigour but by their relationship to those with power (Jenkins 1995).

From a postmodern perspective, the purposes of studying history derive from this situatedness in the present. A study of the past is potentially democratising and emancipatory as, if the past can be redescribed infinitely, then there are potentially an infinite number of fresh insights and new histories to be told.

[This] is potentially empowering to even the most marginal in that they can at least make their own histories even if they do not have the power to make them other peoples' (Jenkins 1991: 66).

These new histories have the power to inform the present by giving rise to new insights and looking at the past from different perspectives (post-feminist, post-structuralist, post-Marxist). In deconstructing and historicising other interpretations they help us to understand the world we live in through the forms of history that have helped to produce it and which it has produced.

From this interpretation of postmodernism it is still possible to make new and illuminating histories. The creation of these histories develops critical intelligence through a sceptical, critical reflexive methodology. These new histories are reflexive histories they are 'openly partisan', and 'signal and flag their (sometime confessional) standpoints'. (Jenkins 1999: 29). They are also, or may sit alongside, historiographical studies which expose the construction and circumstances of production and acceptance of previous histories. The reader and the student of history are able to explicitly consider the history that they are getting and why they are getting it in that way (Jenkins 1991).

This is the conception of postmodern history and its purposes that I accept as my own. However some historians including Jenkins himself from 1999 in *Why History?* see the end of history as 'history has ended as a groundable (epistemological/ontological) discourse, and we are left in a condition allowing or necessitating only groundable temporal stylisations *in infinitum*' (Jenkins 1999: 2) In this text he draws on Rorty's (1999: 6-7) idea that this would:

redescribe lots of things in new ways, until you have created a pattern of linguistic behaviour which will tempt the rising generation to adopt it, thereby causing them to look for appropriate new forms of non-linguistic behaviour – for example... new social institutions. This sort of philosophy does not work piece by piece, analysing concept after concept, or testing thesis after thesis. Rather it works holistically and pragmatically. It says things like 'try thinking of it in this way' – or more specifically, 'try to ignore the apparently futile traditional questions by substituting the new and possibly interesting questions'. It does not pretend to have a better candidate for doing the same old things which we did when we spoke in the old way. Rather it suggests that we might want to stop doing those things and do something else... Conforming to my own precepts... I am going to try and make the vocabulary I favour look attractive by showing how it might be used to describe a variety of topics.

There is no longer a possibility of producing new histories but history could still service emancipatory aims (Jenkins 1999: 6).

### **A dominant discourse?**

Postmodernism has not had as significant an influence on history as it has on other discourses. Jenkins (1995) refers to 'the chronic, anti-theoretical nature of mainstream 'history culture' in this country' (1995: 5). He claims that history has been isolated from intellectual developments in related discourses. It has not been concerned in the ways that for example, literature and philosophy, have been about their own nature (Jenkins 1991). It is not that this scholarship does not exist, but that it has had a limited impact on the mainstream, in undergraduate studies of history, in dominant accounts of the nature of history and in the work of practising historians. University history is predominantly concerned with methodological and epistemological rather than ideological issues in history. Southgate (1996: 2) outlines how

some ritual obeisance is conventionally paid to historiography during the academic training of historians, but it often seems possible to exclude from that any fundamental questioning of the actual nature of the subject, of the validity of historians' claims to know about the past, and of the inevitable intrusion of ideological considerations into their historical judgements.

Both Evans (1997) and Jenkins (1995) point to how the now very dated texts of Carr and Elton are still central to debates on the nature of history. Evans (1997: 7) recounts the threat that some historians perceive postmodernism to be. Many constructionist historians recognise the role of narrative but do not see this as a bar to accessing the meaning of a knowable past reality (Munslow 2006: 11).

What have been characterised here as reconstructionist historians represent a very small part of current thinking on the nature of history. Yet their views are still sometimes presented as if they were doxic, despite the long challenge to notions of history as an objectivist pursuit (Evans 1997). Reconstructionist history has been an easy target for postmodernist historians but 'the fact that not many historians admit to being active or consenting reconstructionists has blunted the postmodernist message' (Munslow 2006: 8). Most historians do not view the past and history as synonymous. The majority of mainstream empirical historians accept knowledge as a human construction. Whilst maintaining a fundamental belief in the knowability of the past accessible through an evidential base, they embrace the possibility of a multiplicity of interpretations and are aware of the implications of history's textualism in both its sources and in historians' accounts (Munslow 2006). Brickley (2001) argues that the issue is not so much whether or not historians believe in the possibility of objective knowledge but the extent to which 'a broadly accepted sense of scepticism in knowledge should be understood and expressed' (Brickley 2001: 3). For him postmodernists' anxiety about the truth and the extent to which this marks a new historical epoch necessitating radical methodological and disciplinary change overstates their influence on historical methodology 'as one of details rather than of fundamental essence, as they claim. To put it simply, they overstate their case and they do so by tilting at straw targets' (Brickley 2001: 11).

## **Chapter 3 The School History Curriculum**

The previous chapter outlined distinctions between broadly modernist and post modernist perspectives on the nature of history. The intention of this chapter is to consider the extent to which these different conceptions of the nature of history are manifest in school history. Consideration will be given to different discourses of history teaching with detailed consideration being given to The National Curriculum for History. It will be argued that at its inception it was a compromise curriculum, within which competing often contradictory orientations towards the nature of history were apparent, due in part to the context of its production. Successive versions have increasingly provided opportunities for interpretations more sympathetic to the postmodern orientations which dominate the literature on history teaching. Research and inspection evidence suggest that these opportunities are often under-utilised and poorly realised in schools. The role of the classroom teacher in mediating the curriculum is emphasised.

### **Policy and discourse**

In line with the postmodern approach that I have chosen to adopt (as outlined in Chapter 1) I am not seeking universal truths but rather to consider the way in which truths are produced and sustained. One way of doing this in relation to school history is through giving consideration to the dominant discourse – the National Curriculum for History. The conception of Discourse is taken from Foucault (1972) and refers to systems of thought, knowledge, actions, beliefs and practices which constitute the subject and which are inextricably linked with power.

The National Curriculum for History is a policy document. The broad concern of policy is 'to create specific universal social states or conditions' that 'focus on the control of the individual's ways of thinking and acting' (Dunne et al 2005: 125). The National Curriculum does this by providing a statement of aims and values and pointing to appropriate and desired classroom practices. Its adoption is enforced through legislation, inspection and resourcing. As such it is a manifestation of what Foucault terms 'governmentality' with the state controlling and policing the discourse of history teaching.

Dunne et al (2005) point to the ‘vernacular positivism of the modern state, the privileging of rationality and with it the belief in a single plane of knowable reality that is represented in a one-to-one or mapping fashion by language’. Based on correspondence theory of language this goes some way to ‘understanding the nature and status of policy documents’ (Dunne et al 2005: 113-114). In contrast in this analysis the policy process is seen as a discursive practice (Foucault 1972). Policy is created for a purpose. This is not a neutral process. Despite the illusion of objectivity created by the lack of named writers, policy documents like the National Curriculum are authored texts (Dunne et al 2005). A deconstructive reading of such texts can forefront ‘the political and ideological dimensions that constitute its connotative field’ (Dunne et al 2005: 116). In the case of the National Curriculum for History these relate to conceptions of the nature and purpose of historical study. What follows is a reading of the text which attempts ‘to ascertain the rules of formation of the discourse’. (Dunne et al 2005: 93)

In considering this policy in action I draw on Ball and Bowe’s (1992) analysis of policy implementation which makes the distinction between intended policy, actual policy and policy in use. This distinction is applied to the National Curriculum for History where a clear distinction can be seen between the original National Curriculum as conceived by Margaret Thatcher’s government, how this was then executed by The History Working Group, and how the policy is actually implemented by individual teachers in classrooms. Policy texts are not closed, nor their meaning fixed, but they are subject to ‘interpretational slippage and contestation’ (Ball and Bowe 1992: 98). We will see how the National Curriculum for History is ‘subject by the reader to interpretation, even contestation’ (Phillips 1998: 133).

### **The National Curriculum for History- the battle for control of the discourse**

The National Curriculum for History (DES 1991; DfE 1995; QCA 1999; QCA 2007) is an articulation of a discourse of history teaching. Control of this discourse is contested and nowhere was this more apparent than at its inception. Phillips (1998) describes the ideological, educational and political events surrounding history in The National Curriculum from its origins in the late 1980s to the Dearing Review from 1993-95. He outlines how strongly held, competing views on the nature and purposes of school history by a wide range of stakeholders resulted in fierce debates played out in a variety of fora, not just

educational and political but also firmly within the public sphere – particularly in the popular press.

This ‘Great Debate’ (Phillips 1998) centred around contrasting views on the epistemological status of historical knowledge which led to polarised views on history pedagogy, between an emphasis on the acquisition of historical skills, and a focus on the transmission of historical content. The criteria for the selection of content caused much contention, particularly the proportion of British history in relation to European and world history. The debate can be broadly characterised as being between those who advocated the ‘new history’ which had been emerging in England since the 1970s and the influence of the ‘New Right’ ideology of 1980s conservatism under Margaret Thatcher (Phillips 1998).

The dominant discourse of history teaching inherent in England until the first half of the Twentieth Century is popularly characterised as the ‘Great Tradition’ (Sylvester 1994). This was characterised by the didactic teacher imparting to passive pupils the facts about the past in order that they were able to reproduce these when required. These facts were largely political, English and Imperial. Slater (1989: 8) describes the content as:

largely British, or rather Southern English; Celts looked in to starve, emigrate, or rebel; the North to invent looms or work in mills; abroad was of interest once it was part of the Empire; foreigners were either, sensibly, allies, or, rightly, defeated.

Content was taught chronologically and underpinned by Whig ideas of progress and development. The purpose of learning this content was intrinsic and cultural to acquire knowledge of a shared past in order to understand the present.

There was a shift in history education in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which saw a movement from school history being almost entirely concerned with issues of historical content in the 1960s to a focus on history as a discipline in the 1990s (Lee and Ashby 2000). This rise in what was to be deemed the ‘new history’ was due in part to the work of The Schools Council History Project (SCHP, later to become the Schools History Project) with its focus on: the processes of history, particularly the evaluation of evidence; the definition of historical concepts; pupil engagement; giving access to history across the ability range; innovative teaching styles; new ways of assessment, including coursework; the inclusion of social, economic and cultural as well as political history; content selected

for specific reasons, sometimes thematically, for example as a development study, a study in depth or a study of a contemporary problem. Influenced by Marxism and feminism, the content of this history saw more recognition of 'history from below' with the teaching of world history and different versions of history and the history of different groups within societies. It rejected the idea of progress and was taught for different purposes, to prepare young people for life, work and to provide a wider education.

What Phillips (1998), drawing on Ball (1990), refers to as the 'discourse of derision' of the 'new right' was in part a response to the rise of this 'new history'. The New Right railed against new history's perceived relativism which they felt was contemptuous of knowledge and content in its focus on concepts and skills- particularly the loathed skill of historical empathy. They believed that a lack of emphasis on the pursuit of truth led to a neglect of the core knowledge of British history and the lack of cross cultural comparisons was a sign of a lack of respect for British culture (Phillips 1998). These contrasting discourses on the aims and purposes of history teaching can clearly be seen to relate to contrasting views on the nature and purposes of history, with new history's emphasis on history as a form of knowledge owing much to the supposed relativism of Collingwood and Carr and the new rights' 'Eltonian' conception of history as a corpus of factual knowledge (Phillips 1998: 34).

Phillips (1998) argues that these contrasting discourses are also linked to different conceptions of nationhood, culture and identity, with the perceived potential of history to shape the collective memory leading to the government's interest in controlling history in schools in order to engender identification with the nation and state. As Furedi argues (Furedi 1992) 'anxiety about the future' at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century lead to a 'scramble to appropriate the past' as governments and elites throughout the world attempted to reinvent national histories, leaving history in demand by a range of groups concerned to find identity in a changing uncertain world. He contends that there is no longer 'a history with a capital H; there are many competing histories' (Furedi 1992: 8). This confirms that history is always for someone (Jenkins 1991).

The process of producing a National Curriculum for history was a struggle between these competing interests for control over the discourse. Phillips (1998) provides a detailed account of the role of individuals and interest groups in this struggle including: professional organisations; pressure groups; the press; The National Curriculum History Working



Group; The Historical Association; Her Majesty's Inspectorate; civil servants; The National Curriculum Council History Task Group; and government ministers including direct intervention by Secretaries of State for Education and Science Kenneth Baker, John MacGregor and Kenneth Clarke and the Prime Minister herself, Margaret Thatcher.

The result of this struggle was a National Curriculum for History which aims to placate the range of interests. It is a compromise curriculum, within which different, sometimes contradictory, views about what history should be are apparent. It is a curriculum that can be read very differently by different audiences and which offers 'unintended opportunities' (Jenkins and Brickley 1991) for a new, more postmodern, approach to school history. It was far from being the more 'certainties' history that Margaret Thatcher intended:

empirical in its mode of enquiry; factual and knowledge led; anti-intellectual in its distrust of theories (especially foreign ones and especially if they're clever) so British history would act as the privileged centre and yardstick around and against which all other histories would revolve and be judged. Champion of free-trade, Thatcherism would ideally close down the market place of competing historical commodities (interpretations) erecting just one stall from which everyone would purchase authorised historical products all stamped with the legend 'Made in Britain' or better still, 'Made in England'. (Jenkins and Brickley 1991: 9)

Instead it ended up by offering the opportunity to teachers to forefront historiographical and methodological practices, to encourage diverse interpretations and to emphasise cultural and ideological heterogeneity.

### **A compromise curriculum**

The National Curriculum for History governs the teaching of history across Key Stages 1 to 3 at which the subject is statutory. A National Curriculum for history was first published in 1991 (DES 1991). The current version taught in schools in England (QCA 1999) is the third version of that original curriculum, which despite reviews in 1995 and 1999 (DfE 1995; QCA 1999) still very much reflects the original context of its creation as outlined above. Since September 2008 schools have been required to begin to roll out a new version beginning with year 7 in September 2008 (QCA 2007). This curriculum reflects its own context of production and demonstrates a shift in the discourse of history teaching which, it will be argued, is more sympathetic to more postmodern approaches to history.

Aspects of the current National Curriculum for history (QCA 1999) reflect modernist concerns with factual historical knowledge, the centrality of British history, and historical truth. The curriculum has been influenced by notions of the meta-narrative. The Breadth of Study, which outlines the areas of content to be taught, is organised into chronological subdivisions, at Key Stage 3 these are: core British history units of Britain 1066-1500, 1500-1750, 1750-1900; A European Study before 1914; A world study before 1900; and a world study after 1900. The example content for these units takes a focus on changes in science, medicine and technology. For example indicative content for British history 1500-1900 includes:

‘advances in medicine and surgery including the work of William Harvey; the founding of the Royal Society and the scientific discoveries of Isaac Newton, Robert Boyle and Edmund Halley; developments in the arts and architecture’ (QCA 1999: 21).

Taken together the implication is one of teleological chronological development.

The Knowledge, Skills and Understanding section of the National Curriculum for History (QCA 1999) identifies the aspects of history to be developed through the specified content. Aspects of this section demonstrate a belief in the possibility of an uncontested knowable past reality. Pupils are to be taught ‘to analyse and explain the reasons for, and results of, the historical events, situations and changes’, (QCA 1999: 20) as if events have neat uncontested causes and consequences, indeed the hierarchical model of causation inherent in the Attainment Target is drawn directly from E. H Carr’s 1961 (Carr 1987) account of causation in history. Pupils are also asked ‘to consider the significance of the main events, people and changes studied’ (QCA 1999: 20) and to make reference to ‘what past societies were like’, implying that there is a universally agreed method of assessing significance and the possibility of finding out what past societies were *actually* like.

In contrast to these modernist emphases, parts of the National Curriculum have also been influenced by more post-modern perspectives. Aspects running counter to the idea of a meta narrative implying the possibility of multiple narratives and embracing the possibility of a variety of discourse, are found for example, in The Breadth of Study where it is required that:

In their study of local, British, European and world history pupils should also be taught about...: b) history from a variety of perspectives including political, religious, social, cultural, aesthetic, economic, technological and scientific. (QCA 1999: 21)

The focus on the skill of historical enquiry in the National Curriculum for History (QCA 1999) is less on developing in pupils the methods of the 'discipline' of history in working with sources and more about enabling pupils to select and utilise sources for defined purposes. Pupils are required to 'evaluate the sources used', the emphasis is not on the problematic nature of sources but on the identification, selection and deployment of a range of sources in order to reach conclusions in accounts of the past (QCA 1999: 20).

The part of the curriculum that most explicitly counters notions of the possibility of an uncontested past and requires pupils to view history as a construct is the inclusion in the Knowledge, Skills and Understanding of the concept of historical interpretation. Here the past and history are recognised as being different with the past only accessible through interpretations. Pupils are taught 'how and why historical events, people, situations and changes have been interpreted in different ways' (QCA 1999: 20). The historian, (or the writer, archaeologist or film-maker) is placed as central to the task of interpreting the past. The historians' interpretations reflect their intentions, the circumstances in which they were made and the available evidence (QCA 1999: 20). These interpretations might take a number of forms including 'pictures, plays, films, reconstructions, museum displays, and fictional and non-fiction accounts' (QCA 1999: 20). The inclusion of the range of interpretations and interpreters challenges the primacy of the privileged account of the professional historian.

The inclusion of historical interpretations in the school curriculum is one way of ensuring that pupils have the ability to discern between competing interpretations requiring them to learn 'to evaluate interpretations' (QCA 1999: 20).

### **Towards a different discourse of history teaching**

The new National Curriculum for History (QCA 2007) being rolled out in schools since September 2008 can be seen to have been influenced by history teachers and history teacher educators as represented, for example, in the professional journal *Teaching History*. This version of the curriculum offers the scope and potential for the interpretation of the curriculum in accordance with more postmodern perspectives.

The Range and Content section (what was The Breadth of Study) no longer specifies content, instead of chronological units of study it outlines themes to be developed across

different periods (medieval, early modern, industrial and 20<sup>th</sup> century). Themes include: the development of political power; movement and settlement of diverse peoples to the British Isles; how lives, beliefs, ideas and attitudes have changed; trade, colonisation, industrialisation, technology and the British Empire; and the nature of conflict and cooperation between countries and people (QCA 2007: 115-116).

Historical interpretation remains a central concept. Reference to other historical concepts recognises a greater complexity and provisionality. The concept of change is problematised beyond the reasons for and result of changes to consider its extent and pace and whether it amounted to progress and if so for whom (QCA 2007: 112). Drawing on literature in this area (Gibson and McLelland 1998; Howells 1998; Chapman 2003; Woodcock 2005) notions of causation become increasingly complex and nuanced embracing the notion of the 'causal argument' and its relationship with evidence and interpretation (QCA 2007: 112). Reference to historical significance now recognises that it is a process of reasoning not a given condition (Counsell 2004a). A note explains that significance includes:

considering why judgements about the significance of historical events, issues and people have changed over time; identifying the criteria and values used to attribute significance; and assessing how these have been used in past and present descriptions that may be based on contestable judgements about events, issues and people, and are often related to the value systems of the period in which the interpretations was produced. (QCA 2007: 113)

The model of historical enquiry is a more reflexive one in which pupils are encouraged to present their histories through a variety of forms and media in the awareness that their end product is an interpretation. This expansion in the form and medium of representation begins to answer criticisms that school history has 'failed to reflect the way that the subject is studied, enjoyed and communicated in contemporary society at large' (OfSTED 2007: 29). The representation of history in this way ensures that history is no longer just the preserve of the professional historian. Changes in historical enquiry reflect a movement in the teaching of historical enquiry away from working with historical sources in isolation in order merely to detect limitations, towards working with them as a historian would, for example, integrating evidential understanding into extended writing (Mullholland 1998), and using sources to construct tentative narrative accounts on the basis of the fragmentary and imperfect sources available (Byrom 1998). Counsell (2004b) demonstrates how through the reading and writing of history pupils can learn about the 'power of the subtext'.

They can see, and replicate, how historians integrate the historical record into their writing and use other textual and stylistic features in the presentation of their argument such as the use of language to indicate judgement, emphasis or degree of certainty. The explanatory note on enquiry makes the distinction between evidence and sources and includes a focus on the language of sources (QCA 2007: 114). This new focus on language is also apparent in the attainment target where, for example at level 8, pupils are expected to 'use historical terminology confidently, reflecting on the way in which terms can change according to context' (QCA 2007: 118).

The shift in emphasis in the new National Curriculum for history can be related, as with earlier versions, to its own context of production. A significant contemporary influence is the Every Child Matters agenda. The Green Paper Every Child Matters was published in 2003 setting out proposals for reforming the delivery of services for children, young people and families, including all aspects of education. It indicated how it would support all children to develop their potential and help them become happy, successful adults in Britain in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This Green Paper formed the basis for the Children Act 2004.

The emphasis on diversity, complexity, competing interpretations and the provisionality of knowledge in the new National Curriculum for history can be seen to contribute to the outcomes of Every Child Matters (DfES 2005). Studying history in this way can help pupils *Be Healthy* with the positive effect on their mental and emotional health of acknowledging them as individuals with personal and community histories. An understanding of the complexity of historical situations helps pupils to deal with the equally complex aspects of their own lives. An awareness of bias and inaccuracies when discussing historical situations helps pupils learn to make the right choices in their own lives, helping them to *Stay Safe*. The ability to evaluate interpretations enables them to make informed appraisals of media stories and contextualise domestic and global issues contributing to their *Economic Well Being*.

A further influence on the new curriculum is Citizenship education. The National Curriculum for history has always been seen by politicians and policy makers and other bodies as central to contributing to citizenship education. This has been due to the continuing perception that it can contribute to the development of 'Britishness', the defining of which continues to concern politicians today (Brown 2006; Cameron 2007). However

the new version of the National Curriculum can be seen to have been influenced by a different model of citizenship education, concerned more with developing the skills of critical citizenship, for example, helping pupils to 'become confident and questioning individuals' (QCA 1999: 111), through the teaching of aspects of the history curriculum, such as, historical interpretations.

### **Opportunities lost in mediating the curriculum in to practice**

Despite the potential that the National Curriculum for History offers for the teaching of more postmodern history this potential does not appear to be being realised in classrooms. Inspection evidence suggests that it is these aspects of the curriculum that are often taught more weakly. For example historical interpretations was identified by heads of history responding to the QCA's Monitoring and Curriculum Assessment questionnaire as an area staff found difficult to teach, being the most commonly cited aspect of the curriculum mentioned and identified by some 46.5% of respondents (QCA 2005: 13). This may account for why OfSTED have found that the teaching of historical interpretations in schools is a weakness that needs to be addressed (QCA 2005: 10). OfSTED also found uncertainty over historical interpretations at GCSE which it is claimed 'fails to examine historical interpretations properly' OfSTED (2005).

Haydn's (2005) research in to pupils' perceptions of history at Key Stage 3 also suggests a gap between the spirit of the National Curriculum and its implementation in classrooms. He found that there was still a strong emphasis on narrative content and the story of the past in many classrooms as

Pupils' ideas about what it meant 'to get better at history' were commonly based on the idea of progression being based on the aggregation of substantive historical knowledge. Pupils did not express their ideas about progressions in terms expressed in the National Curriculum for History (Haydn 2005: 3).

This gap between policy and practice can be clearly seen in many primary schools where, despite the National Curriculum, singular narrative accounts dominate the teaching of history with little emphasis given to the process by which these accounts are created. OfSTED (2005) found 'there are weaknesses in pupils' key historical skills such as posing historical questions, discovering evidence and interpreting it, and communicating their ideas and conclusions'; and that 'insufficient attention is paid to ensuring that the historical concepts and skills built into the National Curriculum are addressed' (OfSTED 2005).

Problems with the teaching of history in the primary school may in part be due to the limited time and emphasis given to foundation subjects in comparison to core subjects. In their Monitoring, Curriculum and Assessment (MCA) survey QCA (2005) found the priority given to history by primary head teachers to be 'low'. History only accounts for about 4% of curriculum time at key stages 1 and 2 with more than half of all schools teaching history in blocks of time and not on a weekly basis (QCA 2005). OfSTED (2005) identified an attitude towards history that suggests that studying it is for fun as a welcome relief from the rigours of core subjects.

There are also a limited amount of history specific training and professional development opportunities for primary teachers. Students often receive very limited training in history during their initial teacher education. OfSTED (2005) found that 'on an average PGCE primary course, the time devoted to history could be six hours training or even lower and if history is not being taught when they are working in schools, trainees may never get the chance to teach it before they are awarded qualified teacher status'. Once they do qualify there is often a lack of CPD in history. Local authority advisory structures have largely disappeared (OfSTED 2005). Teachers are often professionally isolated. This has resulted in a lack of confidence and an unwillingness to innovate with the curriculum. Many primary history teachers slavishly follow the QCA schemes of work which were intended as exemplification to be adapted and extended according to the needs of particular groups of pupils OfSTED (2007).

These concerns are no longer just confined to the primary school. OfSTED (2005: retrieved November 2007)) found that

there is evidence that history is playing (and will play) an increasingly marginal role in the wider curriculum as schools give greater emphasis to literacy, numeracy and vocational subjects. Compared with these subjects, history is seen as less important and relevant to many pupils.

They continue that

there have been too few attempts in history departments to be creative with the curriculum... the freedoms available to teachers within the National Curriculum have not been sufficiently exploited.

One of the most significant mediating influences on the realisation of the curriculum in a classroom setting is the teacher. Harnett (2000) identifies how curriculum implementation

in the primary school does not always correspond to official rhetoric (Harnett 2000: 2) with teachers' knowledge and understanding of history impacting on curriculum planning and implementation. She outlines how official policy is often mediated in practice, as a result of a number of factors the key one being the teacher and their subject knowledge and understanding. These understandings are based on a complex set of beliefs and values deriving from teachers' personal experiences and career histories (Harnett 2000).

Husbands et al (2003: 13) found that the different traditions of history teaching characterised as the 'great tradition' and the new history, co-exist

in different ways in different schools, departments and individual teachers. There were those firmly embedded at one extreme or another of each tradition, but most history teachers moved, in terms of their own practice, between the assumptions of the two traditions.

Similarly (Phillips 1998) posits a discourse of history teaching prior to the National Curriculum which had been little influenced by the 'new history' where teachers married traditional and new practices and that 'a broad pedagogic discourse had emerged in schools about the nature and purposes of history teaching' that held the view that school history 'should be interesting, enjoyable and accessible to pupils; that history teaching should not be exclusively associated with the transmission of knowledge and content but that it should be taught in a way which cultivated a range of intellectual skills and historical concepts through a predominantly evidence-based approach' an approach influenced more by the qualified relativism of Carr than the certainty of Elton. (Phillips 1998: 23).

This was possible within the 1990/1 curriculum which was 'based around a policy compromise which appeared to hold the two traditions in creative tension' (Husbands et al 2003: 13). Current practice in teaching has moved beyond what Counsell (Counsell 2000) has famously dubbed the 'distracting dichotomy' between skills and content. But it is 'less clear whether current practice has resolved tensions between competing ideas about purposes of history teaching' (Husbands et al 2003: 14). It is less possible to balance competing traditions in the current curriculum which as argued in chapter 2 more directly reflects a more dominant, postmodern influenced history curriculum. Leading to the possibility of a 'discursive gap' (Phillips 1998: 12) between the discourse of history teaching and the National Curriculum.



Consideration of the National Curriculum for history in the way that has been done in this chapter provides one insight into the discourse of history teaching. It provides access to the stated aims, values and appropriate/desired practices. But what we have seen from the research and inspection evidence in the primary and secondary schools is that there can be a gap between what is stated and the actual practice in the classroom and that this may in part be due to the mediating influence of the classroom teacher. This mediation of the curriculum and the factors that influence it will be considered further in section 3.

## **PART 2 THE RESEARCH**

### **Chapter 4 Methodology**

#### **Choice of method**

In completing this research I was concerned to ensure that I adopted a coherent epistemological framework across all that I did. I found the majority of books on research methods to be 'how to' guides often less concerned with theoretical issues. From these I attempted to take an approach to the research that cohered with my postmodern approach (as outlined in Chapter 1) sensitive to discourse, the fragmented subject identity and the generation of understandings within a context; which recognises the centrality of the positioned researcher in producing an authored account.

I chose interviewing as my main method. If knowledge is conceived of as the social justification of belief rather than an accurate representation then this can be constituted through conversation (Kvale 1996). This allows recognition of the narrative nature of knowledge through consideration of the stories told, the way in which language, as the way in which knowledge is generated and understood, constitutes reality. It enables the contextuality of meaning to be recognised and forefronts the interrelational nature of knowledge within the interview. It recognises the discursive context. Discourse can constitute what is said, and different dominant discourses will dominate at different points leading to different meanings. Similarly different identities can be apparent in the conversation sometimes shifting within the interview so that what is said at times appears to be contradictory, but is actually responding within different identities that become dominant in different contexts.

The form of interviewing chosen was one in which knowledge is regarded as generated between people, emphasising the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production described by Kvale (1996) as the qualitative research interview and Holstein and Gubrium (1995) as the active interview. Individual interviews were undertaken in order to consider the particular understandings of each individual teacher in some depth. The use of these

interviews allowed descriptions of how the interviewee understood their life and their world to be obtained from their point of view.

Consideration was given to including observations of the teachers' practice as an additional method of data collection. After careful consideration this was rejected as, at best, potentially only providing 'snapshots' of practice. Practice was also conceived of more widely than observable teaching episodes, to include, for example, content selection, resource creation, lessons planning and design and choice of teaching and learning strategies over the medium and longer term. The emphasis of the analysis of lesson observation data would inevitably have been the researcher's interpretation of the impact of views of the nature and purposes of history. This research was much more concerned with how the teachers themselves feel that their views impact on their practice. Interviews enabled teachers to highlight aspects of their own practice they feel have been influenced by their views elaborating, exemplifying and attributing significance to the areas discussed. I did not need to check or 'test out' understandings generated through interviews with observations of teaching.

Writing was chosen as the method of data analysis. Oral accounts given by respondents were transposed into account to be presented to the reader. During this process the accounts were analysed in order to draw conclusions. This was undertaken with due care given to making explicit the methodology of the analysis process. This included noting the decisions made in the production of the accounts and the ongoing inferences drawn from the texts. Indeed I have attempted in this chapter and elsewhere to be open about the processes of the research and to show how the research did not flow smoothly through a premeditated course but was subject to false starts, reappraisals and side-steps. Paradoxically though, mentioning these and justifying as one at some level is obliged to do in a doctoral thesis, rather than drawing attention to the messiness of the research process may serve to tidy it up, which is not my intention.

### **Sample size, choice, representativeness and access**

I focused my interest in the impact of debates on the nature of history on history teachers' practice on teachers entering the profession, specifically at the end of their initial teacher training. This was, in part, because it was hoped that teachers may be more able to articulate their rationale for the subject and to consider the origins of their thinking about it

earlier in their careers, particularly having given this some consideration on deciding to enter the profession.

I was able to gain access to student teachers to participate in the research by undertaking the research within the professional setting within which I was employed. This was a post 1992, urban multi-site university where I held the post of course leader for the secondary history Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course, a 36 week course of initial teacher education during which students spend 24 weeks undertaking experience in a placement school. In order to carry out the research in this setting permission had to be granted by The Head of The School of Education and The Director of Research. Permission was granted on the understanding that the students' work on the programme would not be disrupted by their participation.

Interviewees were not selected in terms of their representativeness; no effort was made to target respondents who might speak reliably or validly for a population. An invitation to participate was issued to each of the 13 students in the cohort of history PGCE students as an announcement on their virtual learning environment (appendix 1). This was subsequently reiterated with the same request made as an announcement after a taught session. All of the students on the programme were graduates with degrees in which the study of history had been a component. The students came from a variety of backgrounds, had a wide range of prior careers and had previously studied in universities across the United Kingdom.

My research valued the subjective and idiographic therefore did not require a large number of participants. It was concerned instead with the depth and richness of the responses collected from a small number of participants. The adequacy of data was determined not by quantity but by the richness of the data and the extent to which it illuminated the aspects being investigated (Goodson and Sikes 2001). I therefore undertook interviews with each of the 11 students who agreed to participate.

### **Sources of tension and ethics**

Ethical issues arose at all stages of the research process, from securing the context of the research, method of data collection and the participants, to the nature of the data collected and what was done with it. Care was taken in inviting participation in the research as there

was a pre-existing relationship between the students and me. I took care to ensure that participation was truly voluntary and that respondents actively opted in to participating and could freely opt out at any stage. For example, I ensured that there was a time lag between the request for participation and when the decision to participate had to be made. The interviews were undertaken at the end of the PGCE course so that the students could be sure that there would be no relationship between their participation in the project and their progress on the course as, at the point the interviews were undertaken, the final assessment point had passed.

In obtaining consent and cooperation from interviewees I was clear about the purpose and methods of research, explaining any risks and benefits and offering to answer any questions in order that the students were in possession of all the information that would be likely to inform their decisions as to whether to participate (appendix 2). The nature of the research and the way that it reveals so much information about interviewees' lives which could potentially reveal their identity meant that it was not possible to guarantee total anonymity. Instead assurances of confidentiality were given and I was clear about who would have sight of the data. I was explicit in my explanation of the meaning and limits of confidentiality in the invitation to participate, informed consent form and at the start of the interview. As the researcher I know who has provided the information given, but have ensured that this connection has not been made public. Techniques to allow public access to the data without confidentiality being betrayed have included changing participants' names and not revealing the institution in which the data were collected or the year of the cohort they were collected from.

### **The interview schedule**

In designing the interview schedule consideration was given to translating the research objectives into questions to be asked giving consideration to the types and phrasing of questions, their format and mode of response and the sequence in which they were posed. I chose to use a semi-structured format, in a more conversational style, to enable the interview to be exploratory, flexible and adaptable; enabling me to modify a line of enquiry, and follow up interesting responses. The interview schedule did contain questions, probes and possible prompts which I could draw on during the interview in recognition of the fact that different respondents need different amounts of prompting in order to ensure the 'flow' of the interview and to ensure depth of discussion of relevant areas (appendix 3). However

I aimed for as loose a structure as possible in order that I did not miss out on relevant discussions by pre-empting them and in order that respondents were able to identify, make connections between and attribute appropriate weight to relevant issues. The structure of the interview was flexible. The order and wording of the questions could be changed. The interviewee's responses determined whether particular questions were necessary or appropriate, with questions being omitted or added.

I designed a five stage interview schedule (based on Robson 1993). This moved through an introduction, an interviewee directed opening section, interviewer directed follow up questions, a penultimate section designed to bring the interview to a close and inviting the interviewees to add to or to clarify responses and a conclusion which thanked them for their time and reflections. The schedule was formally piloted and subsequently modified in the light of my reflections on this pilot. (For further details about the pilot see McCrum 2005).

The interviews began with an introduction to the interview which: thanked the interviewee for their participation and sought their permission for the interview to be taped and for notes to be made; reiterated the purposes of the interview; giving reassurances that responses were confidential and that participation was voluntary and separate from their role on the PGCE course. My intention was to ensure a comfortable start to the interview. In my pilot interview I therefore went on to ask a sequence of information gathering questions which sought background information about the interviewee such as their undergraduate degree title, classification and institution, postgraduate qualifications, main areas of historical study, and work experience prior or subsequent to their degree. After undertaking the pilot interview it became clear that the use of these questions suggested an artificial unfamiliarity between the interviewee and the interviewer. The interviewee knew that as their PGCE tutor I already knew the answers to the questions I was asking and was only asking them in order legitimately to obtain the information for the purposes of the research. I therefore decided not to collect this information in subsequent interviews; instead I obtained permission from future interviewees to use their course application form to gather necessary background information.

In order to ensure a non-threatening start to the interview I decided instead to begin the interview with a discussion of a previously prepared 'timeline' (Goodson and Sikes 2001).

This timeline was used to facilitate the generation of accounts of how the history teacher's understanding of history had developed in order that the origins and development of their views on the nature and purpose of history could be explored. Prior to the interview interviewees were asked to record those factors that they felt had shaped and influenced their views of history. The instructions given told interviewees that they could note their thinking however they liked but suggested that they might like to use a timeline to help them think chronologically about their experiences or use a concept map to group their experiences together. The instructions explained that each respondent would have different things that had been significant to them but it listed some things that other people had mentioned, drawn from the literature, emphasising that many would not be relevant to them. These included family background and interests, experiences of learning history, influential people, interests and leisure pursuits, career, media, books, events, geographical origins, community, gender, social background, political beliefs or affiliations, religious beliefs, values. I provided interviewees with written instructions for the production of the timeline in order that they could make reference to the instructions when they produced their timeline and in order to ensure that the interviewees completed the timeline before the interview.

The timeline was not the subject of analysis but was used to stimulate the interviewees' thinking about the areas to be discussed within the interview. I regard the interview as the site of knowledge production; it is the interaction of the interview which generates the knowledge (Kvale 1996). I wanted interviewees to begin the process of knowledge production prior to the interview, in addition to the timeline I was open about the purpose of the interview and the invitation to participate and the confirmation of arrangements made reference to the areas to be explored. I had used a timeline in the pilot interview. It had proved very successful in stimulating the teacher's thinking but I incorporated discussion of it too late in the interview. By the time it was explicitly addressed much of what had been recorded had been drawn upon in answer to earlier questions, which led to undue repetition. In subsequent interviews I therefore decided to consider the timeline in the first part of the interview. The discussion of the timeline proved to be a comfortable way to begin the interview as the interviewees were discussing their own life and experiences in their own words. It enabled the interviewee to structure their own response to a very open question, selecting those factors to which they attributed significance. It also helped to ensure that the interviewee gave detailed, considered and well-illustrated responses as

they constantly referred back to the timeline during the interviews. The use of the timeline facilitated discussion within the interview. At the start of the interview I made a copy of the timeline so that both the interviewee and I had a copy. This enabled me to refer back to areas that had been discussed and enabled me to prompt the interviewee to discuss, expand on or exemplify things that had been recorded. Much of the subsequent questioning in the interviews arose out of the discussion of the timeline.

Designing the parts of the interview schedule which sought to address history teachers' conceptions of the nature and purposes of their subject was the most difficult. In the pilot interview I asked the interviewee to consider what, for them, history is. I used probes such as what it might mean to study history and prompts which aimed to position responses within the context of debates about the nature of history that have arisen from the condition of postmodernity, such as whether there is a past independent of the writings of historians, whether the truth of the past is recoverable and the extent to which the past can be reconstructed through its traces. I asked them about the value of historical study, probing them to consider what history might be for and prompting them to think of things such as value for whom, its role in identity formation and the teaching of moral and or political lessons. This part of the interview was not very successful; questioning the interviewee in this way produced limited and stilted responses. The interviewee could not always engage with the questions asked causing them discomfort and not eliciting suitable responses. My consideration of teachers' conceptions of the nature and purpose of their subject was more successful in subsequent interviews in which I modified the interview schedule so that questions on this topic arose from the previous discussion of the timeline. In many of the interviews this took the form of a discussion which arose out of consideration of their experiences of undergraduate courses which addressed these issues and I went on to ask the interviewee to position themselves within the debates they recounted. The notes that I made during the interviews were very important in facilitating these discussions. In the pilot interview a lack of confidence in the potential adequacy of the sound reproduction led to my making copious, uninformative, notes during the interview. In subsequent interviews I developed a system of note taking which highlighted things that were said during the discussion of the timeline that I could come back to in later questions. These notes became an almost diagrammatic representation of the linked themes that were raised which provided a picture of what was said that was useful not only



within the interview but which was also referred to in the process of transcribing and analysing the interview.

After considering the teachers' views on the nature and purpose of history the interview then addressed the teachers' rationale for their subject in the school curriculum. I was keen for these rationales to arise from the teachers themselves, so although potential prompts were available, drawn from relevant literature on the purposes of school history, I aimed to gain as full an understanding of the teachers' own rationale as possible, in their own words, with the use of just a few probes to enable them to develop or exemplify responses.

The final part of the interview addressed the ways in which teachers' conceptions of the nature and purposes of history influence what and how they teach in their classrooms, probing them to consider how beliefs expressed in the interview have influenced the content and learning activities they select for lessons. This part of the interview also explored how the teachers viewed their own teaching, their preferred teaching style, favoured types of learning activities and the reasons for this, and the areas of the National Curriculum knowledge, skills and understanding they focus on developing in pupils.

### **Facilitating the interview and managing social relations within it**

My conception of the interview as the site of, and process by which, knowledge is produced meant that the objective of the interview was to provide an environment conducive to the production of the range and complexity of meanings that address relevant issues (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). The position of the interviewer was paramount. Kvale (1996) describes the interviewer as the research instrument. It is the interviewer who activates the production of knowledge (Holstein and Gubrium 1995), the interviewer provokes, directs, harnesses and develops responses. This requires the interviewer to be an expert in the subject matter and in interaction and communication, creating an atmosphere in which the interviewee feels secure and able to converse freely.

The pilot interview revealed the need for greater attention to be paid to creating an appropriate atmosphere for the interview. One way in which I achieved this was by undertaking subsequent interviews later in the course. By this time I had built up a relationship with the students of mutual trust, making them less inhibited in the interview

and less cautious about revealing personal information. I also changed the location of the interviews after the pilot. I had felt that it would better facilitate the interviews if students were interviewed in their own environment so I chose to interview them in their placement schools. As subsequent interviews took place after their school experience this was not possible. Interviews were undertaken within the university and this improved the atmosphere within the interview. Conversely the students felt more confident and in control on 'my territory' where they could leave whenever they wanted to and where they did not feel responsible for me or the conduct of the interview. Not undertaking the interviews in school also avoided any potential association between the research and the assessment of students on the PGCE course which also involves visits to them in their placement schools.

Whilst recognising its potential to inhibit discussion, interviews were audio taped in order that I was able to listen carefully to the respondent during the course of the interview picking up on productive lines of enquiry. In earlier interviews the questions I asked did not always relate to what had been said and were not always clearly understood. This was because I was insufficiently focused on what the interviewee was actually saying. As the interviews progressed I became more skilled at exploring and developing the interviewee's responses. I became more attentive to what was being said and made judgments about the questions I would ask and the responses I would make. I remembered earlier statements and recalled them during the interview, clarifying, confirming and disconfirming interviewees' statements.

I was concerned within the interviews to reduce the asymmetry of power that resulted from the pre-existing relationship between interviewer and interviewees. I aimed to emphasise reciprocity and collaboration within the interview. I tried to give some control over the interview to interviewees, for example, in using the timeline to direct most of the interview and asking very open questions without predetermined modes of response. However it was recognised that personal relations and expectations position everyone in the interview and that this will influence the knowledge constructed (Drake 2010). The conduct of the interview acknowledged that interviewer and interviewee knew each other and did not try to superficially ignore this relationship in pretence of distance or objectivity. Within the interviews I tried to reassure the interviewees, I did not try to eliminate natural conversational responses manifest in the use of my voice and my body language. I tried to

appreciate their contribution as individuals, for example, by spending a few minutes with each interviewee after their interview to thank them for their participation, answer their questions and to reassure them of the value of their responses.

In managing the interviews I was concerned that interviewees did not leave the research situation with greater anxiety or lower levels of self esteem than they came with. I hoped that they would be enriched by the experience and would leave with the feeling they had, through the dialogue that we had, and their articulation of their own thinking, learned something. The main difficulty in this respect was considering the history teachers' conception of the nature of their subject. Issues and debates in this area are complex and often highly theoretical, and many beginning history teachers have only given them cursory, if any, previous consideration. I planned the interview schedule with this in mind so that within the interview I could question interviewees appropriately responding to their understanding and ensuring that I did not make any of them feel threatened by a lack of knowledge. In the case of the interview with Tina I was unsuccessful. She displayed apprehension throughout a short, stilted interview and prefixed all responses with a protestation that she did not know, as if there was a correct answer.

The focus of the interviews on individual's lives and experiences meant that they could reveal potentially sensitive information. In my interview with Helen she alluded on several occasions to a critical incident which had occurred during her secondary schooling which had involved her in the prosecution of a crime, this involvement left her disillusioned by the judiciary leading to a change in her career path. I was concerned that Helen's involvement in my research could cause her distress from re-living what had clearly been a painful event so I summarised the impact of the generic circumstances and moved the interview forward without probing her for further details of the event. In my interview with Tina she made several oblique allusions to mental health problems that had impacted on her undergraduate study of her subject. I avoided development of this area of discussion, again to avoid distress, but also to avoid her revealing information to me that might have a bearing on her fitness to teach.

### **Data analysis**

My original plan was to analyse the interviews according to each of the research questions – using the questions as 'bins' to group responses colour coded according to respondents

and then to analyse all responses relevant to each question in order to draw some tentative conclusions. Soon into the process of data analysis it became clear that the research questions were so interlinked and interdependent and so tied to particular individual respondents that this method of data analysis was not going to be appropriate. For example, whilst it is possible to abstract all statements from the interviews that could serve as empirical evidence of different conceptions of the nature of history these conceptions need to remain linked to the individual respondents if their rationale for the subject is going to be used as evidence of their conceptions of it; if origins of their views can be linked to these conceptions; and if we are to see whether different conceptions result in different emphases on what and how history is taught in school. Instead of analysing all of the interview data according to the research questions each interview was therefore analysed individually according to the research questions. I then looked across the data to see where patterns emerged between interviews.

I decided to use writing as a method of data analysis. This is an approach taken from Richardson (1994) in which the act of writing itself is not just the mode of 'telling' about phenomena in the social world but is also the 'way of knowing' it (Richardson 1994: 923). This is consistent with my postmodern approach in that it privileges the role of language and recognises the central place of the researcher in the report. It is an approach that makes explicit that, as in any social scientific work, the interpretation and organisation are going to be value laden and organised according to metaphor and the expectations of writing within a genre (Richardson 1994). In presenting other people's stories they will always be my account of, and selection from, those stories; with my motivation for the research affecting what is learned and what is emphasised in accounts (Drake 2010). This is an approach which recognises the 'characteristically narrative structure to consciousness' (Clough 2002: 13), and the ways in which people make sense of their lives in the form of story (Clough 2002). The use of writing as a method of analysis combines my background and research interest which intersect at the boundary of the humanities and the social sciences.

I was open about my position in the text and its construction. This recognition of the place of the author in creating an interpretation and their fashioning of the final text meant that I did not want to give the impression that process of data analysis and presentation was a replicable one. I therefore did not attempt to exemplify the process as this could only ever

have been a text artificially created for this purpose as it is not possible to deconstruct all of the many orientations and decisions that inform the author's many choices in creating a text. Recognising that others would have produced different stories from the interviews does not preclude the writing of stories that would be recognised by the interviewees and which are illuminating in response to the research questions. It was important that the text was readable. The aim was not to showcase a methodology to other researchers but to produce a text that was coherent, interesting and persuasive in order to enable reflections on my chosen theme. This is particularly important in the context of a professional doctorate where it is hoped that research findings have meaning to a professional readership and have a place in informing policy and practice not just in a self-indulgent account of the research process with few ends beyond the process of completing the doctorate itself. I also felt some responsibility to the interviewees to present their stories in the best possible way.

The analysis of each interview began with repeated readings of the entire interview transcript in order to get a sense of the whole narrative of the interview. The interview was then organised, according to my researcher viewpoint and according to its relevance to each of the research questions. This then led to the construction, for each respondent, of a story that characterises their own views, thinking, thoughts and experiences in an attempt to understand them on their own terms before drawing comparisons or highlighting differences between them. The interview was one complete narrative, made up of a number of relevant stories, so it was important to me at least to keep as many of these stories together as I could. This also enabled me to have some consistency in form between the original interview, and the analysis and the reporting of it.

During the writing of each of the stories I noted patterns and themes that emerged and comparisons were drawn between the analysed interviews. Analysing each interview individually therefore did not preclude the possibility of drawing some conclusions from all of the interviews that could be linked to a formalized body of knowledge in the form of constructs and theories. I reviewed all of the accounts in relation to my first research question: how do beginning history teachers conceive of the nature of history? in relation to historiographical debates. Conceptions of the nature of history were identified and attributed to positionings identified from the literature (see Chapter 2). In considering the research questions: what rationale do beginning history teachers present for the purpose

of their subject in the school curriculum? and what are the origins of the respondent's views on the nature and purpose of history? I noted the range of responses that occurred in the interviews and the significance attributed to these by the teachers. In considering how conceptions of history are manifest in classrooms, the analysis considered respondents' articulation of their conception of the nature of their subject alongside their categorisation of what and how they prefer to teach.

The process of analysing and presenting the stories was a complex one in which I faced a number of issues which needed to be resolved. The issue of how to write the accounts – particularly in what tense – was one that I grappled with at the analysis stage. This was an epistemological issue. At first I tried to write them in the past tense, to ensure that it was clear that my account of their stories was clearly my construction, I was representing the accounts very much as situated within the time and space within which they were elicited but this made them awkward to read and gave a distance to the rich individual stories that I did not want. So instead I decided to write them in the present tense but making it clear that the report relates to the time of interview. I was explicit about avoiding the suggestion that the meanings expressed transcended time and space by noting their situatedness in their unique context when I presented the findings. Re-presenting the teachers' accounts also represents an awareness that they have already been translated from the oral form of the conversational interview into a written text and enabled me to avoid being disrespectful to respondents by presenting their oral responses in forms which do not suit or fairly represent them.

In analysing the accounts according to the research questions it became clear that respondents often had contradictory positionings for example in relation to their views on the nature of history and their rationale for the subject in the curriculum. Instead of presenting one dominant position in the account the complexity of these competing perspectives were maintained in the final accounts and discussed in considering the findings.

## **Reporting**

Analysing the interviews in this way influenced the method chosen for reporting the results of the data analysis. Having analysed each of the interviews individually it would then not have been appropriate to present these data in a fragmented way with many verbatim

quotations placed in the text interspersed with my comments, an approach which runs the risk of making the text difficult and tedious to read (Kvale 1996: 254) and which is indicative of an approach to the research which suggests that it is possible to avoid subjectivity by presenting copious amounts of the 'raw' data in the final text. I largely avoided the use of quotations from the interview transcripts- often despite the attractiveness of including some of the specific examples of exactly what was said. On those few occasions where verbatim quotations are included this is done to enable reflection on a particularly striking phrase or analogy, or, as with Anne's account of trying to teach her year 8 class about the black people of the Americas to illustrate something of how the teacher thought and felt rather than to suggest that I was substantiating or illustrating my argument. In reporting my findings I wanted to avoid any attempt to suggest pseudo objectivity through devices such as omitting the authorial voice. The postmodern approach I have adopted leads to a focus on issues of authorship in the final text. I wanted to be clear that the understandings that I come to are unstable, temporal, constituted by discourse, language-driven and dependent. They are context-specific within historical period, society, and micro context. I am open about the wish to produce a credible account and that in so doing I use literary device such as genre, structure and rhetoric.

In presenting the data I wanted to ensure that I was able to represent the richness and individuality of the lives, thoughts and experiences of the respondents. I wanted to maintain the connection between the individuals and their life experiences and their beliefs and practices in the classroom. With this in mind I chose not to produce composite accounts to illustrate a variety of orientations, but to present the unique, individual idiosyncratic accounts of the real teachers whose stories were constructed during the research. I wanted to make sure that the context of what was said was maintained and that the interview did not become fragmented and decontextualised. I also wanted to draw on the variety of experiences of as many of the teachers as possible. I therefore presented a portrait of each the teachers (see Chapter 5) which summarised their views on the nature of history, significant influences on these, their rationale for the subject and their preferred teaching approaches. This enabled be to introduce each of the teachers that I would be discussing in chapter 6 and to contextualise their responses. I presented in full three of the accounts that I would be considering in most detail. These were chosen because they each had differing backgrounds and perspectives on the nature and purposes of history which impacted on their practice.

## **Veracity**

Notions of verification through positivist conceptions of reliability and validity are rejected as representing a belief in objective universal truths. An attempt is made to produce a coherent and persuasive account but the text will, ultimately, be judged by its verisimilitude. The validation of the findings will come through the discourse within which the research is situated. In this way the communication of the research becomes important in ensuring that the account is accepted as justified and convincing.

Claims for objectivity are not made; a reflexive account which addresses my impact on the research is presented. The process by which my interpretations have been formed is made explicit. I have tried to ensure that the process of the research and any conclusions reached are charted and justified making explicit my own attitudes, opinions, and expectations. Attempts have been made to ensure the adequacy of the data; ensuring, for example, that the interview questions sought to generate knowledge about the desired areas, that the design of the research and the methods used were adequate, that interviewees were able to respond freely, that my analysis was logical, my interpretation sound and reporting of findings plausible.

Rejecting the possibility of laws of human behaviour that can be generalised beyond the specific instances investigated does not preclude the potential elicitation of commonalities or illuminating insights of value in alternative contexts particularly when research is undertaken within groups who share certain characteristics such as teaching the same subject and/or age range (Verloop et al 2001). The research does not result in statistical generalisation but can put forward the possibility of certain things occurring in specific contexts. Some initial consideration is given to this type of transferability of findings, but the real capacity for generalization to other contexts is left with the reader.



## **Chapter 5 Teachers' Accounts**

In this chapter I introduce the relationships to history of the teachers I interviewed at two levels of detail. For those teachers whose ideas are used less extensively in Part 3 I present only a brief summary of the full story constructed in the interviews. This includes their views of history, the factors that shaped them and the ways in which they were manifest in what and how they taught. For the three teachers, Anne, Charlotte and Patrick, whose stories I draw on in more detail in Part 3, I present a much fuller account.

### **Summary Accounts**

#### **Helen**

For Helen history and the past are synonymous. She thinks that the role of historians is to get as close as possible to what actually happened in the past, through the exercise of appropriate method, in order that what they learn from the past can be used to inform the present. Helen privileges contemporary, often oral, accounts of the past of the kind told to her as a child by her grandfather. This has influenced her conception of what sort of history teacher she wants to be, which centres on her making knowledge of the past, in the form of stories, accessible to her pupils.

#### **Jasbir**

Jasbir is a recently retired professional sportsman who has worked for a year in a secondary school. He has a degree in Politics with no background in history post A level. This means that he has not considered issues about the nature of history and sees the subject entirely as a body of substantive knowledge. One of his teachers has been an important influence throughout Jasbir's education and the model for Jasbir's own teaching, which is characterised by an informal style and a lot of teacher exposition.

#### **Jenny**

Jenny views history as the process of finding out the truth of what happened in the past from its traces. She first became interested in finding out about what happened in the past through talking to her grandfathers, one of whom fought in the Second World War and the other in the Spanish Civil War. Jenny believes that the historian can come closer to the

truth with more extensive research using contemporary sources and it is their responsibility to approach the sources objectively and without preconceived ideas. This emphasis on historical evidence is apparent in Jenny's teaching where learning activities focus on the analysis of sources and in which developing the skill of historical enquiry is central.

### **Lizzie**

Lizzie's engagement with history has been influenced by her family, leading to a particular interest in personal and family histories. Her conception of the subject highlights the importance of the evidential base in reconstructing what happened in the past. She feels that history is worth doing for its own sake, that it is intrinsically interesting and that the knowledge gained could inform the present. Her interest in personal history and historical evidence both influence the content and resources used in her teaching.

### **Mary**

Mary characterises herself as a political person. She sees the fact that she is a socialist as influencing her view of history which, for her, is fundamentally about people, about why they have done the things that they have done, and how they have experienced life in the past. Mary believes that history could be transformative for the individual through the insight that it can provide into individuals in the past but also through the intellectual challenge of engaging in producing accounts of the past. Mary believes that these accounts are always interpretive, to be judged by their plausibility. Mary's own views of history influence what she does in the classroom where she teaches about individual motivations and actions focusing on developing pupils' understanding of causation.

### **Richard**

Richard believes that people are inherently interested in the past. His experience of living and working in Japan and Israel and an interest in politics leads him to particularly enjoy more modern world history. His understanding of history is as a discipline grounded in the evidence, but influenced by its narrative form and the unknowability of the past. This influences Richard's teaching which is pupil-centred and focused particularly on the content of the past through a focus on causation.

**Sam**

Influenced by her own family's history and her experiences of travelling, Sam has a particular interest in social history. She is fascinated by how events in the past really happened and impacted on real people. She sees the value of history in how it relates to individual people. For her, accounts of the past are always interpretive but are stronger if based on reliable evidence and produced with the exercise of appropriate historical method. This can be seen in her classroom teaching where she is especially concerned to enable pupils to undertake independent historical enquiries and to introduce a variety of types of historical sources into lessons.

**Tina**

Throughout her own education Tina's preference for a narrative view of history has been gradually challenged, something which she has found uncomfortable. She enjoys the nature of history as a story and believes that focusing too much on the interpretive nature of history can mean losing something of the narrative of what actually happened in the past. A religious upbringing has led her to be particularly interested in stories of religious and cultural history. Tina has a particular interest in teaching pupils with special educational needs. Her lessons focus on the development of skills extrinsic to history, but she is keen to provide balance between different learning activities and maintaining the overall picture of what happened in the past.

**Fuller Accounts****Anne**

Anne's sense of history is very concerned with finding out about the past, and the role that this can play in understanding the present. Her conception of history is heavily influenced by becoming an adult in the historical context of the 1980s. It has been shaped by encounters with a number of influential individuals and by her own experiences of the education system, including attending university as a mature student. Anne's conception of history informs her view of the teaching of history in the classroom and leads to some difficulties accepting some of the more dominant pedagogical models of history teaching.

One of the most important influences on Anne's views about history occurred in her early years of work. After leaving school she was employed in a London bookshop where she

came into contact with people who were to be a powerful influence on her and her interest in history. One colleague had a particular influence – Victoria had studied history at university and brought her excitement for her subject to managing the bookshop. There were other influential colleagues there too, many of them students doing holiday or weekend work. Having left school at 16 and never having been in an academic environment before, Anne found these people different from anyone she had ever met before. She was somewhat in awe of how clever they were, and how much they seemed to know and this sparked in her a desire to know more too. She wanted to know more about what they knew about, to have read the books and the authors that they had read. So that when someone said that one of their favourite books was by Turgenev, Anne felt that she needed to read it, and then to read all of his books, and to find out about the history that contextualised them.

Anne's need to be better informed and to be 'educated' stems partly from the negative experience of her own secondary education. She thinks that her history teacher was particularly dreadful and embodied all that was wrong with her secondary education. Anne started secondary school at the time that all schools were becoming comprehensive schools but when grammar schools still existed. New to the area, Anne attended a school that had been a secondary modern where she found teachers who were anticipating children not doing very well at school. The worst culprit of all was her history teacher who insisted that all of her pupils begin the CSE history course regardless of whether or not they would later prove able to do O Level history. As a bolshie teenager, well aware that she was capable of completing O level history, Anne found this to be a negative experience that not only put her off studying history but also off the whole idea of staying on at school at all. So she left school and began working in the bookshop.

Influenced by her colleagues at the bookshop, Anne did eventually go to university where she read history. Immersing herself in the study of the past, her quest to know continued. She did not go with any particular interest in any period of history but rather a fervent wish to learn and to find out about things. She was impressed by the people she met at university who she thought were just 'dead clever'. She was particularly influenced by a professor who taught a course on empire. He had real gravitas and embodied for Anne everything that people in universities were supposed to be. Her experience of learning history changed under his tutelage. Until then it had been characterised by the

memorisation and regurgitating of facts, but he encouraged her to use this knowledge, to think for herself and to have her own opinions, something which she found novel and exciting.

A significant influence on Anne's thinking about history was her own lived experiences. She grew up during the Cold War which shaped what she thought about history and what she subsequently went on to do in her life. At school she took part in survival days which made the reality of the Cold War part of her everyday life and which emphasised to her the fragility of the world in which she was living. Other contemporary events were also influential. She found the labour election defeat in the 1980s traumatic. Anne had been convinced that they were going to win and life was going to be new and different, but they did not. She was at university at the time and just couldn't believe that life was going to go on as normal: it was, and had been so awful. She was quite sure this influenced the decisions she made about what to do after university. Margaret Thatcher was in power and Anne graduated into a world where she saw everything revolving around money; where graduates went to work in banks and earned lots of money or went into something more 'woolly'. For Anne this was working in the Civil Service, where she ended up serving the policies of the government she hated.

Anne's husband, Tim shares a similar thirst for knowledge to Anne. Anne finds his breadth of knowledge impressive. Despite his lack of formal education she knows that if she asked him about anything he would know about it, because he enjoys finding out about things and because he wants to know about things. Anne is sure that if she wants to know about the Biafran war Tim would be able help. Anne and Tim share their interest in finding out about the past with their two children whom they regularly take to visit historic sites.

The arts also influenced Anne's thinking about history. Theatre and drama have been important to her and Tim, particularly earlier in their relationship before they had children. She would go to see Shakespeare plays with Tim, recognizing that these were histories of their own sort. Television and film were also influential, such as the 1980s TV drama GBH and the film Rosa Luxemburg. This was history that she did not know about and so again something she wanted to find out about. One way in which she learned about these histories was through reading - something which she still does. When I spoke to Anne she

described how she was reading a book about Nigeria as she just could not believe that she had got to her current moment in life not knowing anything about its history.

Anne reads fiction as well as nonfiction. She is fascinated by the history in the novels of Trollope, Dickens and Wilkie Collins. Her approach to literature is similar to her approach to history, reflecting a desire to know things that she feels she ought to know, perhaps seeking to remedy what she perceived as the inadequacies of her own education. Just as there is a past that people should know about, a history to Nigeria that she is shocked not to have encountered, so there is a canon of literature that should be read: therefore she reads Dickens not just because she is interested in the historical context, but because she feels that she should know about what he wrote.

Anne's conception of history is chiefly concerned with what happened in the past as this is how she herself experienced learning history. When Anne studied history at university, her degree was predominantly content based, organised around eras and epochs and with some courses which began to be organised around substantive concepts such as her course on Empire. Anne had had no experience of thinking about the nature of history until she started her PGCE course. She had not read or even heard of texts that were referred to, and which had been read by some of her fellow students. She had not thought about the issue of what history is. For Anne, history was a given. It was something she knew about and which she knew some bits better than others.

The PGCE played a significant role in challenging Anne's views about the nature of history. Her desire for knowledge meant that she took time to engage with this whole new area of historiography that she had not encountered before, reading and reflecting on key texts. Anne recognised that the view of history represented in the curriculum and which underpinned what she learned in university and the practice she saw in school was different from her own, and so she changed the view of the nature of history that she expressed. But Anne believes that her own educational experiences have been too powerful, and although understanding these new positions she has encountered, she has never really been convinced by them. They influence her articulation of her position, but not the strongly held feelings that actually shape what she does and what she wants to achieve in her classroom.

When writing essays as an undergraduate Anne saw herself as writing accounts of what actually happened in the past, albeit one version. The process of giving consideration to the fact that there is the possibility of different versions within which this would only be one led her, somewhat reluctantly, to concede with disappointment that there can be no truth beyond interpretation. For Anne different interpretations are possible because of the place of the historian in their writing. She believes that the historian cannot be separated from their text, that they bring their own 'gloss' to all that they write. This 'gloss' could be a result of their own history, their own moral judgements and values. So that someone who may even have lived through the same experiences might feel them very differently, some people, for example, may have felt very comfortable living in London in the late 1980s in the way that Anne had not and so would have a different take on that time as a consequence.

The impossibility of one true account did not negate for Anne the desirability of coming as close to the truth of what actually happened in the past as possible. For Anne some accounts can achieve this better than others. This might be because their authors have done more research, will have looked at new primary sources or looked at them differently from others or because they are able to make connections on the basis of superior intellect or will be better able to refrain from making suppositions.

Anne has reluctantly come to see the impossibility of re-presenting the truth of the past, but holds on to the desirability of doing so. She claims that it has become more difficult to recreate the past because the media are now able to bombard us with information in a way that makes it much harder to reach some sense of the truth of the past than when there was less information to contend with.

Anne's rationale for the study of history largely concerns its relevance to the present. She sees the present as a consequence of all that had gone before. People therefore need to study the past in order to understand the world in which they live. Anne's quest for knowledge of the past can then be seen as a desire to make the world in which she lives today more understandable. Indeed her view is that there is a history that people *ought* to know as part of their duty in living in contemporary society.

The fact that the pupils that she has taught have not always shared this understanding has caused Anne some anger and frustration. She told me the story of how she had tried to teach a year 8 class on the black people of the Americas.

*'these children weren't interested. And I just felt they had no right not to be interested. I was quite indignant, how can you sit there and think that you don't need to know this. You need to know what people in the 1900s did to Black people in America. And I felt quite despairing that they didn't feel that they needed to know, couldn't be bothered, it had no relevance'.*

To a lesser extent Anne's rationale for the study of the past is to provide an overview of the past, giving a sense of time and place. She relates this to her teaching and a desire to ensure that her pupils don't just have a sense of the past as disjointed moments in time but get a sense of the chronological span of history and a sense of their time and place within it.

Anne's approach to history teaching is very much influenced by her own experiences and conception of history. She is most comfortable when directly addressing the substantive content area, not necessarily in a didactic way, but ensuring that pupils have sufficient contextual knowledge to be able to have discussions and to ask questions. Her conception of history is apparent as she feels most comfortable when she is telling them about *the* past as a background to their own lives and context in order that they become sufficiently interested in what actually happened.

Anne does not find other teaching and learning activities as comfortable, perhaps because they clash with her own view of the nature and purposes of history. She finds what she refers to as 'all the active learning stuff' difficult to do because she just cannot see the point of it. She feels that it trivialises what happened in the past and that that is too important to be trivialised.

As part of her PGCE course Anne tried to embrace different teaching and learning activities. She tried to use role plays but found them difficult as they just seemed to her 'like make believe'. She feels that you can engage pupils through different media, such as film, as long as it is clear that this is just using a medium that they are comfortable with to get them interested in the past, but it is important to ensure that those pupils understand that 'it is just an interpretation, it is not real history'. She tries to embrace the place of



something like historical interpretations in the school curriculum but is reluctant because this has not been part of her own historical education. Nobody has ever taught her in that way, not at school or even university.

Anne has come to be somewhat disillusioned with history teaching as she feels that pupils need much contextualised knowledge but that as a history teacher she has not been given the time to give it to them. Even when the time is available, you have to rely on them wanting to absorb it in some way. This has not been her experience of pupils that she has taught whom she has found to not really be interested in the knowledge that she is giving.

### **Charlotte**

Charlotte's interest in history has been influenced by her family and centres particularly on a love of historical fiction. The central premise of her thinking about history is that of history as story. This is evidenced in her conception of the discipline as one in which the historian attempts to come as close as possible to what happened in the past. This can be seen in her preferred teaching style and learning activities which, replicating her own experiences, are based around the teacher as storyteller.

The main influence on her thinking about history was Charlotte's childhood and family. Her family had brought her up wanting to learn and with an emphasis on books. Her father has been particularly important. He has a real interest in history; having studied, and spent all his working life practising law, he is in his retirement studying history at university as a hobby. Charlotte looks up to him as a very knowledgeable person, especially about history. Her grandfather was also influential. He fought in the Second World War and knew a lot about their family history. Charlotte found talking to him about the past a link that made up for having less in common with him in the present.

The history that was happening around her as a child, which she experienced through television, sparked a curiosity and interest in history as a way of explaining why things happen. Charlotte had an early interest in Russia which was in the news a lot because of the fall of communism. She recollects being 11 years old and made to watch news footage of the fall of The Berlin Wall as it was something really important happening within her lifetime. She saw East and West Germany change into Germany and asked 'why did that happen?'

As a child Charlotte was given books to support her study of history and was taken on visits to places of historic interest, so that when she studied the Tudors at primary school her parents bought her extra books and took her to visit Hampton Court. She also remembered visiting museums like the Natural History Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum, walking around London learning about its history and childhood holidays visiting Versailles when in France and Iron Age settlements when in Cornwall.

Charlotte links her conception of history as the story of the past back to her love of historical fiction. As a child she was bought books for every birthday and Christmas. Charlotte loved reading story books that were set in the past. As an adult she continues to prefer reading historical fiction to history books. When interested in a period or event in history she goes to historical fiction as her first port of call because it gives such a sense of period, aiding her understanding of what it was like in the past and taking delight in the fact that the history recounted 'actually happened'.

The instinct to be curious about and to question the past instilled in her by her parents has led the adult Charlotte to love travelling. She enjoys going to new places in order to find out about their culture and history. For Charlotte, the story of the past centres around real people and their experiences. She is interested in political and conflict-based history but with her interest lying in how they affect ordinary people. For example, she has lived in South Africa and is fascinated and shocked by how people were affected by apartheid. She feels that what she read about apartheid came alive when she spoke to people who were actually arrested or who could not go to work or school.

Charlotte's own history education was very influential on her thinking about history. As a secondary school pupil she had two particularly inspiring history teachers. What she found so engaging about them was the way that they taught history using stories in exciting ways that brought the past to life and hooked the pupils in, leaving them asking lots of questions and wanting to find out more. The history she was taught at her school focused on the substantive content of history, on big and significant characters through which the pupils were able implicitly to learn historical skills.

Charlotte did a year long module in her first year at university on *What is history?* and really enjoyed it. She liked the issues they covered such as whether it is possible to get objective truth in history or whether it is just the study of interpretations. She also enjoyed the way in which it was taught with many debates and student presentations, such as those on the dangers of bad history, and a group research project using primary sources about the possibility of getting an objective truth in the Bloody Sunday enquiry which was happening at the time.

Charlotte's opinion on whether it is possible to know what happened in the past has changed over time. In essays she wrote in her first year at university Charlotte argued that you can obtain objective truth by doing everything possible to put aside your prejudices. Now that she is beginning to teach she has come to the view that it is very difficult in any circumstances to know 100% for sure what happened in the past, but that this should not stop the historian from trying. For Charlotte the historian must strive for objectivity through looking at the evidence as closely as possible. They need to be aware that they are going to the evidence with their own preconceptions, but as long as they are aware of that then they are doing everything possible to get close to the truth. The possibility of multiple interpretations does not negate the purpose or importance of history, because if the story was important it would not matter that there were slight differences in accounts.

For Charlotte the historian writes an account which is as close as possible to what happened in the past and it is the use of the storied form that makes this as accessible as possible. She does not think that history should be an elite subject that only academics can do. She feels that it is through story telling that historians like David Starkey are able to appeal to the masses and get people interested in the subject.

Charlotte's rationale for history centres around the knowledge that can be obtained from a study of the past being valuable for its own sake. Knowledge of history does not make you particularly more employable but it is interesting to know. She believes that there are aspects of knowledge that people could usefully know to inform their understanding of the contemporary world. Examples of this could include the role of an understanding of migration in explaining why there are different races in England. This might even make people more tolerant. For Charlotte there are laws to be learned from history. This does not mean that things like genocide and war are never going to happen again because

society has learned from the past, but rather that at an individual level we learn that people are complex and that there are no easy answers to why things happen, making individuals think about themselves, their actions, and their impact on other people.

Charlotte's rationale for history as developing skills, particularly those of enquiry and criticality also reflect her conception of the subject. These skills enable the historian to get close to the true story of the past but also encourage life skills to enable them to be enquiring people who question things and do not accept what they are told.

Charlotte's teaching style is very similar to the way in which she herself was taught, comprising elements of storytelling and encouraging a great deal of questioning and answering. She also tries to encourage more independent learning in pupils by sparking an interest to be followed up. Charlotte has tried other teaching methods like group work and role play but she was not convinced of their value or appropriateness, preferring question and answer. She has watched other teachers using different methods with success and is impressed by them but could not imagine continuing to use them herself. This was a situation which had caused her difficulties with her mentor and the other teachers in the department in which she trained to teach. Charlotte is eagerly anticipating taking up her first post in a boy's public school where she is particularly looking forward to teaching in the way that she felt most comfortable – sitting with a group of really engaged pupils and discussing things.

### **Patrick**

Patrick has a joint honours degree in history and social science. He has an interest, derived from his family background and developed through his study of sociology, in issues of social justice and inequality. For him history is created by positioned historians in the present. This has led him to reject the possibility of grand narratives and explanatory frameworks that can be imposed on the past. But he struggles to reconcile this with an attraction to explanations of social experiences and phenomena according to social class. Patrick's interest in social issues can be seen in his teaching in which he aims to empower pupils with knowledge of the past to explain the contemporary world and to enable them to be able to come to, and to express their own views.

Patrick's family, particularly his mother, have been influential on the way that he views the world and so his understanding of history. His family share his interest in inequality and social justice. His mother believes strongly in the determining nature of social class and told the young Patrick about the ways in which certain people were kept out of jobs because they were not of a certain class or race. Patrick credits these early experiences and values for his interest in sociology which he went on to study at A level and then to read, along with history, in a joint honours degree at university.

As a child Patrick enjoyed listening to people talking about the past. He enjoyed the content of history lessons at secondary school, particularly the Second World War and other modern history. He liked watching documentaries on television, programmes like *The World at War* and Simon Schama's *History of Britain* series. The academic nature of history as a subject appeals to him. He enjoys the intellectual endeavour of attempting to make sense of the past, to understand why things happened, people's explanations and motives. His undergraduate dissertation was about trying to come to some sort of understanding of Anthony Eden's handling of Poland during the Second World War.

While at university Patrick studied a course on *What is history?* Also, influentially, he did a course in sociology about ontology and epistemology. It was this coming together of history and sociology that led Patrick to a paradoxical view of these two subjects that continues to perplex him. On the one hand he accepts a view of history as entirely interpretive, but on the other he is very attracted to, and persuaded by some of the overarching explanatory frameworks, particularly those relating to social class that he encountered in sociology.

For Patrick written history is not a re-creation of what actually happened in the past but an account of one historian's interpretations of past events. The writing of history is affected by who is writing it, who they are and when and why they are writing. This means that it is impossible for the historian to be totally objective; they should not strive to be. The historian will always bring to their work the ways in which they view the world which will be different from how others will view it.

Patrick does not accept that greater objectivity can be achieved through the exercise of historical methods in relation to sources because how the historian views the sources will

be similarly affected by their situation in the present. The historian does not approach the evidence objectively. In selecting their sources they have some sort of idea what they will find before they even start looking. They have read what other people have written and are aware of what the debates are and are prepared to put them to the test. They are looking at a source for a reason, they have not just gone to the national archives and picked out a source at random, they have picked it out to look for something, and if they have not found it they are likely to use a different source in which they can find what they are looking for.

Patrick rejects the appropriateness of applying overarching explanatory frameworks to the past, rejecting the possibility of an interpretation of the past that transcends time and space, as it is unlikely that an interpretation is going to be accepted all over the world by people of different cultures and with different aims for looking at the past.

The difficulty for Patrick is in reconciling his view of the nature of history with his thinking about social class. He does not hold that social class is an entirely determining factor in peoples' lives, and believes that how it is viewed is important. But he does feel that even if it is not viewed as a determining factor, it still has an effect on people's lives, whether they are aware of it or not. He recognises that this position is contrary to his view of history, implying as it does some sort of real past that people can access and a belief in the possibility of there being one interpretation that is true for everyone. Patrick's solution to this seeming dichotomy is in the reflexivity of the historian and what is accepted by their audience.

Patrick believes that the role of the historian is to be open about their own positioning. They must make explicit who they are and the factors influencing them. They need to be open about the fact that they are looking for issues of social class and consider it to be a determining factor and so are going to believe it actually existed in the past and that this will affect how they look at the past. When they put their argument about class they must make it explicit that that is what they are doing, so the reader is able to know where the historian is coming from and how this is affecting their history. The judgement of the historical accounts is then based on plausibility, the extent to which they are believed by the reader and the extent to which it accords with their own world view.

Patrick's rationale for studying the past includes knowing about the past in understanding the present. He uses the example of the history of Ireland where you have to look into the past to see why things are so polarised in the present. He does not suggest that there might be lessons to be learned from the past but rather that an understanding of the past provides an understanding of contemporary issues and where they come from, so enabling informed opinions to be held on them. Patrick also thinks that studying the past is intrinsically interesting.

Patrick believes that there are aspects of history that people should be aware of. For him these would include issues of social justice, inequality and protest. They need to know of them because of the dispositions that this might engender, such as participation in society and having an awareness of alternative perspectives and different points of view. Part of Patrick's rationale for history therefore relates to the role of history in developing skills in understanding, questioning and challenging interpretations.

Patrick's preferred teaching style is one in which he enables the pupils to think for themselves and come up with their own ideas. He wants pupils to leave his lessons having learned wider lessons beyond the detail of the historical content. It is more important to Patrick that pupils gain an understanding of concepts like protest than a detailed recollection of things like the dates when things happened. The learning activities that Patrick favours are therefore those where the pupils are able to come to their own points of view such as enquiring into the past using sources, and looking at multiple views and perspectives through interpretations. Patrick focuses his lessons on areas of historical understanding such as interpretations to help enable his pupils to understand that they can disagree with each other and view the world differently from others. He wants to enable them to think for themselves and to write their own interpretations not to just regurgitate accepted answers.

## **PART 3 FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS**

### **Chapter 6 History Teachers' Knowledge of the Nature and Purposes of History**

This chapter will consider the knowledge teachers' have of the nature and purposes of history relating this to the central issues of debate, and positionings in relation to these, as outlined in Chapter 2. Focusing on the accounts of Anne, Charlotte and Patrick and making reference to the other teachers it will argue that these beginning teachers take a broadly empiricist approach towards history within which they emphasize the role of the historian in striving for objectivity through their use of historical evidence and in order to represent the past within their text. This reflects the academic consensus outlined in chapter 2. More postmodern perspectives have not been influential beyond imparting recognition of a need for a greater degree of reflexivity. The teachers' views of the purposes of history are influenced to a greater extent by how they see themselves as teachers and emphasize broader educational, social and moral purposes. Whilst largely matching their views on the nature of history they also include a much greater emphasis on the constructed and disputed nature of historical knowledge manifest in different historical interpretations.

#### **History teacher knowledge**

History teachers' knowledge of the nature of history can, from the teachers' accounts, be seen to be both a body of knowledge and a set of beliefs and values which shape knowledge and practice. Teachers' knowledge of the nature of history encompasses substantive aspects of knowledge including an awareness of ideas and debates, knowledge of skills and methods, and a familiarity with historiographers and key historiographical texts. As such it takes its place within typologies of history teacher knowledge as part of a teacher's knowledge of their subject of history (Husbands et al 2003; John 1991).

Teachers' knowledge of the nature of history is not just substantive knowledge. It is a set of beliefs, a facet of an 'ideology', which affects the way in which knowledge is organised, selected and transformed for classroom use (John 1991). These beliefs lead to an



acceptance of particular methods and approaches (John 1991). They underpin detailed understandings of the substance and procedures of history which shape what teachers and pupils actually do in their classrooms (Husbands et al 2003).

## **History teachers' knowledge of the nature of history**

### **Prior experiences of learning about the nature of history**

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) subject benchmark statements for history (QAA 2000) recommend that:

Reflexivity: All History students should be expected to reflect critically on the nature of their discipline, its social rationale, its theoretical underpinnings and its intellectual standing. This may take place in a course labelled historiography or historical method, in other courses or in independent work (point 19).

For some students, predominantly those educated at the older universities, the study of the nature and methods of history was a compulsory part of the rubric of their undergraduate degree. For other students this was an optional course that they may or may not have selected and some students could not recall ever having been given the option of considering these debates. Recollections of these programmes tended to relate to key authors and texts rather than particular issues or debates. Comparisons between Carr and Elton seemed to predominate with some reference to the procedures of history – Sam referred to Marwick. Less consideration had been given to debates since Carr, only Richard had encountered Foucault and Charlotte had read some texts by Jenkins.

Many of those who had undertaken these courses found them uninteresting or too difficult and had therefore not remained engaged with the issues raised. Jenny recollected some input on the nature and methods of history, probably in her first year, but it was not influential and not something she remembered well. Richard described his historical argument and practice sessions as not being very helpful, but rather '*all up in the air and abstract*'.

Students like Charlotte, and Patrick who had encountered and engaged with debates on the nature of history as part of their undergraduate studies brought a more conscious articulation of their own positions in relation to central issues to the PGCE programme. Having enjoyed the module on *What is history?* In her first year Charlotte had begun a process of reflecting on the nature of history which enabled her to chart the shifts and

changes in her thinking and to position herself in relation to key authors and texts. Similarly Patrick's consideration of issues of ontology and epistemology enabled him to articulate the way in which he was still grappling with the seeming paradox in his attraction to Marxist explanations of the past and his own firmly held conception of history as relative and interpretive.

Different views on what history is and how and why it should be taught seem to result from different disciplinary backgrounds (Wilson and Wineburg 1988). Patrick's background in social science clearly contributed to his thinking about history. Having not studied history at undergraduate level Jasbir was ill equipped to engage with debates concerning the nature of history, his relation to the issues centered entirely on history as a body of substantive knowledge. Students like Anne whose university education took place before the popular emergence of debates concerning the nature of history and their subsequent incorporation in to undergraduate programmes had had little or no experience of considering the nature of history prior to their PGCE course. Unlike Jasbir as an historian Anne was able to engage with these debates on the PGCE course and to begin to come to her own position in relation to these.

The PGCE course was important for a number of students in introducing or reintroducing them to key debates concerning the nature of history. Lizzie outlined how having never explicitly studied the issues, the PGCE was important in making these explicit so she was able to do the same in her own teaching.

### **Positions in relation to the 'knowability' of the past**

None of the students were as bluntly Reconstructionist as the characterization of positions by postmodernists as outlined in chapter 2 would suggest. Only Helen, with her emphasis on the desirability of coming as close as possible to 'what actually happened' in the past reflected this perspective. All of the students except Patrick and to a lesser extent Mary took a broadly empiricist standpoint towards the past. None of them believed that it is actually possible to know for sure what happened in the past but they felt that this should not stop the historian from striving to get as close to the truth of what happened as possible.

When describing the process of coming to know about the past ‘picture’ and ‘jigsaw’ metaphors predominated. The past was conceived as the ‘*bigger picture*’- ‘*what happened*’ and ‘*what it was like*’, history is the exercise of piecing this together. There were a number of reasons suggested for why it is difficult to complete the picture: the availability of evidence, the reliability of this evidence, and distance from the object of study. The students varied in the extent to which they felt that the historian was shading in the unknown details. For Lizzie the work of the historian is akin to travelling back in time and being able to see what happened, how they did things and what it would have been like – through the sheer amount of information that they look at. In contrast Richard saw more of a distinction between history and the past with the past being something which happened that you can never fully know because you cannot go back in time. History is therefore something constructed by historians who can use the evidence left over from the past but who have to weave a story from it and put their own perspectives onto it.

Only Mary and Patrick rejected the possibility of coming to know what happened in the past seeing history as entirely interpretive. For Patrick history is not a re-creation of what actually happened in the past but one historian’s interpretations of past events. For Mary history is always an invention, a creation of the present that can only be viewed through the spectacles of today. She does not deny that things happened in the past, and that there are more and less accurate interpretations, but everything is exactly that- an interpretation.

### **The role of the historian and the nature and use of their evidence**

None of the teachers thought that it is possible for historians to be entirely objective. They differed according to the extent to which they believed historians are able to control or suppress mediating influences. They fell on a continuum from a belief in the desirability of eliminating all preconceptions to an acceptance that, unable to do this, they can merely declare their own influences.

Charlotte described her increasing uncertainty about the possibility of finding out what happened in the past having led her to the position that while it is not possible to know for sure historians should try to do all that they can to come as close as possible to knowing. They do this by being aware of their own preconceptions so that they can ensure that they do not compromise their objectivity and by the closest scrutiny of the historical evidence to

ensure that this supports their account of the past. Similarly it is the historian and their relationship with the traces of the past that determines the veracity of accounts of the past for Anne. The historian reaches an approximation to the truth of the past through the amount of research undertaken, including the number of sources considered but also the way in which this is done by the historian varying according to their intellect or ability to refrain from making suppositions.

Patrick does not believe it possible for the historian to be objective and so does not think that they should even strive to be. Historians always bring their own world view to their work. Their history will always be affected by who they are and when and why they are writing. Therefore it is not possible to achieve any degree of objectivity through historical method. How the historian views sources will always be affected by their situation in the present. The historian goes to the sources with ideas about what they are looking for; they have an awareness of issues and debates in the field and are preparing to test them. They always go to the sources for a reason.

### **Social theory and explanatory frameworks**

None of the teachers thought that historians should use explanatory frameworks to make sense of the past. It would contradict the desirability of the objectivity of the historian if they went to their sources with such preconceptions of how the world is ordered. Also as Richard commented this would be using a way of making sense of the past that imbued it with a structure that has not really existed.

Whilst denying the possibility of objectivity Patrick also rejected the appropriateness of applying overarching explanatory frameworks to the past. Despite difficulties reconciling this with his attraction to Marxist notions of the determining nature of social class on people's lives.

### **The significance to explanation of the narrative form**

The teachers' views on the significance of the narrative form in shaping explanations of the past also varied along a continuum. Few believed like Helen that the historian can literally re-present what happened in the past in their account and that they should therefore keep their accounts as factual as possible – without their interpretation coming in to it. They should avoid giving opinions, but if they did so, they should balance this with alternative

views. Most thought like Anne that it is impossible for the historian to re-present the truth of the past, but that they should try to do so all the same. Charlotte took a more contradictory stance in believing that the historian writes an account which is as close as possible to what happened in the past. Whilst at the same time recognizing this as a necessarily storied form, which she values as a way of making it accessible to the widest possible audience. The veracity of historical accounts come either through their correspondence with the past reality or through the extent to which they come close to this by the exercise of appropriate historical method in engagement with the sources. For Richard 'good history' is grounded in the evidence; accounts are therefore well referenced so it is clear where the historian has found their information. Nevertheless Richard recognised and was amused by the contradiction between his own view of the objective historian, approaching their sources without preconceptions and presenting these in as transparent an account as possible, and his belief that this account has to be well written. By this he meant it has to be interesting and lively because boring history is less good history. Writing this history might therefore require a bit of exaggeration and a bit of artistic license.

Patrick and Mary's recognition of the interpretive nature of the historian's account leads Patrick to emphasize the historian's role in opening up their own positioning. The historian should make explicit who they are and the factors influencing them. In this way judgment of historical accounts is based on plausibility, the extent to which they are believed by the reader, and accord with their own world view. For Mary plausibility also comes from accounts resonating with the person making the judgment against their own personal beliefs. She agrees some of this will come from the persuasiveness of how it is written. She also recognises that the same text can be read in a multitude of different ways by different readers.

### **History teachers' knowledge of the purposes of history**

Jenkins (1991) points to the multiplicity of histories produced within the postmodern condition: historians', children's, women's, feminist, men's, heritage, reactionary, revolutionary, bottom-dog, top-dog (Jenkins 1991: 65-66). Amongst these 'historians' histories would be different from those of teachers. Husbands (1996) highlights fundamental differences between the ways in which historians work and the ways in which pupils and teachers work, with historians more concerned with the archive and relating the research findings to the current state of the discipline and teachers concerned with the

classroom and pupils' personal and intellectual development. This was not apparent in the knowledge of the teachers on the nature of history. This broadly matched the dominant views outlined in chapter 2. They did not reflect the Reconstructionist doxa claimed by some postmodernists, but rather a broadly empiricist approach, assimilating insights drawn from postmodern perspectives, but not fundamentally shifted by them to embrace fully the constructed nature of knowledge. Where different discourses became more apparent was in considering teachers' rationales for the purpose of history. These were influenced by wider academic views of history. Differences were apparent between that academic view and the more situated knowledge of the history teacher.

### **Intrinsic and extrinsic purposes**

A distinction is apparent between rationales for the subject articulated largely in terms of wider educational aims and those that are specifically historical. Lee (1991) highlights a continuing tension between those who see learning history as an end in itself and those who see it as a means to an end, in furthering social or political goals. Slater (1995) makes a widely adopted distinction between 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' aims of history. Intrinsic aims are those specific to the study of history, examples might include: to understand the concept of change; or to know the difference between AD and BC; or to know the reasons for the rise of Nazism. Extrinsic aims are broader educational aims which aim to change society, examples of which might include: enabling participation in a liberal democratic society; countering racism or gender discrimination; or developing tolerance. Slater (1995) contends that the main concern of school history is to secure the identified intrinsic aims. Whilst it might be possible to enable the achievement of extrinsic aims, history lessons cannot guarantee their achievement; school history might enable students to have a lifelong interest in history, or to pursue related careers or be more informed citizens but it does not *guarantee* them (Slater 1995).

Like Husbands et al (2003) I found history teachers to have clear, strong views on the purposes of the subject and that these more commonly made references to extrinsic, as opposed to intrinsic purposes. These extrinsic purposes took the form of the development of moral dispositions but also included the development of political literacy. Only Helen suggested that it is possible to learn from the mistakes of the past. All of the others were keen to avoid this cliché, citing for example contemporary instances of genocide as an example of the difficulties of claiming an easy didacticism for history. Most of the teachers

saw the potential of history to teach more personal, moral, lessons. Charlotte thought that an awareness of other races that comes through a study of migration might make people more tolerant. Similarly Lizzie felt that people's perspectives can be broadened through the study of the diversity of beliefs and experiences of others.

Both Charlotte and Mary articulated a rationale for the subject, which in different ways provided an insight into human motivation and action. For Charlotte history teaches the complexity of human nature. Mary looks to understand the motivations of individuals in the past, for her history can provide inspiration, so that we learn from what others have done that is remarkable, and to understand what other people have done that is less remarkable.

Patrick's rationale for history centres around the role of both a knowledge of past events and the learning of historical skills in developing political literacy. Awareness of issues of social justice, inequality and protest that come through the study of the substantive content of the past can guide the actions of people today. Similarly the skills learned through the exercise of history raise awareness of alternative perspectives and different points of view and develop a questioning disposition open to challenging interpretations. Patrick's view of the purposes of history emphasises its role in complementing citizenship education with the acquisition of substantive knowledge and the development of procedural skills making a distinct contribution to learning in Citizenship. (Arthur et al 2001; Lévesque 2005).

The focus for many of the teachers came from their role as educators. They emphasised the role of studying history more specifically in how it relates to young people's secondary education. This led them to focus on extrinsic purposes in the form of skills developed through a study of history that are transferrable to other curriculum subjects or work contexts. For Helen this took the form of skills in speaking and listening, analysis, and essay writing. For Mary this was in the form of skills in critical thinking that come from the challenge of trying to make sense of what happened in the past and how all the things going on at any one time all fit together.

### **The relationship between views on the nature of history and conceptions of its purpose**

There are a wide variety of possible aims and purposes for history. Differences between views are to some extent related to different conceptions of what history is. In the same way that competing often contradictory conceptions of school history can be held by a teacher and can co-exist within schools and departments as outlined in Chapter 3, so we can see that our history teachers have a variety of different rationales for the subject which are sometimes contradictory and which more often relate to their thinking about pupils learning than being consistent with their views on the nature of history.

Like some of the more Reconstructionist historians outlined in Chapter 2, some of the teachers valued history, as the past, for its own sake. They find it intrinsically interesting; Richard believes that people have an innate interest in the past and that it fulfils a basic need within humans to understand what happened before them. Sam also thinks that people have a natural curiosity for the past which comes from an interest in stories and storytelling. For Charlotte the past is just interesting to know and for Jenny finding out about the past has value in finding out the truth of what happened.

All of the students saw an important role for the subject in providing substantive knowledge that contextualises contemporary events, societies and issues. For Anne history's relevance comes in the ways in which it enables us to understand the present within the context of the past – knowledge of the past helps us to understand the world we live in today, helping to give us a sense of place within the broad chronological span of time. Anne argues that there are areas of historical knowledge that people, particularly her pupils, ought to know, because of their historical significance but chiefly because of their impact on contemporary society. Charlotte shares this view giving examples such as the way in which knowledge of migration can help to explain the racial diversity of modern England. All the other students shared this emphasis on the value of this knowledge of the past in shaping the present. Lizzie spoke of the importance of her pupils coming to understand why we have such a strong labour party and don't have a Conservative government and how it is that her pupils came to have a computer and to be able to fly to Spain in two hours. Richard emphasised the influence of the past on different institutions, different forms of government and social customs.



Despite the broadly empiricist emphasis in their views on the nature of history there was little emphasis on the specific skills of the historian. Surprisingly, only Tina mentioned historical sources and this was in the context of the evidential skills learned through a study of the past providing broader more transferrable skills that can be used in any work places handling information. More Constructionist emphases on the purposes of history were also less apparent in these teachers' views: none of them pointed to patterns or laws of human behaviour in the past, according with their rejection of over arching explanatory frameworks within their conceptions of history. Nobody suggested any relationship with human destiny or the future, although we have already seen how for Patrick history does serve a social and a political function.

The influence of more postmodern perspectives on the teachers' conceptions of history can be seen in the emphasis on the role of history in developing critical intelligence through cultivating a critical reflexive methodology. All of the teachers talked about the role of history in developing skills of historical interpretations. Charlotte saw history as cultivating a questioning disposition so that people would not just accept what they are told. Similarly Tina described this in terms of ensuring nothing was taken at face value. All of the teachers were, if sometimes obliquely, calling attention to the role that an understanding of the constructed nature of historical accounts can have in highlighting the interpretive nature of all accounts, newspapers were, like for Jasbir, a popularly cited example.

This emphasis on history's role in developing skills of historical interpretation might be the result of the teachers' own experiences of learning and teaching history in twenty-first century England. Certainly such views were less current in a much earlier study of primary and secondary school teachers in London undertaken by Harries (1975) and were not apparent in the Finnish primary school teachers whose objectivist view of history with its emphasis on content over analysis or interpretation or its role in developing critical thinking that can be accounted by their school history being dominated by the transmission of factual knowledge (Virta 2001).

An emphasis on the role of history in developing skills of historical interpretation may also be a particular reflection of the current historical context. History educators in England and America (Seixas 2002; Husbands et al 2003; Lévesque 2005) highlight how recent world

events like the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of The Cold War, European integration, the re-emergence of ethnic nationalism, the War on Terror along with developments such as the growth of mass media; globalisation; increasing migration and associated mixing of cultures and histories have 'precipitated a need for and interest in the past'. (Lévesque 2005: 349-350). Seixas (2002) argues that such changes lead to a need for ways of reconciling the different histories increasingly apparent within societies and communities and that this is what a critical historical discourse offers.

The greater prevalence of historical interpretations within the context of the particular historical epoch can be seen to present new and different challenges to history teachers in their classrooms. It is apparent from the responses from the teachers with their emphasis on countering prejudice and misconceptions, challenging representations in the popular press, and seeing the roots of present day conflicts in the past that the purpose of history can no longer, if it ever could, be to present a completed truth but rather to provide young people with opportunities to encounter the multiple, conflicting interpretations of the past that they will encounter outside of the classroom.

The knowledge teachers have about the nature of history and how they conceive its purposes are important because they have the potential to shape what and how they teach in their classrooms. The next chapter therefore goes on to explore how the teachers' views were shaped and how they impact on their teaching.

## **Chapter 7 Origins and Impact of Knowledge**

### **The origins of teachers beliefs about the nature and purposes of history**

This chapter gives consideration to the origins and impact of the views on the nature and purposes of history outlined in Chapter 6. Findings concur with Harnett's (2000) study of the development of primary school teachers' views on school history, the origins of which are located within their family backgrounds and interests and their own experiences of learning history. The most significant impact on the teachers' views of the nature and purposes of history is their family. This is either in terms of familial interest or encouragement of an interest in history or in the personal and lived experiences of family members. The teachers' own lived experiences are also significant. Either their own experiences of contemporary events or of travelling to places and becoming interested in their histories. The teachers' own educational experiences of history are important but not as significant as other factors. Alongside those who have been influenced by an inspiring teacher, there are those shaped by negative educational experiences. An unexpectedly significant influence on teachers' views are the arts and the media in the form of books, television and film. This accords with Evans's (1994) typology of American history teachers which suggests that in addition to the influence of family and influential teachers', historical novels and movies account for some of the origins of teachers' views about history.

These views are important because they impact what and how teachers teach. This can be seen in the second part of this chapter where impact is shown on their practice in the form of the teaching styles that they prefer, the learning activities they favour and the areas of historical understanding that they emphasise. Those teachers who most closely associate with a more Reconstructionist view of history tend to favour a more didactic, teacher-centred, teaching style. The majority of the teachers, more comfortable with the constructed nature of history, favour a more pupil-centred approach. This approach also reflects their more empiricist views of history with the predominance given to historical sources. The sources tend to be used more for finding out what happened in the past or to judge the veracity of historical accounts with, as reflected in the teachers' views on the purposes of history, less consideration given to developing the skills of historical enquiry. The predominance of extrinsic motivations for history can be seen in the teachers' emphasis on teaching historical interpretations. This appears to be less as an influence of

more interpretive approaches to history and more a part of equipping young people with necessary life skills through their study of the subject.

The importance of giving explicit consideration to teachers' views about the nature and purposes of history can also be seen in the ways in which they impact on their learning. This is most apparent in those teachers who views conflict with dominant discourses of history teaching.

## **Family**

For many of the teachers their interest in history is shared with their family and the nature of this interest shapes their thinking about the subject. We saw in Chapter 6 the powerful influence that family had on Charlotte, Anne and Patrick's interest in history with Charlotte influenced by her father's interest in history, Anne's husband sharing her interest in the past and Patrick's mother's approach to the world shaping his understanding.

One manifestation of a shared familial interest in history is through visits to historic sites. Charlotte remembers her visits to historical sites with her parents. Anne discussed such visits from her perspective as a parent. Visits to historic sites are one way in which Anne and Tim attempt to share their interest in history with their own children. Anne identified this as an influence on her thinking about history as she was doing things she would not have done before, going to places she would not have been and seeing and understanding history in different ways through her children's eyes.

As well as a shared family interest in history the teachers' views about history were also shaped by the lived experiences of members of their families, particularly grandparents. Helen's grandfather was evacuated during the Second World War and went on to join the navy just as the Cuban Missile Crisis began. Helen remembers time spent as a child talking to her grandfather about his experiences which he recounted as stories, she remembered how *'he liked telling me all the stories and he liked the fact that I am interested'*. Sam and Jenny also identified their families as the most significant factor in shaping their views on history. Sam's interest in social history was started by an interest in the experiences of her grandparents. Her mother's parents were Irish immigrants who told her stories about when they left Ireland and the different fortunes they encountered upon coming to England. Jenny's grandparents also inspired in her an interest in history from a

very young age. One of her grandfathers fought in the Second World War the other in the Spanish Civil War. Sam's paternal grandmother would talk about her father and how he had fought in the First World War, how he survived the trenches and then came home and died of the 'flu epidemic of 1919. It was these personal stories that captured Sam's interest and led her to a focus on social and economic history and on knowing that the events in the past really happened and impacted on real people.

For two of the teachers, Jasbir and Mary, their family's lack of interest in history has been influential. Mary's family are all scientists and medics and she accounts for her interest in history as coming from an interest in people, their lives and motivations that was absent from her family. She characterises the things that they wanted to share with her as 'why bridges work'. Jasbir identified a cultural dimension to his family's, particularly his fathers', approach to history. Jasbir recounted a high value for education within his family which he supposed to be '*An Asian culture thing*' that valued scientific knowledge most highly. He told the story of how when he decided to train to become a teacher rather than do a law conversion his father did not speak to him for a month.

Evans's (1994) study of American history teachers suggests genealogy is influential on history teachers. Only Lizzie mentioned family history in any form beyond that which was told face to face. She placed her interest in personal history in the context of activities she undertook within her family. She recalled a project her sister had to do for school in which they had to create a family tree using a roll of wallpaper and putting together baby books for her two younger sisters.

### **Experiences of history**

For a number of the teachers a significant influence on their thinking about history was their own lived experiences of historical eras and events. As we saw for Anne this was growing up during the Cold War and graduating at the time of the 1983 general election. For Charlotte it was the experience of contemporary history through television.

For many of the teachers their own experiences of history came through travelling. For Charlotte going to new places is all part of her wanting to find out what happened in the past inspiring in her a questioning and a curiosity about the past. Many of the other teachers have had similar experiences. Jenny's Spanish grandfather and his experiences

in the Spanish Civil War took her to Catalonia where she began reading about and finding out about how people had been affected by the war and how it had impacted on the community. Richard was also influenced by his travels. He spent six months of his gap year in Israel where he found history to be very much part of contemporary life – ancient history as well as contemporary political debates. This sparked an interest in world history which took Richard to Japan after graduation. For Mary two visits to Europe in the late 1980s were particularly influential on her thinking about history; the first to Berlin and the second to Hungary in 1989. She described how there was an atmosphere there, she supposed now that this was from the collapse of communism, which at the time she did not understand but wanted to.

Evans (1994) found a political and religious dimension to the shaping of teachers' beliefs about their subject. Different types of history teacher tended to come from different political perspectives. Mary described herself as a political person positioning herself as '*fundamentally left wing*'. She was '*fascinated by governments and how they work and how they don't work*', why people don't vote for the sort of left wing government that she would want them to. Richard also describes himself as coming from a '*quite left wing labour supporting family*'. His family background made him interested in modern day politics and current affairs. This interest in politics led him to an interest in modern history so he really enjoyed studying the Russian Revolution and Nazi Germany.

Evans (1994) also found that religious affiliations influenced teachers' conceptions of history. Only one of the teachers discussed a religious dimension to their thinking about history. Tina identified religion as an important factor in shaping her view of history; however this was not so much her own religious views. She is not, now, religious herself but she was brought up in a '*very religious family*' as her mother is an evangelical Christian with what Tina described as '*very intense Christian viewpoints*' which shaped Tina's views on politics and religion and led to her focusing her interest in history, particularly at university on religious and cultural aspects of history.

## **Education**

The teachers did not, largely, feel that their views of history had been influenced by their primary schooling, they had little recollection of the study of history at this level but those that did discuss it, remembered having enjoyed it. Patrick thought he might have studied

some history at primary school and quite enjoyed it but he did not remember too much about it beyond a booklet about the Romans that involved drawing a centurion and labelling the picture. Similarly Jenny only had vague memories of having studied history at primary school, she recollects little of what she actually studied, she just remembers studying Victorian fashion although she couldn't really remember very much she knew that *'when we did do history I used to like it'*. Only Tina's thinking about the subject seems to have been particularly influenced by her learning of history at primary school. This involved creative and imaginative aspects such as creative writing which she really enjoyed. She described history at primary schools as *'a bit like a soap really. Like when we did the Tudors it was like which wife was going to be beheaded next.'* This shaped Tina's view of history as narrative and her enjoyment of history as story.

It was their secondary schooling, particularly inspirational teachers that taught them at this level, that were the most influential aspects of the teachers history education. Patrick did not recall having any memories of particularly inspiring history teachers but found the content of history that he studied at this level, particularly the Second World War and more modern history, as particularly interesting. Charlotte thinks that the way she was taught history at secondary school was especially influential on her thinking about history. She remembers two really inspiring history teachers. What she found so engaging about these teachers was the way that they taught history as the story of the past, focusing on the substantive content – particularly big significant characters. She still has vivid memories of aspects of the history she was taught *'certain bits of the story that bring it to life and the little hooks that really get people to want to find out more'*. Similarly the way that Tina was taught secondary history – with a narrative focus – has led to her feeling most comfortable with this approach centring around the *'story of history'*. Other teachers such as Helen, Jenny, Richard and Lizzie remembered particularly inspiring history teachers whose enthusiasm interested and engaged them in the subject. Jasbir was influenced more widely educationally by a history teacher. However, despite this fostering of enthusiasm these teachers did not play a particular role in shaping their understanding of the nature and purposes of history.

It was more negative experiences of secondary history that were influential for Anne and to a lesser extent Mary. Anne characterises her own secondary education very negatively describing her history teacher as *'dreadful'* and embodying all that Anne felt was wrong

with her education in the newly created comprehensive system. It is this perception of her education that has shaped Anne's view of history, her need to be informed and 'educated' and to find out about, so she knows about, all those aspects of the past that an educated person should. Similarly Mary has few memories of her early education beyond being '*bored rigid*' by studying the Celts in an integrated humanities course early in her secondary schooling. In contrast to this, and partly as a result of her travels to the Eastern Bloc, Mary became more interested in history of individuals and their actions and particularly their politics.

Few teachers were particularly influenced by their university education either. The teachers' thinking about the nature and purposes seems to have been fairly well established by the time that they studied it at university so these experiences might challenge or develop their perspectives but not fundamentally shift them. Anne's view of history was reinforced by the people that she met at university. She thought that people who worked at universities were '*dead clever*' and she just '*lapped it up*'. Her view of history remained very much about what happened in the past but her emphasis shifted, as a result of the influence of the professor who taught her a course on empire, from '*learning and regurgitating the facts of the past*' to using these to write her own history. Jenny was also influenced by a university lecturer, less in terms of historical method and more in terms of approach – she was introduced to ideas of race, class and ethnicity which shaped her focus on history as social history and its impact on the lives of individuals. In the case of Tina she found this challenge uncomfortable, as the final year of her degree exposed her to the more interpretive aspects of history she felt that this was at the expense of narrative and ultimately rejected it.

For some of the teachers it was their experience of their post graduate teacher training that had begun to challenge some of their firmly held views on the nature and purposes of history by making explicit different perspectives apparent within the curriculum and dominant discourses of history teaching. Both Anne and Charlotte found this uncomfortable. They recognised that their own views were at odds with those that characterised the teaching in the schools that they were placed in, whose views were more in line with the curriculum and current practice in school history teaching. For those such as Patrick and Mary they embraced these views and developed their thinking as their approaches were much more in line with what was expected of them in school. For some,



like Lizzie and Tina the PGCE course was the first time they had really thought about what history is. Tina suspected that she had learned more about history in her PGCE year than she had done in her degree, which she thought was '*a bit concerning really*'.

### **Arts and media**

The arts and media were a significant influence on the teachers' thinking about history. We can see in Anne's account that Theatre, drama, film, television and fiction were all significant. Similarly we can see how fiction was important in Charlotte's thinking about history. She remembers always loving reading books that were set in the past so that she still prefers reading historical fiction to '*actual history books*' because of the sense of period you get from these books. This love of historical fiction influenced Charlotte's conception of history as the story of the past, and particularly the personal dimension of the people who experienced the past. This interest in fiction for the ways in which it is able to illuminate the impact of the past on individuals is also shared by Lizzie who enjoys historical poetry and Sam who enjoys novels set in real periods in history like *Birdsong*, *Winter in Madrid*, *The Girl with the Pearl Earring* and *The Other Boleyn Sister*.

Television history was also something Patrick had found influential. He enjoys watching documentaries on television, programmes like *The World at War* and Simon Schama's *History of Britain* series. He enjoys '*people talking about the past*' and is less interested in televisions' fictional recreations of the past. Jenny shares this interest in television history- such as David Starkey's *Monarchy* series. Helen enjoys watching historical films particularly on aspects of Modern History. Her approach to these reflects her approach to history in that she is aware of the interpretive nature of the films. She finds it interesting how Hollywood changes stories to suit their audience such as the portrayal of American Involvement in U571 or Pearl Harbour, she likes to check the historical accuracy of these films, reading books to determine how much 'truth' is in them.

### **Impact on practice**

Analysing the nature and origins of teachers' views about history is important because existing research would seem to suggest that these views impact on teachers' learning and their practice and so ultimately the experiences of the pupils in their classrooms. An understanding of these views is therefore important as they will need to be given

consideration in programmes of initial teacher education and in initiatives which aim to impact on the practice of teachers.

Pendry's (1997) investigation into the pedagogical thinking and learning of history student teachers undertaking a secondary PGCE course found that student teachers bring to their course influential preconceptions, values and aspirations about history and teaching which remain remarkably stable and which are significant throughout their training, influencing what and how they learn. Each of her students had their own ways of making sense of the roles and purposes of history lessons which shape their planning and teaching.

The most detailed account of history teachers understanding of the nature of their subject, linking this to what happens in their classrooms, has been undertaken in America by Evans (1988, 1994). Evans created a typology consisting of five types of history teacher which combine an approach to pedagogy and epistemology the: storyteller; scientific historian; relativist/reformer; cosmic philosopher and eclectic (1994).

The *Storyteller* emphasises the acquisition of knowledge as central to their conception of history. The purpose of history is to comprehend the unique particularity of past events, in order, for example, to gain cultural knowledge, to inform our sense of identity. Their classroom practice tends to be teacher centered, dominated by teacher talk within which story telling is common. The Storyteller has been influenced by early experiences such as historical novels and movies, parental influences and an interest in ancestors and they tend to be politically conservative.

The *Scientific* historian emphasises historical explanation and interpretation in their view of history. They emphasise the role of school history in extending historical knowledge and understanding historical processes. Their teaching is characterised by an emphasis on the process of historical inquiry which attempts neutrality or objectivity. Scientific Historians have the strongest academic background having studied the most history and they tend to be political liberals.

The *Relativist/Reformer* emphasises the relation of the past to the present and sees history as a background for understanding current issues. Their teaching utilises a range of methods and often involves an inquiry based approach in which they pose problems to

students drawn from present day issues. They have been influenced by discussions and debates on history and politics with family and provocative high school teachers. They tend to be politically left of centre social reformers.

The *Cosmic Philosopher* emphasises generalisations or 'laws' connecting events and sees patterns in history which helps to explain human experience. They resemble the Meta Historian philosophy of history. Their classroom practice is characterised by process centred approaches. They tend to be moderate liberals with religious connections which have helped shape their beliefs about history.

Not all of the teachers in Evans' study conformed to one of these categories. Some had no central tendency or combined elements of the different categories. He deemed these teachers *Eclectic*. Their teaching incorporated a variety of methods and was characterised by a dominant concern for pupil interest. They had an eclectic range of influences and tended to be political moderates. They were interpreted by Evans as lacking ideological commitment.

Evans's typology is valuable in illuminating the impact of historiographical orientations on classroom pedagogy but there are significant differences between British and American contexts for the teaching of history, which limits the potential transferability of their findings (McCrum, 2006). Underpinning Evans' research is an implicit belief in the purpose of history education as developing participatory citizenship – a belief in the purpose of a history education as about promoting sustained critical reflection in students a belief that comes from the place of history within a Social Studies framework in American education. This leads to explicit value judgements about the beliefs and practice of those teachers who were the subject of the study. He judges the Storyteller teacher for their didactic teaching style which is criticised for fostering the 'non critical acceptance of the powers that be' (Evans 1994: 184). In contrast the Scientific Historian's process-centred pedagogy is seen as a 'liberating experience' for pupils (Evans 1994: 189). The context of the English educational system is different. If the National Curriculum for History is taken to be an articulation of what the value of an historical educational might be within an English context then (as we have seen in Chapter 3) it could contain elements welcomed by Evan's scientific historian, but it is also characterised by much of what would appeal to his relativist historian.

Evans's conceptions of the nature of history do not take into account more recent debates about the nature of history, such as the influences of postmodernism. Evans (1994) relates differences in thinking about the subject amongst historians and philosophers of history to: the purposes for historical study; the extent to which it is possible to discern patterns in history; the degree of generalization possible from the past; and the relevance of history to the present. This represents only one view of the constituent elements of different orientations to the discipline of history. His typology of orientations ascribed to historians does not make reference to any orientations which might be recognised as formalized orientations within historiography (as discussed in Chapter 2). Evans' typologies might be different if he had classified conceptions, for example, in relation to history as constituted by meta- narratives or being constituted by multiple narratives; the possibility of objectivity in historical methodology; or positioning in relations to the possibility of historical truths. Evans's teachers all have fundamentally modernist conceptions of history, whether this is the emphasis on factual transmission of the story teller, the scientific historians focus on an empirical methodology, the relativist reformers orientation to the present relating the past to current events or the cosmic philosopher's emphasis on models of personal behavior through time. The lack of transferability of Evans's findings and changes in thinking about the nature of history warrant an exploration of the impact of teachers' views on history on their practice within the context of contemporary education in England.

Teachers' views on the nature and purposes of history can be clearly seen to impact on their practice as they describe it. Anne's emphasis on history as a substantive body of knowledge that the pupils should learn for its own sake and because of its role in contextualizing their lives lead her to feel most comfortable with a pedagogy that emphasized methods of acquiring, largely uncontested, substantive knowledge. She recognizes that she is most comfortable in her classroom when she is directly addressing the substantive content area, when she is providing pupils with the large amounts of contextual knowledge that she feels that they need, and should want, to know. This has led to some tensions in her relationship with the pupils and she has had difficulty comprehending and dealing with pupils' lack of intrinsic interest in the aspects of the past that she has taught them and this has led her to wonder where their lack of interest in the history she is teaching leaves her as teacher.

Charlotte's emphasis on history as story can be seen in her choice of teaching and learning activities, dominated by storytelling, exposition and question and answer. Her curiosity about the past and questioning disposition can be seen in her desire to encourage independent learning. Patrick's interpretative view of history is reflected in his teaching style and the learning activities that he favours for his pupils. His wish to use the study of history to empower his pupils can be seen in his teaching style which is designed to enable the pupils *'to think for themselves and come up with their own ideas.'* He also emphasises the themes of history over detailed understanding such as dates. Therefore the learning activities that he favours are those such as enquiring into the past using sources, looking at multiple views and perspectives through interpretations. He favours the teaching of historical interpretations as *'they need to understand that they can disagree with each other and view the world differently'*.

Like Anne, Charlotte and Patrick the other teachers' views of the nature of history influence the preferred teaching style and the learning activities that they favour. All of the teachers were concerned with ensuring that their teaching engages their pupils but their conception of what form that this might take differs between those who favouring a didactic story telling style and those who favour a more pupil centred style. Helen comes closest to a Reconstructionist concept of history which leads her like Charlotte, to favour a conception of history teacher as story teller. Helen's concern in her teaching is about bringing the story she tells the pupils alive; for her a teacher gets better as their historical knowledge increases which enables them to draw on more stories, anecdotes and facts to engage their pupils.

The recognition of the majority of the teachers of the constructed nature of history leads to a focus on a more pupil centred pedagogy and related learning activities. Richard's view of history as constructed by the historian from the sources means that he does not feel comfortable with what he describes as an old fashioned didactic style leading him to prefer instead a style in which pupils are more *'active'*. This has led him to a preference for learning activities like debates, role plays and card sorts that involve his pupils in engaging with history themselves. Similarly Sam's conception of herself as a teacher was concerned with her role as a facilitator of pupils' learning. She recounts how *'What I like to do most is, setting things up and then handing them over the pupils, setting up group work or activities where they do most of the work'*.

This pupil centred approach is also linked with the dominant empiricist emphasis in teachers' views on the nature of history. The teachers' empiricism can be seen in the place of historical sources within their lessons. For example, Sam likes to focus her teaching on using evidence, such as visual sources, cartoons, political cartoons and paintings as:

*'it gives pupils an opportunity to pick out the information, if you give them a source and you ask them what do you see? What do you think this might mean? They are the ones coming up with the answers and finding out the history for themselves'.*

This influences the type of learning activities that are used. Jenny likes to use historical sources and so favours activities like *'layers of inference diagrams, ripple diagrams, extracting information from sources'*. The use of sources characterises much of Jenny's teaching *'for example with the industrial revolution they were looking at lots of different skills but there were sources in almost every single lesson'*. Similarly Lizzie likes *'to look at sources in every lesson'*. The teachers' emphasis on the knowability of past reality alongside this empiricist concept of history means that while sources are heavily incorporated into their teaching there is little consideration given to skills of historical enquiry with pupils, like in Lizzie's classroom, in using sources for information and then later going on to evaluate them. This accords with the absence of emphasis on the skills of historical enquiry that can be seen in the teachers' views on the purposes of history.

Only Mary and Patrick with their more interpretive view of history explicitly emphasise skills of historical enquiry. Mary sees her teaching style as that of a facilitator. She feels most comfortable when pupils *'find things out for themselves'*. When this is applied to historical sources this can mean learning to *'unravel things or unpick things'* as *'well as to build up a picture'*.

An emphasis on the extrinsic purposes of history also impacted on the learning activities that the teachers favoured. The teachers often cited an interest in teaching about historical interpretations. This was (except in the case of Patrick) less to do with any interpretive orientation to history and more in line with their views of the purposes of history as enabling young people to judge the competing interpretations which they encounter in the contemporary world. Richard is concerned with using history to equip young people with the skills necessary to critically analyse interpretations

*'because there is so much history out there. So much popular history, on TV or in books, and not all of it is grounded in the evidence or a serious study of the discipline.'*

The learning activities that Tina prefers are those that have a purpose extrinsic to the study of history. She really likes doing group work because *'it is also very good for personal development'*

The impact of teachers' views on the nature and purposes of history on their own learning is most apparent in those, such as Anne and Charlotte whose views are different from the dominant discourse that they encountered in their training, reading, and curriculum and in the schools in which they did their teaching practices. Anne's views of history and school history and the resulting pedagogy have led her to be slightly disillusioned by and dissatisfied with teaching history in school classrooms. She does not feel that the current curriculum and dominant discourses of history teaching allow her the time to give pupils the contextual knowledge that she feels that they need. She also recognizes that it has impacted on her learning to become a teacher. She points to her difficulty in embracing different pedagogies. As part of the PGCE course she has tried different teaching and learning methods, and does recognize their value, but ultimately finds them difficult to embrace and successfully utilize because they do not accord with her own dominant views. Similarly she is aware of the need to address different areas of historical understanding with pupils. She can see some value, for example, in teaching about historical interpretations but ultimately these are not areas and approaches to the past with which she feels comfortable.

Like Anne, Charlotte's approach to history also impacted on her learning to become a teacher. Charlotte talked of trying other teaching methods like *'group work and role play and stuff'* but she was not convinced of their value or appropriateness. She had watched other teachers using these methods with success

*'I have gone wow that is so, that is really exciting, but I almost can't imagine doing that. But I have tried.'*

This led to Charlotte having a difficult relationship with her mentor and other teachers she worked with in school, their approaches to history and resulting pedagogy were so different and the other teachers could not understand why Charlotte could not use the new methods she was observing, and which they valued highly, with any conviction or great

success. Charlotte's approach to history and to teaching history led her to be most comfortable teaching A level history and led her, ultimately, to reject the dominant mode of teaching she encountered in the state sector and to take up a first teaching post in a boy's public school where, she feels, the expectations of her pedagogy will better match her own orientations.



## **Chapter 8 Findings, Implications and Conclusions**

This chapter reflects on the findings outlined in previous chapters to consider their implications on the curriculum, on pupil learning and on teacher development and to make recommendations for change. It is argued that the limited impact of postmodern approaches to academic history on teachers may go some way to explaining the reasons why the areas of the school history curriculum most influenced by these approaches are the least well taught in schools. Furthermore, without more explicit consideration of the implications of these approaches, history teachers are unable to teach aspects of secondary History as outlined in the National Curriculum. A consideration of the implications of postmodern orientations to classroom pedagogy shows that fully embracing these aspects helps to facilitate pupil learning and is one way in which the extrinsic aims for school history that teachers articulated can be achieved. The implications of the findings on programmes of both initial and in service teacher education are also outlined, emphasising the role of syntactical knowledge on teacher development. Consideration is given to the implications of the findings of the research for those teachers whose views conflict with dominant discourses of history teaching.

### **Key findings**

The findings of the research undertaken for this thesis supplement the small amount of literature on the professional practice of history teachers. Adding the perspectives of English secondary school history teachers to those of the English primary school history teachers (Harnett 2000) and American history teachers (Evans 1994) on the nature and purposes of their subject and their implications on their practice. They add a focus on more recent debates on the nature of history, incorporating postmodern perspectives, in order to provide insights which while related specifically to the context of the English secondary school curriculum might provide some illuminating insights into the beliefs and practices of teachers in other contexts, particularly those where the influence of postmodernism begins to be felt on the school history curriculum.

In addressing each of the research questions it makes a contribution to knowledge in each area. In relation to the first research question: how do beginning history teachers conceive of the nature of their discipline? The teachers in this study conceived of history differently

as students of history and as teachers, and these different conceptions were held and drawn upon in relation to the different roles that they were fulfilling. In considering this, the different concerns of the academic historian and teachers highlighted by Husbands (1996) are useful:

There are fundamental differences between the ways historians work and the ways pupils and teachers work. Where historians are engaged in an interpretive activity relating the current state of the discipline to new research findings, history teachers are largely concerned with their pupils' intellectual and personal development. Where historians are concerned with the archive, teachers are concerned with the classroom. There is an academic discipline called 'history', a school subject called 'history' and a widespread popular interest in 'history'. There is no reason why all these pursuits should have the same label, nor why the label should have the same meaning in different contexts. (Husbands 1996: 5)

The teachers' views on the nature of history as an academic discipline were broadly empiricist. A minority thought like Helen that it is possible to reconstruct the truth of the past but most subscribed broadly to a wish like Patrick and Mary to strive for the ultimately unobtainable knowledge of the truth of the past.

The findings of the second research question: what rationale do beginning history teachers present for the purpose of their subject in the school curriculum? Show that in their rationales for the purposes of the subject the teachers gave more weight to the interpretive nature of history and emphasised broader educational, social and moral purposes such as Patrick's vision of history as a vehicle for the inculcation of political literacy and action.

In considering the research question: how are teachers' views on the nature and purpose of history manifest in what and how history teachers choose to teach in their classrooms? It became apparent that the teachers' views on the nature and purposes of history influenced their teaching and the types of historical learning activities undertaken. Those teachers, like Charlotte and Anne who were less comfortable with the constructed nature of history tended to favour teaching more didactic, teacher centred pedagogies. They preferred using teaching and learning activities such as Anne's emphasis on providing contextual knowledge in the form of uncontested substantive knowledge and Charlotte's love of storytelling and use of exposition and question and answer. In contrast Patrick's greater comfort with an approach to history as interpretive led him to favour enquiries and activities based on multiple versions of the past.

Asking: what are the origins of teachers' views on the nature and purpose of history? found that these views were largely influenced by the teachers' family backgrounds and their own experiences of the past, such as Charlottes' father's interest in history, Jenny's grandfathers' experiences in World War Two and the Spanish Civil War and Anne's experiences of growing up during the Cold War. The arts and media were also influential, for example, the influence of drama and film on Anne; Charlotte's love of historical fiction and Patrick's early experiences of television history.

Those teachers such as Charlotte and Patrick who had engaged with debates on the nature and purposes of history as part of their undergraduate studies were better able to give consideration to their influence on issues encountered on the PGCE programme. Different disciplinary backgrounds were also influential with Patrick's views shaped by his experiences in the social sciences and Jasbir's lack of engagement with history as a non history graduate. Jasbir's history knowledge was impoverished not just in terms of substantive knowledge, which pre-course tasks tend to address, but also in terms of procedural knowledge limiting his ability to utilise a range of learning activities that develop pupils understanding of the subject fully.

The PGCE played an important role in introducing some teachers, like Lizzie, to debates on the nature and purposes of history, for others like Anne and Charlotte it was where previously strongly held views were challenged. Students were more successful if the programme of ITT accorded with the values and beliefs that they brought to the course (Guyver and Nichol 2004). This can be seen in the difficulties faced by both Charlotte and Anne whose thinking was at odds with the dominant discourse of history teaching, both of whom encountered difficulties in their progress on the course.

## **Implications**

### **The Curriculum**

The teachers' conceptions of the nature of history have implications for their teaching of the school history curriculum, notably their mediation of the National Curriculum for History. This is, as outlined in Chapter 3, open to interpretation. It offers opportunities to emphasise different aspects of, and orientations towards, history. In not embracing many of the implications of postmodern perspectives teachers are ignoring core components of the new National Curriculum for History. One aspect of this is in the Key Process of school

history, Historical Enquiry. The teachers emphasised working with sources. This was influenced by their views as history teachers about the purposes of history. They emphasised skills, extrinsic to history, in assessing the large amounts of information pupils are faced with in the modern world. The teachers focused on the development of pupils' skills in the use of historical evidence, emphasising the evaluation of individual sources. The development of 'evidential skills' in this way leads to a lack of consideration of secondary accounts; focusing instead on decontextualised primary sources (Husbands 1996). This makes it difficult to evaluate a range of interpretations of the past to assess their validity. A lack of emphasis on the interpretive nature of historical accounts militates against learning activities in which pupils are encouraged to present their own interpretive accounts in a variety of forms with a self-conscious awareness of the use of language both in the sources themselves and in their communication about the past.

By not fully embracing some other implications of postmodern perspectives there are other elements of the National Curriculum for History that the teachers are not fully developing in their classrooms. History teachers need to understand the lack of relationship between the signifier and the signified if we they are going to 'foreground' thinking about language in thinking about history (Husband 1996: 40). This is a fundamental basis of the new National Curriculum for History within which teachers need to be aware of the interpretive nature of language, in pupil and teacher talk, and the shifting and slippery meanings of language in historical accounts and traces.

A significant aspect of the relationship to the past that came from teachers' accounts was the extent to which a number of them embraced story and narrative forms of representing the past, particularly those such as Helen and Charlotte who most closely associated with more modernist conceptions of history. Narrative is a popular way of accessing history. This can be seen in the popularity of narrative historians like Simon Schama. Many of the teachers recognised story as a way of engaging and interesting pupils in the study of the past. Stories are vivid, colourful and evocative; they can provoke an emotional response and provide insights into the experiences of others. However story has, in recent years, been associated with the Great Tradition of history teaching and dismissed as a form of one version history promulgating singular interpretations as a means towards unarticulated ends or for simple moral didacticism. If Charlotte's fondness for story telling is to be embraced within the current school history curriculum it requires recognition of the plotted

and entroped nature of history in all its storied forms and an awareness of the constructed nature of accounts created in the present. This is necessary if teachers are to enable young people to develop the skills to see story as a way of understanding the past not an account of what happened in the past.

### **Pupil learning**

In addition to influencing their ability to teach the school curriculum the teachers' views on the nature and purposes of history can be seen to influence their pedagogy and so pupil learning in the subject. If the curriculum (as outlined in Chapter 3) reflects a range of orientations to history then history teachers need to be aware of all of these approaches and make these explicit to their pupils if they are going to make progress in the subject.

Coffin (2006) used systemic functional linguistic analysis to illuminate the ways in which secondary pupils write, think about and conceptualise the past, and how they are inducted into ways of thinking about history within secondary schools. On the dominant view of history in schools she found that:

history is no longer a neutral discipline founded on an immutable body of facts. Rather the past is contested ground in which numerous interpretations compete. In particular, students are encouraged to critically analyse a range of sources presenting different perspectives on an issue in order to understand the way in which the same event may be variously (subjectively) interpreted, empirically detailed, well-researched and balanced accounts can be characterized as (relatively) objective and of greater value than unsupported and skewed representations (Coffin 2006: 8-9)

This demonstrates the conflicting views often promulgated by teachers and the curriculum-whereby there is recognition of competing interpretations alongside training in the production of methodologically secure objective accounts. Coffin (2006) argues that secondary school history comprises a repertoire of different genres, each comprising different ways of thinking and writing about the past and that different genres foreground types of meanings and have different lexical and grammatical resources used for expressing meaning. For example:

the seemingly factual and objective nature of the recording genres masks the subjective and interpretive dimensions of historical knowledge, whereas the explaining genres (to a lesser degree) and the arguing genres (to a greater degree) are more self-conscious and open in their assessment and negotiation of historical interpretation. (Coffin 2006: 93-94)

If this is so, then in order to be successful in the history classroom pupils need to develop an awareness of the repertoire of different genres used to recount, explain, or argue the past and the different positions these embody in relation to knowledge construction. Whilst some pupils may work out what is required of them and are successful, others do not. Such distinctions are often socially and culturally reproduced (Cooper and Dunne 2000). In order to reduce this disparity and to ensure all pupils are able to make progress teachers need to make the distinctions between genres explicit to all pupils.

We are living in a time of unprecedented popular interest in history. The last two decades have seen the exponential growth in all things historical (De Groot 2009). Many of these forms fall outside of the domains of the professional historian with history booming as a leisure pursuit, in popular culture and throughout contemporary society. Within this we can see a whole variety of different discourses that use history in different ways, conceive of it differently and make use of it for different ends. We have seen the growth of television history with the rise of the celebrity historian, historical dramas, documentaries, history reality television, the use of historical tropes in advertising and pornography, and whole television channels dedicated to history. We see the increasing popularity of history in film, theatre, popular history books, historical novels, political diaries, historical biographies and history magazines. Local history and genealogy remain hugely popular leisure pursuits. These have been aided by technological developments that have helped to facilitate the increased popularity of history, with history websites, online gaming, digitised and virtual materials online. Also popular as leisure pursuits are historical re-enactments, visits to museums with their increasingly interactive exhibits and history as a game- in board games and pub and television quizzes (for more on popular history see De Groot 2009).

These popular histories have widespread popular appeal and reach more people than traditional academic historians. Television history, for example, 'is consumed by more people in a half hour than the number who will ever read a history book on the same subject in a historian's lifetime' (Taylor 2001: 175). These histories therefore have the potential to impact hugely on the popular imagination of the past. There are for example more books and websites devoted to who killed John F Kennedy than to the man himself. When the Warren Commission published their report into the assassination in 1964 most Americans believed its findings. Today most Americans believe that JFK was killed by a

conspiracy, as proposed by the hugely popular 1991 film by Oliver Stone (Banham and Hall 2003).

The impact of this wider appeal and popularity of history on young people was confirmed by Haydn's (2005) report on pupil perceptions of history as 'roughly half of the pupils surveyed acknowledged an interest in history outside the classroom, in the form of reading, websites, site visits and watching history programmes on television'. (Haydn 2005: 3). Virta (2001) highlights the important role of the history teacher at a time in which there are so many influences on pupils understanding of history:

Students create their views of history on the basis of formal history teaching, and also on the images transmitted by the media, and through family traditions. This view, filtered through a number of channels, may be haphazard and disorganised. It is the history teaching at school that should help the students to integrate these elements and to indicate to them that they live in the middle of history. (Virta 2001: 10)

If pupils' understanding of the past is influenced by a range of factors outside of their formal education teachers therefore more than ever have an important role in reinforcing or counteracting their notions of the nature of historical knowledge (Seixas 2000).

It is also through engaging with some of the more recent challenges to the commonly held understandings of history that history teachers are able to achieve their rationales for the purposes of history (outlined in Chapter 6). By returning to fundamental debates in the subject of history, teachers will be able to develop the critical intelligence that they prioritised as so important in contemporary society.

The history of the new National Curriculum, influenced as it is by more postmodern perspectives, can also be the history that most engages and interests pupils. History teacher Todd (2000) notes that 'one of the heartening things about history teaching is the degree to which pupils themselves are gripped by questions of historiography' (Todd 2000: 207). He outlines how in his experience in the classroom much of what is described as postmodern is what works best in terms of pedagogy. He outlines an approach which enables the incorporation of activities that involve pupils including engaging with historical fictions, role playing, the exploration of open-ended stories, and discussion of history in the public sphere. Similarly Lee and Ashby (2000) contend that:

It is clear that some fourteen-year-olds have a better grasp of the nature of historical accounts than some politicians and journalists. They will hardly be satisfied with a diet of cultural icons masquerading as a common past when they already know that historical accounts are constructed, not conjunctions of facts. (2000: 215-216)

Todd (2000) claims that teachers have been

... too shy about introducing questions about what history is for and how it can generate meanings. In fact pupils themselves already bring some equipment and examples to bear on these questions. They may draw on their experience or cite evidence from public and popular histories, albeit often without adequate means of discrimination. It has been my experience in the classroom that children have little difficulty in recognizing the richness of these issues. We can't go on pretending that our pupils are empty vessels'. (2000: 208)

A central part of teaching history in current times is enabling pupils to consider the history they are getting and why they are getting it in this way. This requires history teachers who are aware of this themselves and able to equip them with the skills to be critical consumers of history.

### **Teacher development**

We have seen how different conceptions of the nature and purpose of history as an academic subject are important for all teachers because of their impact on their mediation of the curriculum, their classroom teaching and the impact on pupil learning. This is particularly true of beginning teachers. Student history teachers bring to their initial teacher education ideas about the nature of history. These are influential on, and seem to be remarkably stable throughout, their training (Pendry 1997). They impact on the content that they teach and the way that they teach it. At present teacher education does not give sufficient consideration to the discourses of academic subjects in the development of student teachers (Arthur et al 1997). Ignoring this knowledge is to neglect its impact on their pedagogy and, as Arthur et al argue, amounts to a 'deskilling of student teachers at the very beginning of their professional lives'. (Arthur et al 1997: 101)

Insufficient understanding of issues in the nature of history has a negative impact on practice. Grossman et al (1989) link inadequate syntactic subject understanding and ineffective pedagogy:

Novice teachers who lack knowledge of the syntactic structures of the subject matter fail to incorporate that aspect of the discipline in their curriculum. We believe that they consequently run the risk of misrepresenting the subject matters they teach. (Grossman et al 1989: 30)



Student teachers' thinking about the nature of history also impacts on their development as teachers. Grossman et al (1989) found that a lack of syntactic knowledge limited the extent to which they could learn new information in their field. As:

Without a firm grasp of the syntax of a discipline, prospective teachers may be unable to distinguish between more and less legitimate claims within a field. Teachers may find themselves unable to counter effectively a specious argument, even if they are aware of its dubious nature. As knowledge within a field changes, teachers need to be able to evaluate new theories and explanations on the basis of evidence. In fact, in our sample of novice teachers, a firm grasp of the syntactic structures of a discipline proved most valuable in helping teachers acquire new knowledge within their fields. (Grossman et al 1989: 30)

Guyver and Nichol's (2004) study of primary teachers found that where students have a well developed and syntactic understanding of the subject prior to their ITT course that their training builds upon and complements, they are able to develop many of the features of proto- expert teachers of history. Where their prior experience of history as an academic discipline is limited their course has a relatively superficial impact upon their development as teachers of history (Guyver and Nichol 2004). This can be seen in those teachers in this research who were not able to teach all aspect of the National Curriculum for History fully. This accords well with the findings of this research. If student teachers are to develop pupils' procedural knowledge and understanding of second order concepts (Guyver and Nichol 2004) and so teach the National Curriculum for History then explicit consideration must be given to the academic syntactic knowledge that underpins such syntactically based teaching.

This has implications for either the entrance requirement for programmes where tutors do not accept on to the programme students, like Jasbir, who have insufficient grounding in the nature of the discipline. Or for the preparatory work that students like him are asked to do prior to a course- focusing less on the acquisition of substantive knowledge and more on finding ways to develop syntactical knowledge.

The understandings that students bring to training programmes can be one of the most important determinants of what they take from their training programmes, acting as 'a filter or lens through which all that they experience in their training must pass' (Pendry et al 1998: 23). This means that beginning teachers need opportunities to clarify their own beliefs and conceptions about history and its functions for society and for individuals (Virta

2001). They need to be given opportunities to engage with, reflect upon, and assimilate thinking about the nature of history to their own practice. They need to be provided with opportunities to consider where their beliefs come from and how important this might be in shaping their practice and learning on the course. There are many ways in which these beliefs can be elicited. This could be through discussions with the students- for example as could happen in interviews for ITT programmes, in their discussions of the nature of their prior learning of the subject or in their discussions of the orientations of those that taught them or whose teaching they had observed. They will also arise out of discussions of their views on the curriculum, learning activities, innovations and others teaching, as well, of course, as from reflection on their own practice.

The move towards making teaching a Master's level profession (DCSF 2007; Balls 2008) and the introduction of Master's level components on most programmes of Post Graduate ITT could provide the space and opportunity to address the nature and purposes of the subject and the link between these and pedagogy and the curriculum. This will also enable programmes to give consideration to those other factors, other than education that can be seen in Chapter 7 to have such a significant impact on teachers thinking about the subjects.

It is important that training in schools as well as in the University engage with the beliefs that students come with. This poses issues in ensuring that university tutors raise awareness amongst mentors and develop their skills in enabling this to happen. Pendry, et al (1998) advise that having found out what these beliefs are, mentors have to do a skilled job of finding the balance between legitimising and challenging them. It is unhelpful to accept ideas uncritically as students need to scrutinise them in the light of what they are learning about history teaching. It is also unhelpful to ignore them as this runs the risk that 'these ideas will be submerged and go underground; tenaciously retained but infrequently articulated' (Pendry et al 1998: 23).

Effective mentoring will help student teachers to explore their grounds for holding such views and their implications: working with existing ideas rather than against them. Such an approach may, of course, include helping students to see that certain ideas, although reasonable from a certain perspective, are in practice both unhelpful and untenable. It may also involve accepting that in many cases there are valid, different points of view – about the purposes of learning history, about what certain pupils are capable of achieving in history, about the most appropriate strategy to use – and that these differences cannot be easily resolved. The students may finish the course with views about teaching history that differ in fundamental respects to those

held by the mentor or tutor, and these are entirely reasonable views to hold'. (Pendry et al 1998: 24)

Although reasonably held these views may limit their ability to teach the statutory curriculum. Teachers would need to be cognisant of the effect that working outside of the dominant discourse might have on the individual, their pupils and their working context.

This process will also require mentors to open up their own practice to students and help avoid students being judged as wanting where their orientation is different from their mentor as happened to Charlotte. It will mean mentors discussing their own personal and learning histories in the subject in order to establish their positions in relation to discourses, and to unpack connections between those and student teachers ideas about teaching and learning. It also helps student teacher to identify mentors positions in relation to debates so these do not remain hidden, or oblique, and lead to difficulties like those that Charlotte faced.

An awareness of the range of influences on teachers' thinking about their subject, the importance of different orientations to their subjects, and the ways in which teachers draw on different aspects of their thinking in different ways according to their different roles should also influence the further training of, and interventions in the practice of experienced teachers. It raises awareness of the complexity of teacher thinking and practice. This needs to be explored critically and within the context of individuals if change is to be real or effective.

## **Conclusions**

This research has established that history teachers' thinking about the nature and purposes of their discipline has important implications for teacher development, for the school history curriculum, and for pupil learning. A number of suggestions for action arise out of a consideration of these implications notably for the education of history teachers both at the beginning of their careers and as part of their continuing professional development.

Initial teacher education needs to give more consideration to the syntactic knowledge that teachers bring to their training programmes. This research suggests that a lack of

engagement with relevant debates about the nature of history prior to the PGCE course can have a negative impact on progress. Therefore entrance requirements and pre course preparation tasks need to be reviewed with this in mind.

The PGCE plays an important role in introducing students to debates on the nature of the subject which suggests that this must be an integral part of history education training programmes. This would allow beginning teachers to reflect consciously upon and articulate the orientations to history that influence the curriculum choices, learning activities and areas of historical understanding emphasised by themselves and by those with whom they work. This would also go some way to addressing the disadvantages faced on these programmes by students whose firmly held beliefs about the nature of their subject do not accord with dominant discourses of history teacher education. Programmes of initial teacher education should, along with all history teacher professional development, build in recognition that like school pupils, history teachers' thinking about history is shaped at least as much from outside of their formal history education as from within.

All history education programmes need to give further consideration to improving the teaching of those areas of the school history curriculum most influenced by more postmodern perspectives. This requires additional in-service and initial training on, for example on, teaching areas of the National Curriculum for History such as historical enquiry and historical interpretations. Part of this training would be making explicit the thinking about the nature of history which underpins them. It would need to be done by all those involved in the training, including school based mentors and coaches. This would enable teachers to teach the whole of the school history curriculum and help all pupils to attain better in all aspects of the subject.

There are also ways in which this research might have implications outside the specific field, and ways in which it might generate further research. Findings about the role of subject understandings in teaching and learning and the recognition of the complexity of teacher knowledge are potentially applicable to other subject areas. Future research could give consideration to the impact of different epistemological understandings on the teaching and learning of other subject disciplines.

This research also generates understandings which may be influential beyond initial teacher education. Policy makers and providers of continuing professional development could usefully incorporate consideration of the complexity of teacher decision making into implementation of any programme which aims to bring about change- for example in responding to the needs of specific teachers, not just creating uniform idealised models. Politicians and policy makers should also recognise the role that teachers play in mediating and implementing policy and curricula. This understanding could also lead to further research on how teachers do learn and what does lead them to incorporate and accept change.

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## Appendix 1 Invitation to Participate

As part of my doctoral study I am currently undertaking research on trainee history teachers' experiences of, and thinking about, their subject. As part of this research I would like to do some interviews with members of your history PGCE group.

I am looking for volunteers who would be prepared to be interviewed for about an hour. The interview would be to explore your individual experiences and thinking so there would be no right or wrong answers to any of the questions- it is people's views and experiences that I am interested in.

All answers will be treated in the strictest confidence and all responses will be made anonymous; participation in this project would be entirely separate from your work on the PGCE course. I hope that in the long term this work will inform my work with trainee teachers like you.

If you would be interested in taking part and would be available to be interviewed at some time during June I would be grateful if you would e mail me at [e.mccrum@ac.uk](mailto:e.mccrum@ac.uk)

Regards

Elizabeth

## Appendix 2 Informed Consent Form

### WRITTEN CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

#### Statement by participant

- I confirm that I have read and understood the invitation to participate in this study. I have been informed of the purpose and benefits of taking part.
- I understand what my involvement will entail and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I consent to the information provided by me on my GTTR form (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, academic qualifications) being used, by the investigator, as data in the study.
- I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, and that I can withdraw at any time without prejudice.
- I understand that all information obtained will be confidential.
- I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published provided that I cannot be identified as a subject.
- Contact information has been provided should I wish to seek further information from the investigator at any time for purposes of clarification.

Participant's Signature-----

Date -----

#### Statement by investigator

- I have explained this project and the implications of participation in it to this participant without bias and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

Name of investigator -----

Signature of investigator -----

Date -----

## Appendix 3 Interview Schedule

### Introduction

- Thank interviewee for agreeing to take part in this interview
- Ask interviewee's permission to tape the interview in order that I am able to transcribe the results and listen better during the interview
- Inform the interviewee that I will also make some notes as we talk as an aide memoir and to supplement the tape recording
- Reiterate the purpose of the interview – to, as part of my doctoral study, ascertain views on:
  - How history teachers conceive of the nature of their discipline;
  - Their rationale for the purpose of their subject in the school curriculum;
  - The origins of their views on the nature and purpose of history;
  - And how these are manifest in what and how they choose to teach in their classrooms
- Explain that I am interested in conceptions of history and the factors which have influenced and shaped these conceptions and that I hope that in the long term this work will inform my work with trainee teachers like the interviewee
- Remind the interviewee that they have volunteered to participate in this study, that they have given their informed consent which they are free to withdraw at anytime without any repercussions
- Reassure the interviewee that the interview is not scheduled to take more than an hour but if they want to talk for longer I will be happy to go on for longer
- Give the interviewee assurance that they will remain anonymous in any written report or discussions resulting from the study and that their response will be treated in the strictest confidence
- Reassure the interviewee that their participation and answers to the questions are solely for the purpose of this project and are entirely separate from the PGCE course
- Explain that there are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions that I will ask, and that I am interested in are the interviewee's opinions and experiences.
- Tell the interviewee that they are to feel free to interrupt, ask for clarification or choose not to answer any of the questions

### Factors that have shaped and influenced conceptions of the nature and value of history

Question- You have prepared and brought to this interview a 'timeline', a record of the experiences that you feel have been significant in shaping your views of history.

Using the timeline to help you (and I have a copy) what sort of things do you think have shaped and influenced your ideas about history?

Possible prompts:

Family background and interests

Experiences of learning history: primary school, secondary school, university

Influential people (both known personally and others, for example authors)

Interests and leisure pursuits



Career  
 Media  
 Books  
 Events  
 Geographical origins  
 Community  
 Gender  
 Ethnicity  
 Social background  
 Political beliefs or affiliations  
 Religious beliefs  
 Values

### **Views on the nature of history**

Question- to arise from discussions of the timeline. For example what was the balance between content driven and historiographical courses in undergraduate studies? In any historiographical courses which philosophers of history were considered? Where would you position yourself in relation to these debates?

Probe- I am interested in how you think about history, for example do you think of it as a subject or a discipline?

Possible prompts:

Is there a difference between history and the past?

Is there a past independent of the writings of historians?

Is the truth about this past recoverable?

To what extent can the past be reconstructed through its traces?

How does/should the historian decide on the object of their study?

Can history be about anything, any people in any time?

Should historians strive for objectivity? How? Can they be objective?

How do you account for different histories/different interpretations of the past?

Are they all of equal value? If not why not?

Why do you think the work of some historians is more influential than others?

Are there discernable patterns/trends/progress in the past? Examples?

Can we draw lessons or derive generalisations from the past?

Can the historian be absent from their text? Should they be?

Does the historian fictionalise the past?

Is there reality beyond the text?

### **Rationale for study of subject**

Question- What is the value of historical study?

Probes- what is history for?

Possible prompts:

Value for whom? (suggest other categories than the ones raised) school pupils/university students/academic historians/politicians/those with little or no acquaintance with the subject as an academic discipline

In what other ways can the study of history be valued?

Why might the study of the past be important?  
 Is a study of history an end in itself?  
 Does studying history teach us anything?  
 To what extent is history identifiably different from other disciplines?  
 Does it have a role in the formation of personal/group or national identity?  
 Can history teach political/moral/social lessons?  
 How important is knowledge of the past? Why?  
 What skills are developed through historical study?  
 Does it have a role in educating citizens? Or promoting participation?  
 Can you give me some examples?

### **Influence of views on nature and purposes of history on what and how teach**

Question- Do you think that the ways in which you think about the nature and purpose of history has any impact on what and how you teach in the classroom?

Probe- does the fact that you think X influence the sorts of learning activities that you choose for pupils/ the content that you select

Possible prompts:

How would you describe your predominant teaching style? Why do you think you teach in this way?

In what ways do you feel most comfortable teaching? Why?

Do you differ from those teachers who taught you history? Why do you think you differ?

What sorts of learning activities do you particularly like using with pupils? Why?

Does this differ according to the key stage which you are teaching?

Which of the areas of the National Curriculum Knowledge, Skills and Understanding do you focus most on developing in pupils?

### **Closure**

Invite interviewee to add anything that they think they would like to add about their conceptions of the subject; anything they feel has shaped or influenced their conceptions history or how their conceptions might influence or be manifest in their teaching.

Thank the interviewee for their time and their reflections, which are much appreciated.