

Pupil perceptions of history at Key Stage 3: Final Report, October 2005

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Context of the research

The past decade has seen increasing attention focused on the affective factors influencing pupil performance in school subjects and an acknowledgement that pupil attitudes to learning in school subjects have an influence on learning outcomes (see, for example, Dorn, 1996, Ruddock, 1996, Oakley, 2002). Ma's research (1997) suggested that pupil achievement was influenced by pupils' perceptions of how enjoyable and how difficult subjects were, and Norwich (1994, 1999) noted that 'identified' motivation (pupils' perceptions of how important a subject was) and 'introjected' motivation (e.g. parental pressure) were also factors influencing pupil performance. Lomas (2005) also argues that commitment and interest are major factors in pupil attainment in history, and identifies 'getting pupils to care about the past' as an important challenge in raising pupil attainment in history.

Attempts to explore pupil attitudes to history in school can be traced back to the 1968 Schools Council enquiry, which was undertaken in part due to a concern about the declining popularity of history as a school subject (Price, 1968).

The Schools Council Enquiry I (1968) found that that in a survey of 15 year olds, only 29% thought that history was a useful subject of study, and only 41% of boys and 40% of girls thought that the subject was interesting.

Only 28% of the boys' parents and 29% of the girls' parents thought that history was a 'very important' subject for their child to learn in school.

In the same survey, geography was viewed as interesting and useful by a higher percentage of pupils (and parents), with 54% of boys and 47% of girls regarding it as 'useful' (see Aldrich, 1987 for a more detailed summary of these findings).

In 1983, research studies undertaken as part of the Hargreaves Report (1984) surveyed 1,200 15-16 year old pupils in ILEA schools and found that 53% thought history to be useful, and 61% thought it interesting (compared to 57% who found geography useful, and 52% interesting).

Aldrich points out that the samples from the two studies was different, and notes that in the 1968 study 85% of 15-16 year olds studied history, as against less than 50% in 1983, but the studies raise potentially interesting questions about how these figures would compare to contemporary pupil attitudes to history in school. The design of the research instruments in this survey was designed partly with a view to enabling comparisons to be made with these earlier surveys.

Although history has been characterised as a subject area where there has been ‘a notable lack of research’ (Lord and Harland, 2000:29-30), it is possible to trace several recent studies which provide some insights into pupil perspectives on school history. It is also important to note that there have always been large numbers of pupils who have found school history to be neither interesting or useful.

One of the most striking findings, emerging out of Adey and Biddulph’s (2001) study of the factors influencing subject choice at 14+, was the number of pupils in year 9 who had a ‘disappointingly uninformed’ understanding of what advantages the study of the past might bestow in life after school. Although 68.5% of the 1,400+ year 9 pupils said that they had enjoyed history at Key Stage 3, and 42.5% thought it would be useful to do history at GCSE level, only a handful appeared to be able to give ‘mature’ and valid reasons for the value of studying history, and that for the vast majority of pupils, ‘their understanding of the relative usefulness of both history and geography in their future lives is limited to direct and naïve reference to forms of employment’ (Adey and Biddulph, 2001: 439). A study by Fink (2004:2) also reported that even where pupils felt that history was of some use, ‘they have difficulties in defining what it is useful for. Utility is rather defined in a circular, tautological way.’

This raises the question of at what age pupils might be expected to have some understanding of why they might benefit from the study of particular school subjects. Given that pupils’ attitude to school subjects (and commitment to learning) is based at least in part on their perceptions of the ‘usefulness’ of the subject, this facet of school history appears to be comparatively under-researched. Although the Adey and Biddulph studies (2001, 2003, 2004) pointed out that many secondary pupils did not appear to understand why they were doing history, it was difficult to find any research which explored this finding further. This was one of the factors which influenced the design of the research instruments in this study, both for the questionnaire, and the focus group interviews.

In terms of the popularity of history vis a vis other school subjects, some recent surveys give a less positive picture, compared to the Adey and Biddulph findings. Maw’s (2003) survey of 2,151 year 8 pupils across 103 secondary schools found that only 3% of pupils cited history as their favourite subject, against 8% who said it was the subject they enjoyed least. ‘Census at School’ (<http://censusatschool.ntu.ac.uk/table7-1.asp>) found that 3.86% of boys and 4.23% of girls cited history as their favourite subject. Lomas (2005: 7) also acknowledges that in spite of much good practice in the subject, there is still for many pupils, the ‘so what?’ question, with many pupils either bored with the subject, and/or failing to see any valid purpose to the general enterprise of studying history in school. Lomas also notes the continuing prevalence of low level transcription work in history, with ‘copying from the board, or a book’, and ‘IRF’ (teacher initiates, brief pupil response followed by teacher feedback) commonly encountered lesson formats in KS3 history.

In a (2002) survey of 708 pupils in Norfolk schools, 31 pupils identified history as their favourite subject and 36, the subject they most disliked. In the case of pupils who enjoyed history, the personality of the teacher was the reason most commonly given for the choice. For those pupils who disliked history, by some way the most commonly given reason was that the subject was boring, with some pupils also saying

that there was too much writing and that history was not useful in terms of future employment (see <http://www.uea.ac.uk/~m242/nasc/cross/cman/histworst.htm> for full transcripts of responses).

Several recent studies have also attempted to find out which aspects of school history pupils find enjoyable or not enjoyable. Hooper (2001) found that 'practical and expressive' activities were most likely to motivate pupils and the Welsh History Project (2000: 21) reported that interesting approaches identified by pupils included 'debates and discussions, stories about famous people, videos, individual or group investigative work and fieldwork'. Harland *et al.* (1999) and Adey and Biddulph (2001) found that pupils were critical of tasks that employed extended periods of more passive learning methods such as filling in worksheets and working from the textbook. Pupils' perception that GCSE history would be dominated by written work was seen as one of the major deterrents to taking the subject post 14, even by pupils who had enjoyed history at Key Stage 3 (Adey and Biddulph, 2001). Nicholls (2004) claims that pupils generally enjoyed history at KS3 because of the prevalence of stimulating, imaginative and varied teaching approaches, but that the constraints of the exam format at KS 4 led to 'a restricted, knowledge-focused and results-oriented content, undoing much of the previous good work.' Mynard (2005) points to the reduction in time allocated to history, both in primary schools and at KS3, as a cause of 'fragmented' teaching and inadequate attention to overviews and links with other subjects. Robbins (2004) also points to lack of curriculum time as a factor which reduces the opportunities for history teachers to develop overview approaches, and explore links between past and present in a way which might serve to emphasise the relevance of historical perspectives to present day issues and problems.

There are also issues of what sort of history interests and engages pupils. Ribbens (2005) points to research in Holland which suggests that under 10% of Dutch pupils felt that national history was important to them, against approximately 50% who indicated that finding out about their own families was important to them. (A comparative Anglo-Dutch survey is currently being undertaken in this area).

There is also sometimes an assumption amongst policy makers that pupils remember what they have been taught. Research by Lightman and Sadler (1993) and more recently Wineburg (2002) and Lee (2005) suggests that much of what pupils learn evaporates from their consciousness. Lee cites one pupil as remembering school history as little more than the Romans and World War Two. One facet of the research design of this study was to explore what pupils at KS3 remembered from doing history in primary school.

Although there have been some commentators who have argued against overvaluing 'relevance' and 'enjoyment' (see, for example, Lawlor, 1989, Woodhead, 2005), several recent studies (see for example, Barton *et al.*, 2004, Lomas, 2005, Ribbens, 2005) have suggested that learning outcomes are likely to be improved if history can be, in the words of Lomas, 'linked with their own life and experiences' (Lomas, 2005: 8).

Many recent studies have paid some attention to the issue of pupil attitudes to the subject. Review of recent literature in the field of history education suggests that most history teachers are interested in finding ways of teaching the subject in a way which

will 'make sense' to pupils, and in ways which pupils find interesting and enjoyable. In the words of Barton *et al.* (2004:76):

Teachers focused particularly on their concerns about how to make historical enquiry meaningful and understandable to young children. They spoke repeatedly of the importance of making the topic interesting and exciting, and of teaching children how history relates to them and the people they know; as one participant put it; "We have to help them to appreciate that history means the changes happening all around them, and they're becoming part of history themselves."

Barton *et al.*'s study was based on interviews with beginning teachers of history in the United States and Northern Ireland. This survey focused on the views of KS3 pupils in UK schools.

The main aims of this study

There has been a conscious attempt to adopt a cumulative approach (Hargreaves, 1996, Alexander, 2003) to this enquiry into pupils' views about studying history at Key Stage 3, in the sense of taking into account and building on the work of some of the earlier studies in this field. In particular, the design of the research instruments has been influenced to some extent by the 'Interesting and Useful' surveys undertaken by the Schools Council (1967) and the Hargreaves Report (1984). (See Aldrich, 1987 for a succinct overview of these two reports). Thus the wording of some of the questions (see appendix 1) was deliberately designed to make pupils 'declare a position' in terms of their views on the usefulness and 'enjoyability' of school history, rather than using a more conventional Likert Scale approach.

It also seemed sensible to attempt to elicit pupils' perceptions of history as a school subject in relation to other subjects (see questions 1 and 2 of appendix 1), even though this meant a substantial increase in the amount of space which this meant had to be accorded to this facet of the questionnaire.

Every effort was made to limit the length of the questionnaire to one sheet of A4 paper, given the 'admin/paperwork fatigue' which has been a feature of life in schools over the past few years (see Cockburn and Haydn, 2004) and the pressures on teachers' time and curriculum time for the subject, so as not to deter schools from participation in the project.

Given that many pupils drop history at the end of year 9, and the fact that Biddulph and Adey have recently done a study of pupils' experiences of history at Key Stage 4 (Biddulph and Adey, 2003), it seemed inappropriate to survey year 11 pupils, even though this might have enabled more direct comparisons (in longitudinal terms) with the Schools Council (1967) and Hargreaves (1984) surveys. Instead, it was decided to do a longitudinal study of pupils' perceptions of doing history at Key Stage 3, starting with a pilot study of pupils at the end of year 7, and including their views on doing history at primary school. In addition to exploring their views on which facets of their experience of school history they had found interesting and enjoyable, and which less

so, pupils were also asked about their views on *why* they did history in school, whether they were interested in history outside school, and (in the focus group interviews), their ideas about what it meant 'to get better' at history. The extension of the survey to year 8 and year 9 pupils next year should help to give some indication of how pupils' views about history change over the course of the Key Stage.

Research design

The decision to combine questionnaire and focus group interviews was made in the light of conversations with Dr Ken Adey about his research in this area over the past few years. Dr Adey felt that some of the most interesting and intriguing findings emerged from the interviews with pupils, and that this had justified the extra time and expense that this form of enquiry entailed. I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to Dr Adey for being so generous with his time and help in sharing his experience of this research. The use of questionnaire survey made it possible to increase the scale of the survey in terms of the number of pupils involved in the survey. The focus group interviews made it possible to explore pupils views in more depth and to follow up some of the issues arising out of the questionnaire responses.

In all, 1,740 questionnaire responses were analysed, from 12 schools, including schools from the East of England, London, and the South Coast. Within the limits imposed by such sample size, efforts were made to obtain findings from a range of schools, in terms of the nature of the school (independent, faith, urban-rural, large-small), the uptake of history at KS4, the percentage A-C pass rate at GCSE and the number of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds. There were 160 pupils involved in the focus group interviews, which typically had 6 pupils in each group, with equal numbers of boys and girls with the exception of one single sex school. The questionnaires were analysed using SPSS software for 'closed' questions and Filemaker Pro for text based responses. Focus group interviews were taped using digital voice recorders and then transcribed before analysis.

A pilot questionnaire was trialled in April/May 2004 and an amended version was then used in several schools in July 2004, in the last few days of pupils' experience of history in year 7. After initial analysis of the 330 returns from phase 1 of the survey, one amendment was made to the design of the questionnaire. This was to separate R.E and PSE where pupils were asked to rank how much they enjoyed school subjects, and how important they felt it was to do well in the subject.

Summary of findings from data analysed

1. Pupils' experience of history at primary school

In terms of the questionnaire data (where they had been presented with a yes/no option to the question 'Did you enjoy doing history at primary school?'), 51.9% of pupils reported that they had enjoyed history at primary school, leaving 48.1% who had not enjoyed the subject at primary school. Amongst those interviewed in the year 7 focus groups, almost without exception, pupils said that they preferred the history

that they had experienced in secondary school. This suggests that large numbers of pupils arrive at secondary school with negative feelings about the subject.

Table 1.1: ‘Did you enjoy history at primary school?’

enjoy at primary school		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	798	45.9	51.9	51.9
	No	739	42.5	48.1	100.0
	Total	1537	88.3	100.0	
Missing System		203	11.7		
Total		1740	100.0		

There was clearly a wide range of experience in terms of how much history they had encountered at primary school. Some reported history as a regular feature of each week, with more than one pupil saying that they had it twice a week every week, but others talked of a carousel system where history featured in alternation with geography and a few responses indicated that they had little or no experience of history at Key Stage 2. A couple of pupils indicated that they had found history difficult in year 7, attributing this to not having done much at primary school.

‘We did a lot... yes, quite a lot.’

‘I can’t really remember any.’

‘We hardly did any history.’

‘Between history and geography.’

‘Not much.’

‘I’d say we did a moderate amount of history: we did quite a lot on the Egyptians, and did things like.... toilet rolls.’

‘We had it two times a week.’

‘I found it to be a little bit patchy. I don’t think we really had a continuous timetable or a lesson plan.’

‘Sometimes we’ll have a few weeks where we do history , and a few weeks when we do geography.’

‘We didn’t really have a proper timetable, we just went when we felt like... when the teachers wanted to do history.’

‘I agree with X..... I think we’ve found it hard because of our old school... we didn’t do much history or anything really. They didn’t teach the same thing, it’s a bit of a shock to do two hours of history a week, as opposed to half an hour.’

There also seemed to be substantial differences in terms of how much pupils remembered from their experience of history in the primary school. Some pupils were able to reel of a long list of topics and events, and to describe quite vividly some of their experiences in primary history, others appeared to remember very little. Often this was expressed in terms of favourite topics (the Egyptians emerged as a common favourite) and ‘special occasions and events’, such as school trips or ‘living history’ days. Even in the case of Year 7 groups, many of the pupils interviewed in focus groups appeared to remember very little of what they had encountered in primary school beyond the level of the general topic (Romans, Tudors etc).

2. Pupils' perceptions of the importance of history as a school subject and its usefulness

Responses from the focus group interviews showed that many pupils ranked history somewhere in the middle in terms of its importance vis a vis other school subjects although a significant minority said it was as important as any other subject. Cross-tabulation of 'enjoyment' and 'importance appears to suggest that there is a degree of correlation between how much pupils enjoy the subject and how highly they rank it in terms of status, but this is not a clear correlation and there were some schools where pupils felt that it was important to do well in the subject, but who did not particularly enjoy it.

Pupils' ideas about the importance of the subject were gathered in three ways. Firstly, they were asked to rank the importance of the subject (and their other subjects) on a 6 point Likert scale. This was done partly to enable comparison with other subjects. A second question asked them to 'declare a position' as to whether they considered history 'useful or not very useful', in order to enable comparison with earlier surveys of pupils' views on history's utility (see Aldrich, 1987). Respondents were also asked questions about the subject's usefulness in the focus group interviews.

Table 2.1 gives the results from the question asking pupils to rank their view of the importance of the subject on a 6 point scale, with 5 representing 'Important' and 0 representing 'Not important'. The table also provides the pupils responses to their views on the importance of other school subjects. The table presents the totals across all 12 schools in column 2, and then the importance within the 12 schools surveyed in the columns to the right of column 2.

Table 2.1 How important do you think that it is to do well in the following school subjects? (measured on a 6 point scale with 5 = important and 0 = not important)

School	All	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Hist.	3.26	3.22	3.19	3.59	3.34	2.94	3.49	2.93	3.10	3.20	3.42	3.09	3.58
Art	2.11	2.59	2.08	2.42	1.91	2.25	1.66	2.09	2.62	1.98	1.94	1.95	2.10
DT	2.71	3.20	2.92	2.90	2.56	2.81	2.20	2.93	3.09	2.60	2.73	2.40	2.60
Eng.	4.42	4.24	4.22	4.79	4.44	4.42	4.22	4.57	4.47	4.39	4.45	4.45	4.54
Geog.	3.23	3.45	3.22	4.14	3.55	3.29	2.75	2.83	3.41	3.15	2.91	2.89	3.75
ICT	3.37	3.00	3.27	3.35	3.07	3.25	2.80	3.29	3.78	3.31	3.61	3.78	3.37
Maths	4.46	4.35	4.19	4.74	4.44	4.20	4.32	4.33	4.64	4.42	4.70	4.45	4.78
MFL	3.03	2.95	3.12	3.23	3.07	3.43	3.60	2.82	3.04	2.13	3.14	2.90	3.34
Music	2.12	2.23	2.08	2.48	2.30	1.98	1.79	2.17	2.48	1.85	2.29	1.92	1.86
PE	3.30	3.21	2.87	3.64	3.50	3.62	2.81	2.86	3.66	3.87	2.94	3.10	3.02
PSE	2.65	2.09	1.64	3.18	2.13	2.15	2.60	2.82	2.78	3.21	2.71	2.72	2.25
RE *	2.33	-	-	-	-	-	2.31	2.62	2.78	2.09	1.35	2.64	2.31
Sci.	4.12	3.94	4.10	4.41	4.01	3.64	4.19	3.97	4.47	3.94	4.26	4.23	4.22

* In the pilot version of the questionnaire, PSE and RE were not disaggregated; the results for schools 1-5 for PSE are therefore for 'PSE/RE'. The subjects were separated for the second phase of the questionnaire survey.

In addition to the Likert scale asking them to rank the comparative importance of history and other subjects, on the second side of the questionnaire, pupils were asked whether they thought history was 'useful' or 'not very useful'. This question was designed to allow comparison with earlier surveys (see page 4), although as Aldrich (1987) indicated, differences in sampling, research instrument, the precise wording of the question, and other possible variables (such as pupils' overall attitude to education over the past 50 years) means that such comparisons should be treated with caution.

Table 2.2 Pupils' views on the usefulness of history

Survey and date	Useful	Not very useful
Schools Council Survey (1967)	29%	71%
Hargreaves Report (1984)	53%	47%
2005 Survey	69.3%	30.7%

There were quite large variations between schools, with figures varying from 77.1% considering the subject to be useful, to a 'low' of 58.2%. The highest figure was from the one independent school in the survey (the highest figure from a state school was 74.0%). This raises the question of whether some departments are more successful, or spend more time, in persuading pupils of the subject's utility. There is also the possible effect of parental influence on pupil perceptions.

There was also a variation according to gender, with 68.1% of boys considering the subject to be useful, as against 70.8% of girls.

When analysed by year group, 67.9% of Year 7 pupils reported that they found the subject useful, a figure which increased to 69.5% in Year 8, before rising again to 72.0% in Year 9.

Although the proportion of pupils reporting that they found history useful appears to have increased substantially since the Schools Council survey, pupils' explanations of the utility of the subject tended to support Fink's finding that 'they have difficulties in defining what it is useful for.' (Fink, 2004: 2). There were also echoes of Biddulph and Adey's study which found that many pupils had a 'disappointingly uninformed' understanding of the purposes of school history, and that their views are often influenced by direct and naïve reference to forms of employment' (Adey and Biddulph, 2001: 439).

The questionnaire asked pupils 'Why do you think that they have history on the school curriculum? Can you try to explain your ideas about in what ways it might be useful for people to do history at school?' This was also an aspect of the subject that was followed up in the focus group interviews.

In the light of the Adey and Biddulph finding (2001) that only a handful out of 1,400 year 9 pupils could articulate any plausible reason for studying the past, this was (to me) one of the most interesting facets of the survey, and the results of this phase of the study should provide a useful 'baseline' to explore the ways in which pupils ideas about the purposes of school history develop over the course of the whole Key Stage. It was one of the areas where there were the most striking 'school effects'. Given the limits on curriculum time for school history at Key Stage 3 (although 2 schools in the survey have history twice a week in year 7, once a week is much more common), it is possible that some schools are spending more time than others on making explicit to pupils the ways in which they might benefit from studying the past. In one school, there were virtually no comments that went beyond tautological or very vague responses, whereas in another school, a substantial number of pupils could put forward some valid/sensible reasons for studying history in school, sometimes going beyond qualifications and vocational arguments, and pointing to the wider benefits of history beyond school. Sometimes pupils cited 'heritage' reasons:

'You need to learn - If you go out of school you need to know what's going on in the world and what's happening, and it's better to know what's going on around you, and in other countries, and what's happened in the past years.'

(Interviewer: And history helps with that?)

'Yes.'

'I think it's important to learn history and do well because you need to know about things like churches and castles because if no-one knew about where they came from and how people lived then they might knock them down and not realise.'

'Well, I don't think history's as important as maths or English, because, of course, you need those, but I think it's quite important because it's good to have it. So that ... you don't knock down stuff ...'

'I think English is absolutely pivotal, because reading English now, if you didn't know English then you'd be stuck. And maths is important as well because without it you couldn't get a job, you need it to make money, you need it every single day. History's I can't really see the point to it, because it's the past, and you're not really going to speak to anybody from the past. You need a little bit but you don't need to have it as a major subject, like, say, maths. I'm not being rude but it doesn't actually help you in your daily life. Some people think it's just a lesson just to pass for an hour, or it's not worth it. But you need to know, you need to know a bit of it.'

'It is quite important, because, not as important as other subjects, but you need to learn from the past so that the same kind of thing doesn't happen again.'

'I mean, Mr X, he says, it'll help you to learn things and put together things that you experience during the day, but to be honest with you I really can't see that. It's useful to people who want to be history teachers, but maths is useful to do everything.'

'It's hard to explain because normally for an education you think, 'better' would be for a job in the future and not really ...'

'It's good to have a history A level behind you because then you know – what's happened. History isn't as important as maths. Say if you have children, and they say, mum or dad, what's this, you go, I dunno. If you did an A-level ...'

'General knowledge, really.'

'I understand things. Looking at the sources. ... I didn't know about ... We did so many lessons, no it it's just in my head now.'

As in the surveys by Biddulph and Adey (2001) and Fink (2004), by far the most common view of the purposes of school history related to getting a job. Over 200 responses related to ideas about employment, in terms of history being of use if one were considering a career as a history teacher, archaeologist, 'something in museums' or (in several cases) architect. In one case, a pupil opined that history was useful *'because a historian is a well paid job'*, and others reasoned that *'a history degree gets you a good job'*, or that *'you have to know about the past for some jobs'*, but often, the justification for school history was phrased in such a way that history was *only* useful if you were intending to pursue a career in history teaching, archaeology or museums work:

'If you want to do something to do with history it is important but if you don't I don't know. It might be useful if you become a history teacher.'

'If you were going to work in a museum or be an archaeologist or anything to do with the past, you'd need to know about history.'

'It would handy to know if you want to be an archaeologist or want to know about something to explore. If you heard about a lost tomb in Egypt, you could become the first to find it, using help from history.'

Perhaps the next most prevalent response was the idea that study of history would help us to avoid 'mistakes' which had been made in the past, with over 50 responses falling into this category:

'So that you understand how life has changed and why we have certain rules now that we didn't used to have. How you can make life better'

'So you can learn about mistakes dead people have made.'

'It is important to learn from the past so that in the future, we don't go down the same path as people in the past.'

'I also think it is important for people to learn about things like the world wars and the holocaust, so they can see how and why they should never happen again, as they had such devastating effects.'

'It's important to know what happened in History for the bad things not to happen again and for people to learn from it.'

'Because it is good to learn from other mistakes in the past to learn from them and make sure they don't forget or it doesn't happen again.'

In some cases this extended to a feeling that there was a 'predictive' value to history, that it would help to 'get rid of poverty', or 'show future trends and changes in religion'.

It was clear from both some of the focus group interviews and the questionnaire responses that by Year 9, some pupils were profoundly disaffected from the subject:

'They teach us history because they think we MIGHT enjoy it. Teachers think it's useful because it teaches us about the past (not that anyone cares).'

'I don't know or care.'

'To bore us to death! I don't find it very useful.'

'To punish people.'

'Handwriting and patience.'

'To fill in time.'

'Because the pupils need sleep so they made history up.'

'To fill up space on our timetable.'

'I don't think we need it, yeah it's OK for telling stories but that is it. (I think they make us do it to bore us all out of our brains).'

There were also pupils who rejected the subject's usefulness more politely, simply stating that they had come to the conclusion that it was not useful in 'ordinary life', or that as the past was 'gone' there was no point learning about it:

'I do not think history is that useful as it does not help you in daily life.'

'I think that history can't be used in every day life and only specialist need to know it e.g. authors, historians.'

'I don't think it should be because we don't need to know about the past because we cannot do anything about them. I think we should learn about what should happen in the future so we can work towards them.'

'I don't think History is really that important because it's just storing information has already happened and won't help me in my future life.'

'I think that History is pointless. Why learn about the past when you need to concentrate on the future? I thought that was the point of going to school, so we have a better future.'

'It helps you learn about things in past that we never knew. But to me I don't get why course it's at the past why do need learn about things that happened in the past when we got to think about the present.'

'I'm not being rude but it doesn't actually help you in your daily life.'

There were also a group of pupils who appeared to 'not get it'; who seemed to be genuinely puzzled about the purposes of school history:

'I don't really know but some people really enjoy it.'

'I don't know why we do History and I don't see the point in it.. I don't know how it will help in future reference.'

'I don't know why it is in the school curriculum.'

'I can't explain.'

'I don't have a clue.'

'They don't tell us why.'

Many responses tended to vagueness or a degree of idiosyncrasy; several pupils felt that it would be helpful for quizzes and gameshows, or in case you found something whilst digging in the garden, and a number of pupils regarded the subject as useful because it contributed to 'general knowledge'. The idea that it was good 'to know facts' also occurred in some responses.

'Because it sometime might come in handy.'

'So that you can know a bit more knowledge you don't use much.'

'So they know their facts.'

'To get a bit about ancient stuff into your brain.'

'So if you dig something up in the garden you know what it is.'

'I don't know, but it helps you on quiz shows and pub quizzes.'

'Preparing you for random game shows.'

'Because you need it for later life example Gameshows.'

'So if anyone asks you a question you could answer instead of saying I Don't Know.'

'If your grandparents start talking about the war you will understand.'

Another pattern amongst answers were pupils who believed that history was on the school curriculum so that pupils would understand how much better life is today than in the past, and not take it for granted. Only one response extended this to comparing the relative merits and demerits of the past and the present.

'Because people will know how fortunate we are and how much has changed.'

'Because it is important to learn about the past how we lived many years ago and how lucky we are now to have clean water.'

'I think history is on the curriculum because it can help you learn about what people didn't have, or couldn't do and it makes you appreciate what you have, and can do.'

'So everyone knows what happened before we lived and how lucky we are in the 21st century compared to what it was like in 1000 - 1800.'

I think it is useful to have history on the school curriculum because it makes you appreciate the life you have now and you don't take so much for granted after learning about some of the terrible conditions people lived in.'

'Passing on' the past to the next generation was another response which featured quite prominently:

'If you have kids you may have to tell them a bit about it.'

'Because we've learnt it we can pass it through generations.'

'I think its quite a good talking subject and you can tell your son and daughter and their sons and daughters.'

Although many pupils (perhaps understandably for KS3 pupils) did not give responses which reflected or showed an awareness of the aims and purposes of school history as articulated in curriculum specifications and 'adult' writings in this field, there were some pupils who did seem to have grasped, or who were aware of some of the 'strands' of the arguments for history's place on the curriculum. This came principally in terms of the idea of learning about the past to understand the present, and (less frequently), the idea of there being some sort of 'skills' or 'understandings' benefits from the study of the past, albeit expressed in fairly vague and general terms.

There were around 50 responses which focused on the idea of learning about the past in order to better understand the present. The following extracts are designed to give examples of the sort of reasoning which was in some ways representative of this group of responses:

'So that children get to grips with the past and understand why things are like they are now.'

'History is good because we need to learn the heritage of our country, because they tell us who we are. I also think it tells us how things have changed such as democracy, and the royal family.'

'So that we can learn about our country's past and why we ended up this way. It's useful to know this because then you have an idea of why our country is this way today.'

'History explains why the country and world we live in today is like it is.'

'Because you learn a bit about politics and it is not all about the world war and such subjects. It is not what you would expect.'

'Personally I believe history is probably one the most important aspects of our school curriculum and without it how are to grow a basic understanding of our fore-fathers carvings of the world we now live in? Which other lesson gives us such a wide range of subjects and such an in depth look at each one? History is important because it teaches us slave labour.'

'Because it gives you an idea about human nature, the same as citizenship, and provides a basis for understanding the way the world is today.'

'I think it is useful because it helps people develop points of view about the world today, by seeing how civilization has evolved.'

'History is important as we need it to understand it to understand today's events.'

'It helps people to realise how our country and other countries came to be how they are today. It also helps you to understand about things on the news.'

'I think they have it on there because how else are you going to find out without having to go to the library etc? In school it's free and it's more enjoyable because teachers bring it to life. It also tells you what the country was originally like and how things came to be today e.g. Parliament.'

Several responses indicated that it was important to know about 'your own country', and some of the great events, people and victories, including one pupil who felt that as he was from 'a minority', it was important to know the history of this country.

Although there were a few responses which mentioned the ideas of heritage, commemoration and 'respecting' the past, there were hardly any which mentioned 'patriotism', or suggested that history might contribute to pride in being British, or loyalty to the state, although there was one response which indicated that this was an aim of school history, and that it was an inappropriate one:

'To influence children's brains with patriotism and not to let them have independent views.'

There were about a score of responses which made reference to ‘skills’ acquired through school history, relating to essay technique or sourcework and analysis. These were often expressed in fairly vague or inchoate terms. The following are examples:

‘It is the only subject that lets you interpretate(sic) things.’

‘It can help with discussion. Source reading and finding information.’

‘It is good training for remembering things and putting your ideas down on paper. It is good for learning to extrapolate information from sources which is useful in most subjects.’

‘History is useful not for the facts that you learn (although they are interesting) but for the skills you accumulate. Finding fact in opinion, discussing and arguing and successfully putting forward your points of view are life skills that History helps to develop.’

‘Because they might become teachers or historians when they are older, also you need history in everyday life so you need to prepare for it. Finally you need to look at sources and work out what is happening from the source.’

‘Because, it is important to know what happened in the past, to realise what happened truthfully!’

‘To develop analysis skills’

‘It helps with other humanities with skills like source analysis and essays!’

‘So people can learn about different ideas of today and the past and see different peoples point of view.’

‘Because it's important to understand our past so that we can learn from it and apply the skills learnt e.g. analysing sources to other situations.’

Overall, there did appear to be a ‘school’ or departmental effect in the pattern of responses. In some cases this was in the form of loosely remembered quotes about people being doomed to repeat themselves or having no memory, but especially in terms of the past helping to explain how things are in the present, and helping us to understand such things as democracy, parliament etc, it seems possible that some history departments are taking more time than others to try to make the purposes and possible benefits of school history explicit to pupils.

In spite of recent changes to the ways in which history is taught in the UK over the past quarter of a century, with more emphasis on history as a form of knowledge as against (primarily) the transmission of a ‘body of knowledge’ (Lee and Ashby, 2000), the majority of responses gave little or no attention to ideas about history as a form of knowledge, with its own procedures and conventions for handling information and assessing the validity of claims. In spite of the recent focus on the issue of ‘interpretations’ in school history, and its presence as one of the five Key

Elements or K,S,Us in the history curriculum, only three questionnaire responses and one focus group comment made explicit reference to ‘interpretations’, and there were also only a handful of responses which mentioned ‘enquiry’, or ‘chronology’. Aspects of ‘communication’ did crop up more frequently, most often in the context of the development of essay technique. One pupil suggested that it might be more important to teach young people to talk well rather than to write well in the 21st century, and that school history as it stands does not reflect this.

Similarly, in spite of the recent high profile of citizenship on the school curriculum, and the part which history might play in the development of young people’s political literacy, there were very few responses which made reference to these concerns, with only one explicit mention of the word ‘citizenship’.

In all the schools involved, there were large numbers of pupils who either did not think that history was useful, or who could not say why history was useful, or who gave reasons which bore little relation to the stated curriculum justifications for the subject (DfES/TTA, 1999). Overall, the survey confirmed the findings of Adey and Biddulph (2001: 439), who found that pupils’ views were often ‘disappointingly uninformed’ and often ‘limited to direct and naïve reference to forms of employment’. As with Fink’s survey, there were also many pupils who ‘have difficulties in defining what it is useful for. Utility is rather defined in a circular, tautological way’ (Fink, 2004: 2).

3. Enjoyment of history and what pupils said they enjoyed

Table 3.1: ‘How much do you enjoy history compared to other subjects?’ (measured on a 6 point scale with 5 = ‘most like’ and 0 =‘least like’)

School	All	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Hist	3.08	2.65	3.38	3.16	3.31	2.32	3.58	2.75	2.96	3.11	3.24	3.17	2.86
Art	3.12	3.85	3.51	3.77	2.87	3.43	3.18	3.28	3.30	2.84	3.19	2.63	2.79
DT	3.30	3.75	3.35	3.49	3.34	3.44	3.12	3.60	3.44	2.84	3.47	3.10	3.21
Eng	2.86	3.14	2.05	3.58	3.30	2.24	3.46	2.53	2.85	2.62	2.91	2.57	2.56
Geog	2.28	2.73	2.17	3.02	2.46	1.94	2.07	1.66	2.81	2.02	1.80	2.06	3.12
ICT	3.22	3.11	2.67	3.59	3.00	3.36	2.75	2.95	3.85	3.28	2.62	3.26	3.90
Maths	2.73	2.80	2.04	3.04	3.06	2.00	2.80	2.31	3.51	2.77	2.91	2.13	2.98
MFL	2.28	2.32	2.27	2.12	2.49	2.72	2.72	2.13	2.73	1.24	2.38	2.08	2.35
Mus	2.79	2.47	3.01	2.87	3.39	2.45	2.90	2.85	3.15	2.40	3.09	2.36	2.09
PE	3.88	4.18	3.41	4.32	4.13	4.04	3.76	3.32	4.31	3.96	3.58	3.60	3.69
PSE	2.52	1.22	1.30	2.84	1.65	1.66	3.51	2.87	2.97	3.32	2.31	2.61	1.85
RE *	2.18	-	-	-	-	-	2.98	2.71	2.54	2.23	0.93	2.26	1.29
Sci	2.88	3.21	2.84	3.01	3.28	2.78	3.46	2.71	3.14	2.58	2.89	2.27	2.53

* In the pilot version of the questionnaire, PSE and RE were not disaggregated; the results for schools 1-5 for PSE are therefore for ‘PSE/RE’. The subjects were separated for the second phase of the questionnaire survey.

In terms of the ranking scales where they were asked to say how much they enjoyed subjects on a six point scale, in the majority of cases history was somewhere in the middle, and did not feature prominently as either most liked or most disliked subject, and there was less ‘polarisation’ compared to subjects such as PE and maths (this is in line with other recent studies, see for example <http://www.uea.ac.uk/~m242/nasc/cross/cman/quest.htm>). There was some evidence of ‘school effect’, and also ‘group effect’ that the character/style/personality of the teacher was a major factor in how much pupils were likely to enjoy a subject. In the focus group interviews, pupils were asked whether the teacher or the subject was a more important factor in influencing how much they were likely to enjoy the subject. Almost without exception, the pupils chorused stridently that the teacher was the most important influence. Responses included the following:

‘Well if you say the word history, you don’t immediately think, yes, fun, but I had quite a good teacher this year.’ (Interviewer: ‘So does it depend a lot on which teacher you have?’) ‘Yes, yes, yes’ (all), ‘Even if its PE then if you have a bad teacher then you’re going to hate it.’

‘I think that history is slightly better than geography, I really hate geography and I do history. What I find is that normally, it depends what teacher you’ve got.’ (Interviewer: ‘So that has a big effect on how much you enjoy it? More than the subject?’) Laughter... Yes, yes, it’s the teacher... it’s how they...’

In addition to the ranking of subjects on a six point scale, the questionnaire asked pupils to state whether they regarded history as ‘Quite enjoyable’ or ‘Not that enjoyable’. This was in order to have some form of comparison with earlier surveys, although as with the comparison of ‘usefulness’, there are issues about comparability, both in terms of the phrasing/wording of the question (for example, whether to use the word ‘interesting’ or ‘enjoyable’), sampling issues, and changes in attitudes to education and society more generally over the past four decades. The results are given in Table 3.2,

Table 2.2 Pupils’ views on enjoyment of history at KS3²

Survey and date	‘Quite enjoyable’	‘Not that enjoyable’
Schools Council Survey (1967)	41%	59%
Hargreaves Report (1984)	61%	39%
2005 Survey	69.8%	30.2%

There was a significant variation between departments, with results from one school indicating that 85.9% of the pupils found history enjoyable, falling to 51.1% at the other end of the continuum. Although there did appear to be a ‘departmental’ effect, there were even wider variations between teaching groups within the same department (for example, in one school, between 94.4% of pupils in one group reporting that they enjoyed the subject, to 50% in one of the other groups. Whilst this outcome might not come as a surprise to experienced teachers and heads of department, it serves to reinforce the point that departmental approaches and efforts can make a difference,

and that the most important ‘variable’ would appear to be the level of the individual teacher.

Overall, the survey suggests that history emerges quite positively in terms of pupil enjoyment of the subject; in all but one school, it emerges as more highly ranked than Geography, traditionally its main competitor post Key Stage 3, and it emerges as the fifth most popular subject overall, just behind ICT, Art and DT, and (like all other subjects) some way behind PE. Behind this overall picture however, as indicated above, there were substantial variations, both within and between departments.

What did pupils enjoy in KS3 History?

Some comments related to how much pupils had enjoyed particular topics, with, in Year 7, for example, castles and the Battle of Hastings emerging positively and Beckett eliciting several negative responses. Most comments related to lesson format and the nature of the activities which were used in lessons. There were however, many comments which referred to terms of how enjoyable the lesson was in a general sense, in terms of ‘climate’ (just ‘having a good time’ being able to have ‘a bit of a laugh’). Engagement was clearly not just a function of pedagogy in a technical sense (there were no comments about how competent the teacher was in terms of ‘boardwork’ or use of PowerPoint). The personality and temperament of the teacher, and their general interaction with pupils was felt to be important to many pupils.

In terms of comments on the nature of lesson activity which they felt was likely to engender pupil engagement, and activities which they felt had enabled them to understand and remember tended to correspond to the findings of the recent surveys mentioned above. There was approbation for lesson activities which involved ‘doing things’ (other than listening and writing). Pupils were often keen to stress that they felt that they learned more effectively with ‘active’ approaches, and several used the term ‘interactive’ to describe lessons which they had particularly enjoyed. Perhaps unsurprisingly, ‘variety’ and ‘fun’ featured in several response, particularly the practice of ending the lesson with a history equivalent of *Blockbusters* or *Who wants to be a millionaire?* As well as finding more ‘active’ modes of learning enjoyable, pupils clearly believed that they learned and remembered things better when they ‘did things’:

‘That’s one of the things you remember – making stuff.’

‘If you can do it practically, you learn more, and it was fun.’

‘If you make lessons fun by discussing things and not making us go mad on written work...’

‘The lesson we made posters . We were put into groups and we made posters on how transport changed. It was fun to listen to each others views and what they think is good their ideas and what they like. This lesson meant not only did we learn about transport we learnt about each other a lot more.’

‘I think a good lesson needs work in groups, a bit of chat, some serious and some fun work.’

'I mainly enjoy lessons when we do a mixture of things, some writing, lots of talking and watching videos etc.'

Listening to/watching video extracts was one of the most frequently mentioned 'positive' elements of history lessons, with over 200 positive comments about the use of video, and very few negative comments. The frequency with which video formed part of their experience of KS3 history seemed to vary considerably, and pupils often had clear views on the ways in which it was most helpful to use video materials. Several pupils felt that having to take notes while the video was playing sometimes impeded 'taking it in', and where longer extracts or whole programmes were viewed, it was seen as a chance to 'switch off'. In some departments, it appeared that the use of the video was principally as an end of term/end of year 'treat' (there were 25 references to the film *Gladiator*, and five to *Blackadder*), whereas in others, video extracts were used much more frequently.

'You can switch off if you don't like the video.'

'It's not like going to sleep, but it's a period when you can feel slightly relaxed'.

'If you write down stuff and you miss bits, it's hard to keep up with it.'

'There are some really good bits, it's a bit hard to visualise it, but when it's on the television it's a bit easier. But I do like group work as well ...'

'When you watch a video and have to take notes you can't concentrate on the images and bits and you miss some bits and sometimes you aren't sure which bits you need or are as important as other bits.'

ICT was mentioned much less frequently than video, which is perhaps a reflection on the comparative frequency with which ICT is used compared to video and television. Where it was mentioned, it generally elicited favourable comment, and in some departments, particularly those using digital video and filming pupil presentations, dramas and roleplays, ICT had provided particularly memorable lessons:

'We re-enacted the battle of Hastings on computer with questions a learnt a lot and had fun. The computer asked what to you did it then it told you what happens, and what happens in the real battle.'

'I liked the lessons in the computer rooms when we made the power point presentations of queen Mary.'

'I loved learning about Henry VIII I went on a website about him when I got home that day!'

'When we were making a film.'

'No, no. we haven't done it this year. Sometimes it's difficult if you haven't got computers in the room.'

'One time we played a Battle of Hastings game on the computer. That was ok. And because the whole class was doing it, it was a nice atmosphere.'

(Interviewer: 'What about using computers?')

Yes, (all, enthusiastic) Mr X has got an interactive whiteboard with pens and we annotate what's on the whiteboard.'

'Interactive ... I also like using the computer ourselves. Sometimes we look things up, or we see websites or games. When we did our castles project we went on in groups.. we had to pick up some bits off our sheet, we picked off our sheets which bits we weren't too sure about and we went on the internet in groups and looked it up.'

Group work was frequently mentioned as a positive aspect of school history, with a clear preference for being able to work in friendship groups for group activity:

'Well, we work together quite a lot, don't we—and it's really good because 2 people.. we'll all have different points of view ... and we'll share ideas...'

(Interviewer: 'So working in groups or pairs is a plus?')

'Yes, yes.' (all).

'Where we made magazines it was good because we got to sit with people we liked.'

'When we work in pairs or groups. When we get to discuss about the work.'

'Done group work on difference for poor and rich people it was good because we worked in groups.'

'Sometimes the teachers put you in your own groups and you might have certain people in and you don't like them very much and it just spoils it, and if you go with people you want to, then it's a little bit better for girls, but, not being rude to boys, but boys mess about a bit.'

'If you're in a group with someone you don't like it's often hard to work with them. I think that instead of just going in groups, you should just sit with your friends and have a chance, then, if you disrupt the class you should move them, but you should sit with someone who you want to because then I think you'd like it more, say I've got someone who I really don't like, and I think, oh, history, next. But if you've got someone you really like then you're like ah, yeh! History next.'

'Working in groups has helped us take different bits of different points of view, because if there was like four ... in that group ... and we'll end just putting together because we'll never be in agreement about what we think's right. And it also helps to work in groups because you can point out things that other people might not have thought about.'

Discussion was also felt to be a positive facet of history lessons. Several pupils felt that they learned things more securely from this form of activity. It was clear from the

pattern of responses that the use of class discussion varied from one context to another. Some pupils did not appear to consider discussion to be 'work'.

'Working for 10 mins. Then maybe discussing for 10 mins. And for the rest of the lesson working.'

'Lots of discussion on the work we're doing. I think all the main subjects are best done by speaking and listening.'

'Discussion lessons, I think this was a good lesson because I learned a lot from it.'

'I think that the lessons that I got most out of were the lessons about the black Death. I learnt more about it and found it quite fun. This lesson was a discussion and we talked about all the elements of the bubonic and pneumonic.'

'I enjoyed discussing the Black Death because I like discussing more than writing and I find the Black death interesting.'

'I can't remember a particular lesson but I think a good lesson would have a bit of digestable (easy to take in) facts, with some interesting closure (interesting) facts with the meaty facts. I should also have a good discussion or debate on people opinions.'

Fieldwork and visits were another facet of doing history which evinced almost entirely positive feedback, as were 'games and quizzes' to test retention and comprehension. Visits and fieldwork were frequently cited as the most memorable, worthwhile and enjoyable lessons of the year.

Less predictable perhaps, was an enthusiasm for doing presentations in class, particularly when this was video-recorded and played back later.

'I like doing presentations in practical work.. we do lots of them.. we had to plan our own television programmes, documentaries, and tell the class about the subject we were learning.'

(Interviewer: I find that interesting, because I ask my students to do presentations; they're graduates and sometimes they get quite nervous, are you not scared about it?)

'No, it's quite fun.'

(Interviewer: And you do it in groups?)

'With a presentation it focuses on group work as well.'

'I think I like it practical, it makes you want to learn more.... Instead of just writing things down.'

'It's boring when you do things like writing out pages and trying to understand the source out of the textbook. When you're moving around it's more fun, and you learn better. And you work with other people on presentations.'

(Interviewer: 'So doing presentations, that's a good bit? Because you might think that some kids get nervous about having to do presentations?')

'We're doing one today.'

(Interviewer: 'But it's ok is it?')

'Yeh, yeh. I like the class discussions as well, because you get to chat about things.'
'When you do drama....'
'The drama's good....'
'We do the Cromwell play.'

Presentation lessons, roleplay and drama activities all elicited positive responses, with very few pupils saying that they did not enjoy such activities, and with many pupils citing drama and roleplay lessons as amongst their most memorable and worthwhile experiences of history at KS3. In terms of the 'volume' of responses, only video elicited more positive comments.

It was also interesting to note that written work, and even essay work sometimes received positive comment, if there was particular emphasis on technique, and on how to get better at writing in history:

'It might sound a bit weird but I actually quite enjoyed doing the essays, because- I don't really know why, but it wasn't as boring as some of the other things.'

'Yes, and perhaps there are some things that are useful, that you've got to get to take some exams.'

'Essays ..., they're good in a way because as you go up the school you're going to have to do more, aren't you. So if you start when ...'

Reaction to teacher exposition and questioning was mixed; in some cases this was clearly one of the high spots of lessons and perhaps related to teacher accomplishment in this facet of teaching. Several pupils were at pains to stress that history teachers should not talk for too long at one time, and need to 'break it up' in some way.

'As long as they don't keep us a long time, and they kind of go off ... going on and on and on at us. If they talk for a minute and then stop talking. And then talk some more.'

'Yes, talking about a certain subject, about what he thinks about that. Or maybe past experiences that he's actually had. Start asking questions and then you get into it more, and start asking more and more questions.'

Some pupils pointed to powerful topics such as Slavery or the Holocaust, some said that they enjoyed 'enquiry work' where lessons were based around a key question, and for some, the fascination of the subject derived from finding out about new things, having their preconceptions disturbed, and learning to find things out for themselves. One further strand which might be worthy of comment; many pupils felt that making links to the present helped to 'make sense' of history:

'It helps people to realise how our country and other countries came to be how they are today. It also helps you to understand about things on the news.'

'Well, if you learn history, you can decipher how the world today has changed, thanks to what happened in the past. It also helps me at English, science, art etc. As it relates to those subjects as well.'

'Those decades programmes are good... 1970s, 80s, 90s... music, fashion, how things were different.'

Pupils at times were negative about history where overviews and links to the present were not prevalent vis a vis other subjects:

'What's the point of learning about the past, why can't we do current affairs instead, like we sometimes do in RE.'

'Yes, things that are in the newspapers'

'Last week we had a special lesson (in RE) about the London bombings, that was really interesting... a lot of people contributed who don't usually say anything.'

As someone involved in Initial Teacher Training, it was interesting to note that pupils were generally very positive about the experience of having a trainee history teacher for part of the year. Comments principally related to variety and difference, and comments were positive about both having a trainee, and having their 'proper teacher' back as well.

4. What pupils did not enjoy about history at KS3

Perhaps predictably, written work was one of the most commonly mentioned negative factors, but there were some qualifications to this, with enquiry questions and 'arguments', debates and interpretations work being viewed more positively. Even in year 7, some pupils could see that essay work, although difficult, long and laborious at times, was an important and useful part of learning in history, and many comments focused on how effective particular activities were, not just how enjoyable they were. One of the complaints about writing was the volume/routine of it; other activities were 'better than writing because we do that every day.' Some pupils felt that they 'hardly ever' had lessons with no writing, and some saw writing as part of the nature of the subject, 'History has a lot of written work because it's about the past, and there's a lot of the past.'

Similarly, working from the text book was often regarded as dull and unhelpful, or 'a bit boring', but where the text book was used more 'interactively' for questioning and discussion, textbook work was seen as 'OK'.

'It's alright.'

'It depends what kind of things it is; answering questions, or discussing things.'

Homework was overwhelmingly seen a negative part of school history, with many pupils regarding it as a tedious and seemingly pointless chore. Where schools were able to set internet based homeworks and homeworks which involved enquiry work., there were some more positive responses:

'I think it's a chore.'

'Yeh, I'm gonna agree. Because you do six and a half hours at school, or whatever it is, and then you're expected to do another two hours. I think that homework is sometimes just writing down what you're doing in the lessons. And sometimes that's a bit boring, but other times it can be refreshing your memory, for next time you do it.'

'Sometimes it's like, finishing off work that you haven't done in the lesson, but sometimes it's a completely different subject to it. I think when you're finishing off work, that's good, because if you do really well in the actual lesson then, you don't have to do so much homework. If you work hard in the lesson and you don't have homework when you go home, this is just me personally, I don't know if anyone'll agree, but I think I would enjoy school about ten times more if we didn't have homework.'

'You think, history, great, oh, I've got homework ... You're already put off the rest of the day.'

'And some people skive off school because they know they're gonna get homework in a certain subject so they get off and not do it. If you've got an essay for history then it kind of weighs you down for the rest of the day, you know that when you go home you've gotta make a start on it. And if you've got something important to do; if me and you have got a tennis match, and we've gotta go home and then we're playing, you're not always going to feel like ... we know that yeh, we've got to go home and do homework.'

Reading around the class was another activity which seemed to be commonly used, but which pupils found generally unhelpful. Only one pupil (so far) expressed any positive comment about reading round the class. Most pupils expressed a preference for being able to read things themselves or for the teacher to read things through:

'If you're not very good at reading then you're not going to want to read a lot but you might want to read a tiny bit. I have to disagree with that; because if you're reading solo then you want to go at your own pace because if someone's reading too fast for you, you can't actually take it in.'

'and you think, oh god, I've lost my place, and it's kind of difficult to follow again. It's best to read to yourself, if you don't understand what was said, and you read it in your head, it's confusing.'

'Sometimes it gets a bit boring. Some of the teachers they make the piece fun if they read it. Teachers keep you alert if they say, can you read it. I think it's good if you read short bits. Because some people; I'm not saying everybody, but certainly I, I start off quite well and then I fade away. But if it's a short bit; five, six lines, I'm ok.'

'Well, if you read it yourself, you don't have to show off. People, it's not many, but some people feel scared of doing anything in front of the class and that might be uncomfortable for them and I don't think it's fair that they should have to do that.'

'I suppose that (reading round the class) can be a bit dull... Some people aren't as good at reading and just read on.. Mr H. usually reads things (positive) he puts like.. emphasis and questions and expressions and he like waits and everything before starting... Sometimes you don't pay attention... isn't that true? Like if someone reads who reads and stops and starts. They read a sentence, but they don't sort of go to half of the other sentence and stop that and then start again ...'

'There's different ways of doing it, sometimes the teacher can read it.'

'I like it when the teacher reads it. I read quite quickly and I tend to read on and then think, where are we? Every time we're reading, I'm like thinking, oh, something's going to happen in a minute...'

'I like it when the teacher reads it because he makes the emphasis and you can understand it.. sometimes it's people who can't read very well and you get bored... it slows it all down.. you forget.'

In some cases, the working atmosphere in the classroom influenced the degree with which pupils felt that they could enjoy the subject. There were some instances where pupils felt that they could not enjoy the lesson because other pupils were being noisy and disruptive, and some classes who felt that they were given a fairly 'Spartan diet' in terms of pupil activities (worksheet, textbooks, lots of writing) because the teacher did not trust them to behave well if more adventurous or 'risky' teaching approaches were tried.

There were mixed responses to activities which involved drawing and colouring; some pupils regarded this as an enjoyable activity, others regarded it as 'patronising' or 'a bit of a doss'; there are clearly contextual factors involved here, both in terms of the nature of pupils being taught, and the skill with which such activities are devised.

Teacher exposition also evinced varying responses; pupils sometimes complained that teachers did not explain things clearly (*'When they tell you facts and not explain them'*, *'When sometimes things weren't well explained'*), but a more common resentment was teachers who talked for too long:

'The teacher talks loads and is really slow so I haven't liked history so I basically liked nothing in history this year.'

'All the essays, writing, notes, listening to the teachers talk on for ever which happens every lesson.'

'He just talks and talks and talks' 'It's as if he's never really thought about whether any of this is of any interest to us.. that it might be boring. 'The lessons seem much longer than 45 minutes when he talks a lot'

‘You listen for about 5 minutes and then sort of drift off and start looking at the sky.

‘Once he talked for the whole lesson. I didn’t understand and I think a lot of people didn’t understand any of it.’

As with what other facets of the survey, there appear to be strong ‘school’ and ‘teacher’ effects: some teachers were obviously able to work with text books in a way that pupils found useful and interesting, and some were able to structure written work, even essay work, in a way that pupils found acceptable and useful. Use of video also seemed to vary considerably, both in terms of how much it was used, and how much it elicited pupil enthusiasm, although overall the use of video extracts elicited widespread approbation from pupils.

It should be noted that many pupils were unable to identify any aspect of history that they had not enjoyed at KS3; it was not difficult to find comments such as ‘I enjoyed it all’, ‘I liked it all.’

5. Pupils’ interest in history outside school

There seemed to be degree of polarisation here and the idea that history is ‘the new roll and roll’ for young people may have been overstated (in comparison, for example, to the number of young people who are actively interested in music outside school). Many pupils stated that they were not interested in the subject outside school, either in terms of the internet or television programmes about history. All the pupils in one focus group expressed antipathy to the idea of history outside school:

(Interviewer: Are any of you interested in history outside school?) *‘No! (all, emphatically), ‘Especially with history now on television, with programmes like Time Team.... What broke this bone? It’s boring.’*

(Interviewer: So school’s enough?) *Yes, which is going back to homework – you don’t really enjoy stuff. If there’s a subject you enjoy, the homework could be optional. I don’t know about anyone else, but if someone paid me a tenner to watch time team, I’d probably struggle.’*

Table 5.1: ‘Are you interested in history outside school (reading about it, watching history programmes on TV, exploring history on the internet)?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	748	43.0	49.3	49.3
	No	768	44.1	50.7	100.0
	Total	1516	87.1	100.0	
Missing	System	224	12.9		

Total **1740** **100.0**

Of the returns processed, roughly half of the pupils claimed to enjoy history in some form beyond the classroom, with no strong gender bias. For a few pupils, history was clearly one of their major interests; one pupil has already visited over 50 castles, several were members of various heritage type organisations (through their parents), and some talked enthusiastically and knowledgeably about fairly adult history television broadcasts (such as ‘Restoration’).

Interest in history beyond the classroom was strongly directed towards history on television. Very few pupils indicated an enthusiasm for exploring history on the internet beyond the demands of homework tasks.

6. Pupils’ ideas about progression in history

This was addressed in the focus group interviews rather than the questionnaire, so the sample size for this facet of the enquiry is much smaller than for elements addressed by the questionnaire. It is nonetheless possible to discern a strong school effect here, and it seems possible that progression is addressed more explicitly in some schools than others. In one school, pupils tended to see progression principally in terms of the aggregation of subject content knowledge, or to suggest that ‘getting better’ in history did not apply in the same way as other subjects, that it was not something that you ‘got better at.’ In one of the schools, there were references to the links between literacy and ability to do well in history, to make progress in essay writing and the ability to understand sources, but (perhaps understandably for year 7 pupils) they seemed to have very little conception of the five areas of knowledge, skills and understanding stipulated by the National Curriculum, in spite of the prevalence of ‘pupil-friendly’ interpretation of elements of the National Curriculum which had been designed by some of the departments involved. Further focus group interviews will attempt to pursue this strand further, particularly pupils understanding of assessment arrangements in history as against their awareness of the ‘Key Elements’/areas of knowledge, skills and understanding.

‘I think it’s just you learn more things, you get to know what history’s like throughout school. I’ve learnt how to write essays well, this year. Mr X gave us a – in how to write an essay.’ And this time he has helped us ...’

(Interviewer: ‘So, there are skills in history that you’ve got better at?’)

‘Yeh, it helped us gather everything. And some mind work. Your mind would be able to recognise something.’

‘I agree, our teacher Mrs Y, she’s taught us how to write a good essay. She’s saying, don’t start off “in my essay I’m gonna talk about”, she’s told us to write, yes.’

‘I do think we learned to structure things better, and it helps the way you put things on paper.’

'Because we've got to write it, to start off with a balanced argument. Bias ...'

'The way we had to do essays. She taught us how to do; she said, to start off with a hamburger system.'

'I don't think ... you can get better, but you can't properly get better, all you can do is be more attentive or like have a better memory, or be better at recording things, but you can't be better at it, because you're not discovering the things, you're just learning them, so you can't like physically become better.'

'You get better just by learning more stuff, or skills like being able to write better.'

(This area was explored in the focus group interviews but not on the questionnaire. Further analysis will follow when all the focus group interviews have been transcribed and analysed).

1. For fuller details of the earlier surveys, see Aldrich 1987.

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