

WHAT IS SCHOOL HISTORY FOR? BRITISH STUDENT-TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

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¿PARA QUÉ SIRVE LA ENSEÑANZA DE LA HISTORIA? PERSPECTIVAS DE DOCENTES Y ESTUDIANTES BRITÁNICOS

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ABSTRACT: Relatively little is known about student-teachers' ideas about the nature and purpose of history education. This paper reviews research on this issue and presents an analysis of how the aims of school history have been conceptualised within successive versions of the English National Curriculum since 1991. Data arising from online discussion among 40 student-teachers of history in England are subjected to qualitative analysis, revealing the wide range of views that they held about the aims and purposes of school history. Contrasts and continuities are identified between the student-teachers' thinking and the thinking of English policy makers and opinion formers, leading to the conclusion that curriculum developers need to pay much closer attention than they have in the past to the thinking of the current and future history teachers who are ultimately responsible for the implementation of the curriculum.

KEYWORDS: History curriculum; aims and purposes of education; history teacher preparation.

RESUMEN: Se sabe relativamente poco acerca de las ideas de los maestros en formación sobre la naturaleza y el propósito de la enseñanza de la historia. Este artículo revisa la investigación sobre este tema y presenta un análisis de cómo el currículum nacional inglés ha conceptualizado los objetivos de la enseñanza de la historia desde el año 1991. Los datos derivados de una discusión en línea permiten explorar el pensamiento de 40 docentes de historia en prácticas y analizarlos cualitativamente para conocer la variedad de ideas presentes en esta muestra. Los estudiantes tuvieron una amplia gama de puntos de vista sobre los objetivos y propósitos de la enseñanza de la historia y se identificaron las divergencias y convergencias entre el pensamiento de los estudiantes y el pensamiento de los políticos ingleses y de los líderes de opinión. Se concluye que quienes desarrollan los currículos deben prestar mucha más atención que en el pasado al pensamiento de los actuales y futuros profesores de historia, que son en último término los responsables del diseño de las propuestas curriculares.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Currículum de historia; objetivos y fines de la educación; preparación de los docentes de historia.

INTRODUCTION

The identity, aims, content and form of school history have been much debated nationally and internationally in recent decades (Grever and Stuurman, 2007; Nakou and Barca, 2010; Taylor and Guyver, 2011) and they have been the subject of debate in England at least since the establishment of a state-sponsored secondary curriculum in the early twentieth century (Cannadine, Keating and Sheldon, 2011). Recent debates in England, like debates elsewhere in Europe, have been driven by concerns about national identity and national integration and have been characterised by an emphasis on, and advocacy of, the use of story and canonical narratives as tools for fostering national identity and integration across the political divide (Gove, 2010; Osler, 2009; Smith, 2011; Straw, 2007, May).

In England, at least, the voices of history teachers are rarely heard in public debates, which tend, on the whole, to be dominated by journalists, politicians and celebrity historians. This paper aims to correct this imbalance and also to highlight the extent of the gap between the thinking foregrounded in our public debates and the thinking of history graduates learning to be teachers in history classrooms.

Discussion of the nature and purposes of school history is common in teacher education programmes in the England (Chapman, 2015). This paper draws on rich data relating to pre-service history teachers' thinking on these issues, that arose from an online discussion forum addressing the question 'What is school history for?' in which we participated in as teacher educators in January - February 2010. In analysing the data sets of student-teachers' 'posts' arising from this discussion, we seek to explore the ways in which student-teachers think about the nature and purpose of their subject. Our aim is also to juxtapose pre-service history teachers' thinking with the arguments advanced in recent public debates in England, noting patterns of convergence and divergence and exploring their implications.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH ON PERCEPTIONS OF THE NATURE AND PURPOSES OF HISTORY EDUCATION AMONGST TEACHERS AND STUDENT-TEACHERS

Relatively little research has been undertaken on teacher and student-teacher thinking about the nature and purposes of history education. Probably the most striking conclusion to be drawn from the research that has been done – even from small-scale

study, focusing on only a handful of teachers – concerns the sheer variety evident among teachers' views of the purpose of their subject.

In the United States, Evans (1994) collected data from around 70 teachers and focused in depth on five of them, chosen to represent the different typologies that he had identified in the larger sample. Although he suggested that each typology emphasizes a distinctly different conception of the purposes of history education, ranging 'from gaining knowledge to changing the future', he also stressed that these were not exclusive categories, with each teacher's views actually encompassing elements from more than one typology. Gradwell's (2010) detailed examination of the practices of a single social studies teacher, claims that all the teachers' aims could be encapsulated in the idea of 'preparing students for informed citizenry' but also points out that in her use of sources the teacher is actually promoting all four of the stances that Barton and Levstik (2004) suggest can be found in history education: identifying as well as analysing, responding morally, and exhibiting knowledge of the past.

Variety is perhaps unsurprisingly the dominant impression gained from the wide-ranging European study *Youth and History*, which surveyed the views of between 30 and 50 teachers in each of 27 different countries, asking them to rank the relative importance of nine suggested purposes of studying history (von Borries, 2000). Although two reasons were seen as slightly more important than the others – 'internalising basic democratic values' and 'explaining the situation of the world today and finding out about the tendencies of change' there was in fact relatively little distinction between the mean scores for any of the different suggestions (all of which were scored quite highly), suggesting that each individual teacher tended to endorse quite a wide range of different purposes.

This variety in aims is entirely consistent with the findings of the most detailed study of history teachers in England – an in-depth study of eight history teachers conducted by Husbands, Kitson and Pendry, (2003). Most of these experienced teachers made claims about history's transformative potential, advancing what were essentially moral arguments for the role of history education in creating tolerant, empathetic, responsible, and questioning citizens. However, while some explicitly embraced a role for history in teaching values, others were positioned at very different points along a continuum between passing moral judgment on past actions and simply seeking

to understand how and why those actions had been taken. Despite this variation, the teachers seemed more united in their assumption that studying a range of different peoples in the past, living in different contexts and in very different ways, would reduce young people's fear of difference and so encourage greater respect for humanity and a fundamental tolerance of diversity. They also shared the conviction that studying the past should support young people's understanding of the present – although some dimensions of that present understanding (such as political structures) mattered more to some than to others. One type of aim that was almost entirely *absent* from these teachers' reflections, however, was that associated with cultivating a sense of national identity or establishing a common cultural heritage (although it was interesting to note that when pushed to specify essential content within the history curriculum, their choices focused exclusively on British history).

Although Husbands, Kitson and Pendry encountered frequent references to the development of 'skills', the fact that the teachers rarely articulated exactly what they meant by this, made it difficult for the researchers to draw any clear distinctions between an explicit intention to develop students' understanding of how knowledge of the past is constructed from sources, and an intention to develop more generic dispositions towards asking critical questions about the status of any given information.

One final aim that was important to all the teachers was that young people should find enjoyment in their study of the past. While this may have been related to the fascination and wonder that the subject could inspire, such enjoyment also served specific purposes – both in building students' confidence and in prompting them to pursue the subject at a higher level (increasing the take-up of the subject in examination classes, in particular).

Again there have been a small number of detailed case studies exploring the views of student-teachers. Prominent among the aims that Wilson and Wineburg (1988) found in their study of just four beginning teachers in the United States were the assumptions that teaching history is a means both of providing contextual understanding for the modern world and equipping young people to develop a generic critical thinking. In each case, however, the particular views of the teacher about the purpose of including history within the curriculum were strongly shaped by their own disciplinary background – a finding that was replicated in Hick's (2005) comparison of the views of

two beginning teachers, one in England and one in the United States. The teacher from England, profoundly influenced by the Schools History Project approach (which she had experienced as a pupil), saw history as a discipline, with her responsibility being to induct young people into those particular ways of constructing and framing historical knowledge. In contrast, the American teacher saw history as a body of knowledge that had to be passed on, influenced by a tradition in which the emphasis was placed on 'transmitting an understanding of the story of the nation's traditions and cultures'. (Hicks, 2005, p. 23)

In England, McCrum's (2010) research into the views of 11 pre-service history teachers found that participants' rationale for teaching history tended to focus mainly on extrinsic purposes, with history serving as a form of moral education, for example, or as a means of developing political literacy. She noted the strong echoes in her findings with those reported by Husbands, Kitson and Pendry (2003) with an emphasis in the student-teachers' views on the idea of broadening students' perspectives and the promotion of tolerance through an exploration of diversity within the past. While most rejected simplistic ideas of learning from the mistakes of the past, they certainly thought that knowledge of that past would serve to contextualise and make sense of the present. Although a few of the student-teachers referred to students' use of sources, their emphasis tended to be less on critical evaluation of particular claims and more on developing an understanding of the interpretive processes involved in constructing historical accounts and an appreciation of multiple perspectives.

THE NATURE AND PURPOSES OF HISTORY IN ENGLISH POLICY CONTEXTS: THE EXAMPLE OF THE ENGLISH NATIONAL CURRICULUM, 1991-2014

There is not space, in this paper, to review recent English debates on the nature and purposes of school history, which have been extensive and, frequently, vituperative and which have also tended to be structured around misleading dichotomies (Counsell, 2000; Cain and Chapman, 2014).

There is room, however, to give some sense of the range of aims and purposes that have been proposed for school history by the English National Curriculum since 1991. Our curriculum documents give a sense both of the range of aims and purposes that have been officially proposed and also of the somewhat erratic nature of our national curricular development.

There have been five curricula since the National Curriculum was introduced in 1991 – in 1991 (DES, 1991), 1995 (DfE 1995), 1999 (DfEE/QCA, 1999), 2008 (QCA, 2007) and 2014 (DfE, 2013). The graph that follows aims to highlight the main concerns of each document, as revealed by a content analysis that ‘counts’ the number of pages in each document devoted to the concepts that history education might seek to develop mastery of (for example, ‘change’), the content of the curriculum (for example, the history of England) and the explicit consideration of the aims and purposes of history (as expressed, for example, in pages devoted to ‘aims’). The proportion of each document devoted to each of these issues is given in the graph, expressed as a percentage of each document as a whole.

As Figure 1 indicates, with the exception of the 2008 curriculum, the key purpose of the curriculum has been to define the content to be taught. Aims served by this content have only been explicitly identified since 1999. The most recent iterations of the curriculum represent contrary trends – towards concepts and away from content, in 2008, and the reverse in 2014.

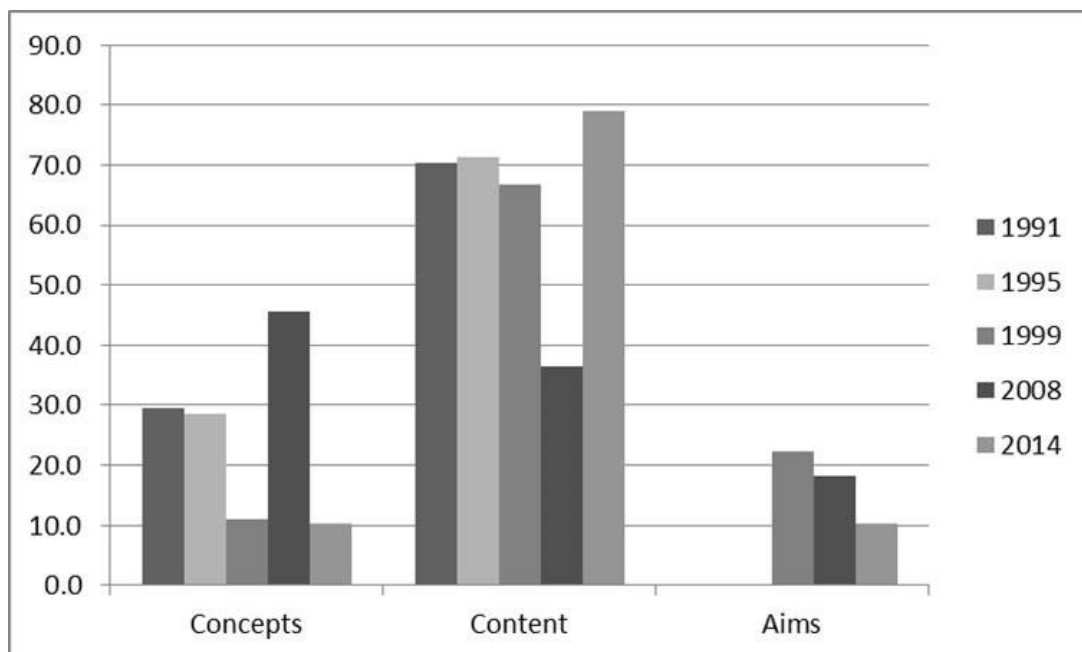
As has been noted, no aims were explicitly stated in either the 1991 or the 1995 iterations of the curriculum other than the following, embedded in a wider description of the content that children should come to know and understand through their studies:

children should be ‘taught to understand how developments... helped shape... modern Britain...’ (DES, 1991, p. 33). In 1999, ‘aims’ were identified through a statement of ‘The Importance of History’ (DfEE/QCA, 1999, p. 14), which claimed that history was important because it:

- stimulated pupils’ imaginations (‘History fires pupils’ curiosity about the past in Britain and the wider world’);
- helped pupils understand the diversity and complexity of human experience and reflect on identity (‘They see the diversity of human experience, and understand more about themselves as individuals and members of society’);
- could shape their values and choices (‘What they learn can influence their decisions about personal choices, attitudes and values’); and
- developed valuable transferable skills (‘to be able to research, sift through evidence, and argue for their point of view – skills that are prized in adult life’).

The 2008 Curriculum likewise contained an explicit statement of the ‘importance’ of history (QCA, 2007, p. 111). There was considerable continuity between the 1999 and 2008 statements, for example, the latter

Figure 1. Pages devoted to Concepts, Content and Aims in the five iterations of the English National Curriculum for 11-14 year-olds, 1991-2014, expressed as a percentage of each document



still foregrounded history's role in stimulating pupils' imaginations ('fires pupils' curiosity and imagination, moving and inspiring them') and in developing valuable transferable skills ('equipping them with knowledge and skills that are prized in adult life, enhancing employability'). Some interesting shifts of emphasis had occurred, however:

- the emphasis on shaping students' values and attributes had become stronger ('It encourages mutual understanding... helps pupils become confident and questioning individuals');
- diversity was more clearly focused nationally than before ('our ethnic and cultural diversity');
- citizenship aims were explicitly identified ('developing an ability to take part in a democratic society');
- there was a clearer focus on actively understanding the present ('ask and answer questions of the present by engaging with the past'); and
- there was a clearer sense that history could shape identity ('It helps pupils develop their own identities through an understanding of history').

The 2014 curriculum is a confusing document in many respects and the product of a rather erratic and opaque process of 'production' (Cannadine, 2013, March 13; Mandler, 2013). A section on 'aims' is explicitly included but deals, in the main, with issues other than 'aims' and we have to turn to a section on the 'purpose' of history to find clarity.

A high-quality history education will help pupils gain a coherent knowledge and understanding of Britain's past and that of the wider world. It should inspire pupils' curiosity to know more about the past. Teaching should equip pupils to ask perceptive questions, think critically, weigh evidence, sift arguments, and develop perspective and judgement. History helps pupils to understand the complexity of people's lives, the process of change, the diversity of societies and relationships between different groups, as well as their own identity and the challenges of their time.

(DfE, 2013, p. 1)

As this statement shows, our new curriculum shares many of the aims identified in 2008, for example, stimulating pupils' imaginations. Some earlier aims have been entirely evacuated, notably transferable skills and citizenship. There are some revealing differences

in phrasing and in cognitive grammar also: pupils are no longer represented as active in shaping their identities (they 'understand' rather than 'develop' them) and although pupils still develop cognitive abilities (such as the ability to question) they no longer explicitly question the present.

THE 'WHAT IS SCHOOL HISTORY FOR?' DISCUSSION BOARD, 2010

Our main data in this study, as has been said, arises from an online discussion that took place among a group of student-teachers in January - February 2010. The student-teachers who took part in the discussion all attended the same institution - The Institute of Education, University of London - and were all following the same teacher training course - the secondary history Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE course).

The 'What is school history for?' discussion took place over a two-week period. The discussion board was part of a broader engagement with the question of the nature and purposes of school history in which student-teachers' attention was drawn to the wider national debate.¹ We had also dramatized the debate for the student-teachers through a roundtable involving an experienced head of history and eminent academics who were not part of the PGCE tutor team.²

We aimed to engage student-teachers, through the discussion, with the full range of positions apparent in national and, to a lesser extent, international debates on the nature and purpose of school history and they were provided with an online folder of 'resources' containing a large number of materials to refer to during the course of the discussion. The materials included: public debates on school history (for example: *Why history matters?*; *The Big Debate on The Teaching of History*) and interventions in broader political debates by politicians (Hansard, 2009; Straw, 2007, May) and the History Matters Partnership (*History Matters - pass it on*); texts advocating disciplinary (Wineburg, 2007), and 'historical consciousness' cases for school history (Chapman, 2009); journalism and work by academic and other authors critical of contemporary school history (for example, Conway, 2005; Hastings, 2005, December 27; Matthews, 2009; Sandbrook, 2009, September 14) and academic analyses of the public debate on school history (Osler, 2009).

The student-teachers were divided into three groups, each moderated by one of their tutors (the

authors of this paper), and were asked to make at least three posts over the course of the discussion – an initial post in response to the question ‘What is school history for?’, a challenge to another student-teacher’s post and a final post at the end of the exercise restating their position in the light of feedback from other student-teachers and from the moderating tutors. The discussion instructions required the student-teachers to make ‘reference to at least one item in the folder of resources’ in each of their three posts.

The student-teachers were actively challenged during the course of the discussions by their tutors, who often differed amongst themselves in view and in argument on the issues that arose, as the following tutor posts, excerpted from the discussion board data sets, illustrate.

I think we’re all unsure of what teaching to develop national identity might mean.

In my own research some years ago with English history teachers, much concern was expressed about teaching lots of British history. Ironically, however, when asked what historical events/people they would fight to keep in the curriculum, pretty much all were British!!

I think there is a difference between teaching British history (I still think it’s very important to know about) and teaching patriotism (though one might follow the other I guess).

So here’s a question: do we think that kids should learn more about British history than any other country’s history?

(Tutor post: example 1)

What is British history I wonder? I was in Trafalgar Square with [two international colleagues] the other day... trying to explain the place to them.... First we have Trafalgar (not in Britain) and on the top of that column is a statue of someone who cut his teeth on the mosquito coast (near Honduras); then we have Havelock (the terror of Awadh memorialised for his exemplary punishment of mutineers in the Gangetic plain) and Napier (conqueror of Sind); up by the ‘national’ gallery we have George Washington... So, to come back to my (mischievous) question: what’s British, exactly, I wonder?

(Tutor post: example 2)

It should be noted also that the student-teachers were happy to challenge their tutors’ views and to disagree with positions that their tutors had articulat-

ed in contributions to the literature on this issue or to national debates and discussions. The following post illustrates this willingness to challenge:

I would disagree with Arthur’s description of history as a ‘vital’ subject and that learning history is a ‘vital process’ (in Introduction: Constructing History 14-19). Much as Claire Fox argued in the ‘Why History Matters’ podcast, I believe that history is interesting rather than vital....

METHODOLOGY

Of the 52 members of the PGCE cohort, 41 (78.8%) posted to the discussion boards. Over the duration of the boards, 229 posts were made, including tutor posts.

Since the data had been generated as a routine part of the PGCE programme, permission to use it for research purposes was formally sought only after the end of the course, when it was clear that the tutors who would be acting as researchers no longer had any responsibility for assessment of the student-teachers concerned. Following the principles of informed consent (*Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*), the student-teachers were given time to review their contributions before deciding whether or not to grant permission for their use in research into student-teachers’ views and into the nature and impact of online discussion on their learning. Postings made by student-teachers who did not return a consent form were excluded from the analysis, yielding a data set consisting of posts from 40 student-teachers.

These data sets of student-teacher posts were analysed using an inductive coding strategy associated with grounded theoretic approaches to data analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) in order to model the forms of thinking apparent in the student-teacher posts. Since the student-teachers had been explicitly required to engage with a range of academic and political literature, the researchers were aware of the range of views that the student-teachers were likely to comment upon, as well as of previous theoretical models developed to account for different conceptions of the purposes of history. Some of those models, such as Rösen’s typology of forms of historical consciousness used to provide an ‘orientation in time’ (Rösen, 2005) or the promotion of ‘community cohesion’ (Cantle, 2001) were even referred to explicitly by the student-teachers. However, our analytical categories emerged through an iterative process, as our ideas were compared, refined and then tested against the

data from the student groups and our categories were rooted in the student-teachers' own conceptions and expressions of these academic, educational and political ideas, rather than being derived directly from any single previous model.

Since the student-teachers were encouraged through the discussion to respond to each other's ideas, presenting challenges to their thinking as well as endorsement or ideas that would promote development, attention was paid both to their positive arguments – the views that they advanced or explicitly endorsed – and to arguments that they rejected or actively challenged. All relevant data within each student-teacher post was categorised and each different argument was only counted once within each post.

DATA AND DISCUSSION

Thirteen codes were developed as a result of the processes described above and these thirteen codes were able to account comprehensively for the arguments presented in the data set. Table I below names, defines and exemplifies these codes.

The codes give an indication of the range of ideas that the student-teachers referenced positively and negatively in their discussions. When coding student-teacher posts, we counted ideas only once in each post. An idea was coded as positive ('1'), when it was considered and affirmed, or negative ('-1'), when it was considered and rejected, allowing the incidence and priority of arguments in the data set as a whole to be scoped. The following illustrations, extracted from different student-teacher posts, exemplify, first, a positive and, second, a negative coding in relation to the 'fascination / aesthetic appeal' code.

The purpose of school history should be to pursue the past for pleasure.

(Example of an idea coded positively)

Although I understand your line of argument in terms of the enriching and colourful body of knowledge that history can offer us all... I have to question how much this can justify why we need to teach history to the young people of today.

(Example of an idea coded negatively)

Table II presents totals for the number of times that particular ideas appeared in the data sets, yielding overall positive and negative totals for each code. It also shows the number of student-teachers who made positive or negative references to ideas of each

kind. Data is presented in descending order by the number of student-teachers making positive choices.

Table II identifies some very striking patterns of positive and negative preference in the data set. The majority of the student-teachers argued that history was important because it was useful – substantively, in helping to make sense of the present (65%), or formally, in developing students' transferable skills (60%). The following post exemplifies these arguments:

It is becoming ever more important to understand our history and the history of the world to make any sense of our world as it is today. History develops the ability to think critically and to analyse information about the past, and therefore, gives pupils the opportunity to transfer these skills to the present... These skills could be taught in other subject areas... but there is no subject with as rich content to sharpen these tools as History.³

The idea that history might serve identity formation and citizenship in the present had convinced advocates and a strong presence in the data sets, exemplified by the following post:

The study of history provides a context for students to help shape their identity... It enables them to step away from a world view fashioned by family, friends and the media, giving them the opportunity to try on another one. They can then take elements from these other world views and choose whether to incorporate them into their own, or not.

In addition... learning from the successes of those in the past can inspire students and give them 'more room for hope and a better sense of themselves as agents of that hope.' (Barton and Levstik 2004) If you believe school is about developing informed, 'responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society', (QCA, 2007) then the study of history cannot be left out.⁴

A striking feature of the data in Table II, however, is the fact that ideas such as these were referenced negatively more frequently than positively and the fact that the critics of these ideas outnumbered their advocates. The following extract exemplifies posts taking a negative stance on both citizenship and national identity arguments.

We are not training as history teachers merely to support a Citizenship programme or to help Jack Straw develop his 'inclusive British story' (Straw, 2007, May). School history should not become the plaything of politicians.

Table I. Codes developed to analyse the arguments deployed by the student-teachers when considering the purpose of school history

Code	Explanation School history is valuable:	Illustration
Knowledge and understanding of the past (KP)	Because it enables students to acquire knowledge about the past (without further explanation).	<i>[A]n interest in the past and a desire to increase knowledge and understanding is a good thing,</i>
Understanding of the present (UP)	Because it is a source of knowledge that enables students to make sense of the world in which they live.	<i>[B]y helping... students to place themselves within some sort of context, e.g. immigration... then we have gone some way to giving our subject an important role within the curriculum.</i>
National identity / pride (NI)	As an instrument for promoting national identity and / or pride in national identity. <i>(Pride is not an essential component of this category)</i>	<i>I think history in schools serves an important role in educating young people in what it means to be British. Without wishing to sound overly jingoistic, I think young people should be proud to be British and of this country's past.</i>
Group identity (GI)	As a means of establishing the identity of particular groups and/or strengthening the confidence and/or pride of those groups <i>(Pride is not an essential component of this category)</i>	<i>It is a way for minority groups to be empowered [sic]</i>
Personal identity / pride (PI)	As an instrument for promoting personal identity and / or pride in personal identity. <i>(Pride is not an essential component of this category)</i>	<i>[H]istory does... allow pupils to develop an idea of identity through connections to multiple groups, their own country, local history etc.</i>
Citizenship / Community Cohesion (CC)	As an instrument for promoting community cohesion and commitment to democratic values.	<i>If you believe school is about developing informed, 'responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society', (NC 2008) then the study of history cannot be left out.</i>
Prudential uses of history (PRu)	Because it helps us to learn from the past – how to avoid repeating the same mistakes or to understand the impact of particular kinds of action	<i>Through this, history can also instil morals/values by teaching the implications of certain actions. Students should be able to draw parallels between different events in history to perhaps predict the outcome of future actions</i>
Understanding difference (UD)	Because it broadens students' conceptions of what it means to be human; it enables them to look beyond their own experience and current context and appreciate other possibilities and ways of seeing the world	<i>It helps us have an appreciation of where others come from and why they may view things differently to yourself.</i>
Historical consciousness (HC)	Because it enables students to understand living in time. The temporal dimension spans past, present and future	<i>With history we are able to identify what is transient and what is enduring and where we stand in the flow of time.</i>
Transferable / generic skills (TG)	Because it helps students develop useful transferable and / or generic skills.	<i>[T]he skills... can be described as nothing but beneficial to a student's academic career even if they forget the information...</i>
Intellectual maturity (IM)	Because it contributes to the development of pupils' intellectual and / or personal maturity.	<i>It is a tremendously demanding intellectual endeavour that sharpens the mind and builds up our 'intellectual muscles'.</i>
Disciplinary knowledge (DK)	Because it enables students to master history specific concepts and forms of thinking.	<i>Developing increased awareness of the nature of how evidence is used to support a claim... and other meta historical concepts and processes... are certainly things that... any successful history student... gain as a by-product of studying history...</i>
Fascination/ aesthetic appeal (FA)	Because of its intrinsic interest and power to affect students.	<i>[H]istory should be about engaging with the past with excitement, and the beauty of history.</i>

Table II. The incidence of ideas contained in student-teacher posts identified under each code and the numbers of student-teachers making positive and negative references to ideas about the purposes of school history, expressed as counts and as percentages

Code	Positive instances	Negative instances	Student-teachers making positive references N = 40		Student-teachers making negative references N = 40	
			Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Understanding of the present (UP)	37	-2	26	65	2	5
Transferable / generic skills (TG)	37	-13	24	60	7	17.5
Knowledge and understanding of the past (KP)	26	-2	20	50	2	5
Fascination / aesthetic appeal (FA)	28	-1	17	42.5	1	2.5
Historical consciousness (HC)	20	0	15	37.5	0	0
Disciplinary knowledge (DK)	21	-4	13	32.5	3	7.5
Personal identity / pride (PI)	13	-4	11	27.5	4	10
National identity / pride (NI)	13	-23	10	25	16	40
Citizenship / Community Cohesion (CC)	16	-17	9	22.5	12	30
Understanding difference (UD)	12	0	9	22.5	0	0
Prudential uses of history (PRu)	8	0	8	20	0	0
Intellectual maturity (IM)	9	0	7	17.5	0	0
Group identity (GI)	5	-1	5	12.5	1	2.5

The students' ideas were often complex, as the existing research literature might lead us to expect, and there were cases where student-teachers both advocated and criticised the same ideas. It was not uncommon to find student-teachers referencing a wide range of ideas, as in the following post, coded as making positive reference to eight different purposes.

The purpose of school history is to provide our students with both the enthusiasm and passion to understand and explore the past as well as equipping them with the disciplinary skills central to historical thinking... As Arthur has himself argued... history is 'vital' as a subject because of its ability to develop within our students their own ability to understand themselves historically as both 'individuals and as interpersonal groups and collectives'... [H]istory enables pupils to make sense of the present experience - as we are aware a key aim for the National Curriculum is to develop pupils into conscious citizens... [T]he purpose of history in terms of developing essential skills can also be supported. Through 'thinking historically' students are able to ask ques-

tions about the past as well as thinking critically about the stories they come into contact with. Furthermore, as discussed by John Tosh, such thinking can also help students 'to understand human problems as problems in time'. This shows the importance in helping pupils develop a sense of period. In order to succeed in the above aims... school history should make learning and students' understanding of their world interesting and engaging. Through the past's wealth of stories, we as history teachers, are in a... position to enthuse the younger generation in developing their own historical consciousness.

Despite their diversity, the ideas we coded were related – most clearly in the case of the three identity codes but also in the case of the 'historical consciousness' and 'disciplinary knowledge' codes, which both relate to historical thinking. Other codes relate to the substance of the past – to its inherent interest (the aesthetic and knowledge codes). Suggestive patterns of inter-relationship between codes emerge when their relationships are explored by student-teacher, as the following observations show:

- Twenty-one student-teachers (52.5%) made positive reference to ideas coded as 'citizenship/community cohesion' or as 'identity' (of any kind) and just under half (10) of these student-teachers made no reference to ideas coded under the 'historical consciousness' or 'disciplinary knowledge' codes;
- Of the 20 student-teachers (50%) who made positive reference to ideas coded as 'historical consciousness' or 'disciplinary knowledge', just under half (9) made no positive reference to ideas coded as 'citizenship/community cohesion' or 'identity' (of any kind) and seven of these student-teachers account for 21 of the 28 negative references to these ideas in the data set.

The post making a positive case for history serving citizenship and identity cited above exemplifies the first of these two types of argument. The following exemplifies the latter, weaving together disciplinary and historical consciousness arguments, and also exemplifies posts critical of simplistic 'knowledge' arguments for the value of school history.

[I]t seems simple to know what school history *is not*... I know, for example, that school history is not a tool to be used to craft a consensual (and perhaps complicit) sense of national identity, based either upon grand national narratives or 'common values.' (Straw, 2007, May) I know school history is not simply about skills, of mastering 'single track activities' for later application, nor is about factual knowledge and information retention alone (Lee, 2005). School history is... about giving students opportunities to investigate, interpret and develop understandings of human experience within time. This in itself is a worthwhile... project, even without considering the usefulness... of the discipline's necessary skill set... [I]t should be about demonstrating the value of the enduring over the ephemeral, the truly significant over the immediately pressing (whatever else our everyday culture might suggest); the weight and heft of human action, inaction and chance.

It seems clear that for a substantial proportion of the student-teachers, at least, there was a clear dichotomy between ideas that one might associate with Barton and Levstik's analytical stance towards the past, represented here by the 'historical consciousness' and 'disciplinary knowledge' codes, and ideas that one might associate with Barton and Levstik's 'identification stance', represented here by the 'citizenship/community cohesion' code and by the 'identity' codes.

As we have seen, the two codes that encapsulated the largest number of student-teacher posts were 'understanding of the present' (26 student-teachers) and 'transferable/generic skills' (24 student-teachers). Seventeen of these student-teachers (42.5% of the data set total) made no reference to ideas coded under the two historical thinking codes ('disciplinary knowledge' and 'historical consciousness') and ten of these seventeen (25% of the data set total) made no reference either to ideas coded under the 'citizenship/community cohesion' or 'identity' codes. Two subgroups are apparent within this last group of student-teachers:

- those who made reference to understanding the present and / or to transferable skills and who also highlighted the inherent importance of knowledge of the past and the importance of aesthetic considerations or the inherent interest or fascination of the past; and
- those who focused solely on uses of history in aiding understanding the present, providing transferable skills or providing lessons that could be drawn upon prudentially.

The following extracts exemplify these posts. The first example was coded as advocating history in terms of its inherent fascination and appeal, and in terms of the transferable skills and intellectual maturity that it can develop.

I believe history matters for three main reasons. The knowledge makes us feel less ignorant and better about ourselves, it gives us the skill of problem solving, and it quenches our thirst for curiosity about the past... My Dad... always said 'if you don't know about the history of the world, you won't know where you stand in it. You will make yourself feel less significant, you won't see that you're part of a bigger picture, and that any action you take, may leave an imprint that may never be forgotten.'... I suppose this has elements of Claire Fox's idea of studying history for the sake of it. But what it's leaving out are the skills one can gain through history... problem solving, which is a valuable skill in life... I believe history also satisfies one's curiosity about how people behaved, lived, worked etc. in the past... I find the distant past fascinating... and can only wonder what life would be like in 1000 years' time. What would I do with history?

And the second was coded as advocating history as a tool for understanding the present and in prudential terms.

History provides us with a way of viewing and understanding the world. It makes us understand how we as a civilisation have reached this point, and gives greater awareness of the world around us. As Tosh states history cannot be used simply to 'avoid the mistakes of the past' as past events are unique and non-comparable. History can however provide some insight into how to approach certain matters happening in the world... 'Placing History' highlights this with some extracts from a student being asked [if] his A Level course... was useful: 'It became quite relevant when it came to war, as empire expansion involved interfering in another country, overthrowing the leader and conquering. With the will to get involved in the Iraqi conflict you can see the qualities of getting involved on other countries' business still very evident'.

CONCLUSION

The data and analysis presented in this paper both have clear limitations. One relates to our sample. The cohort of student-teachers who took part in this discussion exercise was exceptionally well-qualified and the group was unusually large; it was metropolitan in character and the views that it presented will, inevitably, have been shaped, at least to some degree, by the characteristics of the particular course that they were studying. It would clearly be rash to seek to generalise from the sample presented here. A further limitation relates to time: things change very rapidly in history teacher education in England – as the five national curricula that we have had in the last 24 years demonstrate. We would very probably find a different range of arguments were we to repeat this exercise again today.⁵ Nevertheless, the data that we have presented in this paper are unique – particularly given the limitations of the existing research on student-teachers' thinking – and highly suggestive in a range of ways, as we will now show.

A clear conclusion that emerges from our analysis is that the majority of the student-teachers who took part in this discussion were either actively hostile to the kinds of argument for history that have been particularly prominent in recent national discussions of the nature and purpose of history education or were minded to offer rationales for school history that contrasted with such arguments and that often rejected the terms in which the national debate has typically been conducted.⁶

Thus, for example, in contrast to the contentions that school history should be about repairing (or, perhaps more accurately, 'imagining' (Straw, 2007, May))

'the cord of our national memory' (Schama, 2010, November 9), that school history should be about providing children with a 'collective memory of' the 'past and how Britain came to be what it is' (Field, 2009, August 31) and that school history should be about providing 'children the opportunity to hear our island story' (Gove, 2010), we find many of these able young history teachers making arguments such as those found in the following two extracts' from different student-teachers' posts':

The only history that will indoctrinate an increasingly heterogeneous society and create a new island 'identity' for us all would be a sham history.

Becoming good at history means fighting our instincts to get involved in the narrative and immediately starting to pick things apart, deconstructing an argument, developing a theoretical framework through which we can interpret a phenomenon, and other 'unnatural acts'.

As has been noted above, a minority of the student-teachers' comments were coded as arguing that 'school history' was fundamentally 'for' the kind of identity engineering purposes that are often advocated by politicians of the right and left, as in the following case:

National boundaries have existed for centuries and are here to stay... We remain, as a nation, distinct from those around us. I think history has an important role to play in promoting our political and cultural uniqueness. This uniqueness is something to be proud of and I think it's worth teaching young people about.

However, and as we have seen, many of the student-teachers were actively hostile to arguments like these and often objected to them in ways that suggested that these arguments directly conflicted with their academic identities and with their sense of the discipline that they were preparing to teach, as the following post suggests:

History's job is to seek the truth, while knowing that this can never be fully realised. Its job is to unsettle and to challenge myth in the light of logical argument and evidence (Sam Wineburg). Beyond that, history cannot aim for specific goals such as the strengthening of democracy, good citizens or a harmonious nation. The role of history is to critique the concepts of nationhood, democracy and citizenship... to explore what they mean to people and how they actually function. One conclusion may be that these are in fact myths designed to legitimise a modern

style of government. History cannot guarantee any of the goals of a liberal democracy, or of any sort of power structure, but I would argue that to skew history so that it does try to fulfil those aims (as the National Curriculum and Jack Straw would like it to) or to abandon history in favour of citizenship... would be to abandon the search for what is true in favour of what is politically useful... This may seem benign today in Britain but as all historians know, it may not stay benign for long.

The student-teachers were, as we have seen, very willing to argue for the use of history – intrinsically, through the provision of knowledge that would help pupils make sense of the world, and extrinsically, as a source of valuable intellectual abilities and skills: as we have seen these were the two most popular arguments advanced in the discussions. Many student-teachers were also happy to argue for the intrinsic and inherent value of historical knowledge or simply to argue that it was important to acquire historical knowledge (an argument found in 20 of the 40 student-teachers' arguments). Many (17) student-teachers were also very happy to argue that the aesthetic appeal and inherent fascination of the human past justified history's presence on school timetables, as the following case shows:

History can give you adventure, romance, and tragedy perhaps like no other subject can. This should be embraced more so than ever in schools... the human experience is fascinating... Some may feel that history has more purpose than this... But, it can play all the other roles as well.

It is unsurprising, of course, that a sense of the importance of historical knowledge and / or a love of the past should figure prominently in the arguments for history advanced by pre-service history teachers. It should be noted, however, that these arguments in-

variably occurred alongside the other arguments that we have mentioned and that none of the 40 student-teachers whose online posts were analysed in this paper argued for history on those grounds alone.

Our data allow us to present a detailed and variegated picture of a range of ideas held by well-qualified pre-service history teachers and are, in a sense, inherently valuable simply for this reason. Our findings may, perhaps, have a wider value, in drawing attention to an essential ingredient in all history teaching, and one that tends frequently to be passed over by policy makers who sometimes appear to imagine that they can change the world simply by changing curriculum documents. If history curricula are to be taught by history graduates then, it would seem, a number of consequences follow. A degree in history is a degree in a discipline with characteristic 'habits of mind' (*Subject Benchmark Statement: History*). As recent research on history undergraduate students' perceptions of school history curricula suggests (Collins, 2011), history graduates are likely to be highly sensitised to perspectives and to the ways in which the past can be contested and used to achieve particular aims in the present.

Perhaps we can conclude that curriculum projects that seek to mobilise school history in service of national narrative in its 'island story' (Gove, 2010) or 'British identity' (Straw, 2007, May; Hansard, 2009) genres, are unlikely to find favour with undergraduates and postgraduates trained in the discipline of history (Collins, 2011; Evans, 2011; Megill, 2007; Tosh, 2008; Wineburg, 2001; Wineburg, 2007). History curriculum proposals of these kinds are likely, perhaps, to remain simply that – curriculum proposals. To become curricula that are realised in practice they need to be capable of being owned, valued and developed by graduates trained in the modes of thinking and knowing characteristic of the discipline of history.

NOTAS

1. The student-teachers had been engaged with this debate in the first two weeks of their course, in September 2009, through a discussion board focused on the question 'What history should we be teaching children?' The question of the nature and purposes of school history arose with some frequency over the course of the year in response to the on-going national debate on this issue in the press.
2. We would like to take this opportunity to thank our colleagues Ros Ashby, Professor Chris Husbands, Alison Kitson, Peter Lee and Flora Wilson, for taking part in the face to face and or the online components of this exercise.
3. This student-teacher was also critical of 'identity' arguments for history. Those elements of this post have been omitted because similar arguments are addressed below.
4. Citations in student-teacher posts have been corrected.
5. We are currently engaged in a series of studies with student-teachers on different training programmes, seeking among other things, to determine the extent to which the ideas that pre-service history teachers have about the nature and purpose of school history vary with time.

6. Although many of the student-teachers accepted the terms in which the public debate had been framed, a number challenged them, for example and as the post extract below shows, by rejecting the opposition be-

tween 'knowledge' and 'skills' that is a frequent *topos* in political rhetoric:

Surely... the study [of] history demands a wealth of skills and knowledge that are fundamental to a better

life, and that are both intrinsic to history... Gaining these intrinsic skills is history, and so is the scholarship and the books. One cannot exist without the other.

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