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ATTITUDES TO HISTORY AND SENSES OF THE PAST AMONG
GRADE 12 LEARNERS IN A SELECTION OF SCHOOLS IN THE
DURBAN AREA, 2004: A PILOT STUDY

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the School of Human and Social Studies in the
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

by

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DECEMBER 2004

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature:  Date: 15/12/2004

ABSTRACT

This study explores attitudes to school history and ‘senses of the past’ among a sample of Grade 12 learners in a selection of six schools in the Durban area. It traces the history of history education in South Africa from its formal introduction to the Cape Colony in 1839 to the debates surrounding the revision of the history syllabus and the introduction of Curriculum 2005 in the present day. It makes the point that the context within which school history in South Africa arose and developed has led history education authorities to view school history as a subject with ‘problems’ for which they need to find ‘solutions’ from the top down. Thus, learners who come to school with an insufficient knowledge or awareness of the past must be encouraged to become more ‘historically aware’.

Recent developments within western academic history have led a number of historians to acknowledge the significance of histories produced outside the realms of the academy. Some of their literature points to complex and diverse ways in which ordinary people make and use the past in their everyday lives. These developments are of particular relevance when one considers learners at school because school history education authorities have given very little attention to the ways in which learners make and use histories in their everyday lives.

This study set out to explore whether further investigations into learners’ attitudes to history, their senses of the past and the relationship between the two would be a valuable line of enquiry for future research. It concludes that adolescents are just as much ‘producers’ of pasts as they are ‘learners’ of history and that far from showing how little learners know about the past, these senses tell us much about how learners feel in the present.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to extend my thanks to the following academics who were so willing to help me when I was struggling to set up the early stages of my practical research:

- * Professor Robert Morrell for his advice on research in schools
- * Johan Wasserman for his advice on the structure and administering of questionnaires
- * Professor John Aitchison for his advice on sampling.

Finally, I wish to thank my supervisor Professor John Wright for being so thorough in his task and good-humoured in his nature. Your help over the last two years has been very much appreciated.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: HOW THIS STUDY AROSE AND DEVELOPED

In all communities, children are educated and socialised into the values, traditions, rules and norms that characterise and govern their particular societies. They are being socialised, in effect, into conventions, skills and laws, which have, for the most part, been founded in previous developments; in other words, children are socialised into the traces of the past. In the modern, western world, since the late nineteenth century, much of this activity has been concentrated around the system of state education, and more particularly, around the subject of school history. Furedi has argued that

the very emergence of history as an academic discipline [during the nineteenth century] and a central feature of the school syllabus in advanced capitalist societies reflected the conviction of the ruling classes that history could act as a cohesive force against the destabilising consequences of industrialisation. Authorities concerned with the maintenance of the established order have long placed great emphasis on history education. They regard it as providing vital moral inspiration and as helping to forge a sense of national identity in the face of disintegrative trends or subversive influences (Furedi, 1992:19).

What this suggests is that school history has, in part, been a useful tool which helps the state to condition 'learners' (by learning through past example) into mature, independent adults and responsible, loyal, obedient citizens. It helps to teach children about what behaviour is considered acceptable by the dominant view in their societies and what is frowned upon, about the types of qualities that are celebrated and remembered and those that will not be tolerated. Through the study of history in schools, children can be taught about how their societies prefer to remember their past and how these societies came to be in the present.

But school history is not the only (nor is it necessarily the most influential) force which helps children to establish a foundation of past knowledge and values. Their parents, families, religion, ethnic group, peers, communities and cultures all potentially play an important role in shaping and developing the ways in which children perceive, remember and think about the

past. Thus there is a potential source of conflict between the various ways in which children experience the past in their everyday lives, and the official 'historical consciousness' which they are expected to develop as learners through the study of history at school. This study sets out to explore the points at which these two 'forces' overlap. What 'senses of the past' do learners acquire as a result of this interaction between their experiences of the past in the everyday and history as taught and learnt as a subject at school?

But this research did not begin with this aim. In order for me to pursue this line of enquiry, I first had to undergo a radical shift in my own thoughts and views. This chapter will trace the developments and changes in my own thinking around this topic in an attempt to provide a background to why and how this study evolved, and in doing so, to outline what it hopes to achieve. It starts with my own concerns over the diminishing status of history as a subject in South African schools.

The declining popularity of school history amongst South African learners

'Why are you taking history?' I was asked by many of my peers, 'It's boring and irrelevant, and won't be of any use to you after school.' (This attitude was held by some of my adult acquaintances as well.) The last three decades in South Africa have seen growing concern amongst history teachers and other history education authorities over the declining number of learners wishing to take history as a subject through to Matric level (Atuahene-Sarpong, 1992; Department of Education, 2000; Gunn, 1990). In the last six years alone, national figures from the Department of Education show that the proportion of history learners entered for the Senior Certificate Examination in South Africa has dropped by over ten percent. In KwaZulu-Natal, the number of candidates entered to write the Senior Certificate History Examination has almost halved since 1998. In 1998, 38.8% of learners registered to write the Natal Senior Certificate Examinations in KwaZulu-Natal were writing History as one of their exams. By 2003, this figure had dropped to 22,3 % (a 16.5% drop in the proportion of learners registered to write the KwaZulu-Natal Senior Certificate History Examination between 1998 and 2003, see Appendix 1) (Venter, 2004).

But it is not only the school history classrooms that have experienced a decline in learner numbers. Universities around the country have also seen a significant drop in history student numbers over recent years. In an article 'Tensions within the Practice of History' a senior South African historian, Paul Maylam (1995), remarks, 'It appears that the number of school pupils choosing history as a Matric subject is declining. And history enrolments at many South African universities are static or falling' (1995:5). Contemplating the future of the South African Historical Society in 1997, Johan Bergh who was president of the society at the time, commented on the 'diminishing numbers of school pupils and university students taking history' (Bergh, 1997:159), and observed that '[r]ecently, many schools have completely phased history out as a subject for matriculation' (Bergh, 1997:160). This has created much concern for many historians who are worried about the future of their discipline and a shortage of young historians willing to fill their shoes (see also Bickford-Smith, 1990; Morrow, 2000, and Nuttall and Wright, 2000).

There has been much speculation by history teachers, historians and other history education authorities in South Africa over why learners and students are seemingly turning their backs on history. In 1983, prompted, by 'the growing crisis over the teaching of history in South African schools' during the 1970s, members of the Schools History Education Committee (established by a number of history teachers in Natal in 1979, in an attempt to improve the teaching and learning of history in schools) Owen van den Berg and Peter Buckland, conducted a study into the possible reasons for and the decline in 'the popularity of history as a school subject'. They suggested the following possible reasons why pupils (now termed learners) were choosing not to study history as a subject to Matric:

- the status of history in the school curriculum is low (it is seen as a subject for less able candidates and is perceived to be unhelpful in the job market)
- the history examination encourages rote learning
- the syllabus is repetitive
- the way history is taught is teacher-centred with the learners as passive recipients
- syllabuses are overloaded
- textbooks are too heavily relied upon in the classroom
- the material selected is too Eurocentric and also concentrates too heavily on military, political and biographical history
- the purposes of history are seen to be inappropriate
 - history is seen as a factual subject rather than an interpretative one
 - school history in South Africa is seen as part of a socio-political ideological plan

- history teachers often do not have an adequate academic background in the discipline
- teacher training encourages teachers to present history as a fixed body of knowledge (adapted from van den Berg and Buckland, 1983:2-4).

In his thesis “‘Why I like history...” Ciskeian Secondary School Pupils Attitudes towards history’, presented in 1992, Atuahene-Sarpong attributed the decrease in the number of pupils doing history to ‘the multiplicity of new subjects introduced in the school curriculum and some peculiar subject combinations in some schools’ (Atuahene-Sarpong:1992, ii) thereby limiting learners in their choice of subject package. In 1995, Stephen Lowry argued that ‘history at school level is under threat. It is common knowledge that candidate numbers are falling, and that history does not compete with the more utilitarian subjects such as mathematics and science’ (113). And in December 2000, the report of the History and Archaeology Panel set up by the then Minister of Education, Kader Asmal to investigate the status of history teaching in schools, found the following:

There is notably poor quality teaching taking place in many schools nationally, in both urban and rural sectors. In the Northern Province and also in many schools in Gauteng, it is reliably reported that teachers are continuing to work from apartheid era textbooks, invariably without a glimmer of consciousness that there is anything flawed about such materials. What aggravates the situation is that...there is a general and pervasive discrediting of history as a subject...History teaching has suffered from the corrosive effects of rationalisation ...the absorption of history into the Human and Social Sciences grid by Curriculum 2005 is commonly perceived as confirming the marginality or even irrelevance of the discipline (Department of Education, 2000).

Whilst all of these factors and findings are likely to contribute to the unpopularity of history as a Matric subject amongst South African school learners, perhaps more directly relevant to the recent past is South African historian G.R. Allen’s suggestion that ‘the decline in history’s status (and popularity) as a school subject is connected to the perception of history as an “establishment” tool’ (Allen, 2000:291). This view is strongly supported by Tim Nuttall and John Wright who argue that in universities, students are ‘turning away from history because it is seen as a subject that is too politicised’. In the same article ‘Probing the Predicaments of Academic History in South Africa’ they cite Isabel Hofmeyr, who described learners as having ‘an “allergy” to history’. Nuttall and Wright argue that ‘[f]or many students...white and black alike [history] is potentially a source of discomfort and embarrassment’ (2000:28).

They explain that

[i]t points too directly to the era of apartheid, with all the bullying, oppression, degradation and humiliation that went with it. For these students, much more important than keeping the memory of apartheid alive is -understandably - the business of qualifying for jobs, and preferably for jobs which will bring material wealth and social status (Nuttall and Wright, 2000:28).

But despite the credibility and relevance of these views, I have come across very few studies that have actually asked for the opinions of the learners and students themselves (see Chapter Two: Atuahene-Sarpong, 1992 and Vena, 1987). As Chapter Two will argue, the nature of the particular historical forces which have shaped the development of South African history education has meant that historians, history teachers and other authorities involved in history education have tended to view learner dissatisfactions with school history education firstly as ‘problems’, and secondly as problems which can be solved from the top-down, by focussing attention on the development of history pedagogy. By and large they have tended to overlook the opportunity to investigate the direct experience of the learners involved. When I first began this study, I too saw the decline in history learner numbers as a ‘problem’ which needed to be solved. Consequently, my aim was to investigate why learners appeared to be rejecting school history so that history education authorities could find innovative ways to encourage them back. I thought that, rather than working from speculation, a more concrete understanding of learners’ thoughts and views would provide history education authorities with greater insight into the current state of school history education. My study, I felt, was unique because it aimed to target both learners who had chosen history as a Matric subject (history learners) and those who had not (non-history learners). All the studies which I had come across focussed their attention solely on the attitudes that history learners had towards this subject. The attitudes which non-history learners had towards school history and their reasons for choosing other subjects instead of history remained unexplored, and seemed therefore to offer a promising field for research.

Not only did I want to know why non-history learners had chosen not to study history as a subject to Matric, I also wanted to know if (and if so, how) these non-history learners used the past to make sense of their lives in the present? If they were not drawing on the body of historical knowledge which would have been offered to them at school, in what other ways

did non-history learners develop a sense of the past? Did they listen to stories told to them by their parents and grandparents, did they relate to the history of their community or ethnic group as told to them by their leaders or elders, or were they more concerned with the national history being promoted by government organisations and the heritage industries? What role did popular culture and the mass media play in developing learners' senses of the past? Did these learners even have a conscious sense of the past at all? As Allen says,

Many historians make the unfounded assumption that academic history is the prime moulding force acting on historical consciousness...there are many potential sources from which historical consciousness may be formed (2000:299).

But although I recognised that school history was not the only force which helps children to establish a foundation of past knowledge and values, I nevertheless assumed that people cannot really make sense of their lives in the present unless they had a factually 'accurate' understanding of the past. I assumed that since more and more learners appeared to be choosing not to study history as a subject to Matric, there were therefore, presumably, more and more learners who did not have a particularly 'accurate' factual knowledge of history or the past. I also assumed that history learners drew on their school book understanding of the past to make sense of their lives in the present and that non-history learners held an 'inaccurate' sense of the past, and were consequently misled in their understanding of the present, until their perceptions were corrected through the institutional study of history. In broad terms, I thought that if we could understand and address learners' objections to school history, more learners could be persuaded to take history as a subject to Matric and therefore benefit from its pursuit.

What I had not yet recognised, and what I learnt from further study, was that the teaching of history in schools, indeed, in universities, is of fairly recent origin. The fact that institutional history has become the authority through which adult generations in western societies teach their children to understand their past and presumably use this understanding to make sense of their lives in the present, does not necessarily mean that this is the only way in which children are socialised or have historically been socialised into the dominant understanding of the past held by their societies. Nor can we ignore the fact that people develop and use their own perceptions and understandings of the past in their everyday lives, whether they are

academically credible or not.

To make this argument clear, it is necessary to set it against the backdrop of change and development which has recently unsettled the discipline of academic history and preoccupied the minds of many academic historians throughout the western world. Over the course of the twentieth century, the relatively recent phenomenon of 'institutional' history has seen an increasing number of challenges to its constitution and purpose which seek to query the very foundations upon which the institutional forms of academic and school history are built. In order to comprehend these developments, it is necessary to understand the context out of which institutional history arose and to ask what processes have resulted in institutional history becoming so detached from the activity of history making in the everyday.

History within the academy

It was only during the second half of the nineteenth century, that history in the western world began to come into its own as an academic discipline.

First in Germany and gradually elsewhere; professional journals and associations were founded and the free field of the eighteenth century where amateurs had been almost sole masters became fenced in, reserved for the deeper plowing of the specialist (Stern, 1974:16).

The transformation of history into a professional, scientific discipline can be seen as a direct result of the particular political conditions of nineteenth Western Europe. Stern writes:

It has often been remarked that the nineteenth century was the political age par excellence: the great issues from the French Revolution to the Reform Bills in England and the successful unifications of Italy and Germany - all were political in essence and the political agitation was charged with the memory of past triumphs or dangers (Stern, 1974:18).

'The national movements of Europe...raised history into prominence...gave a great impulse to its study' (Bury in Stern, 1974:213) and inspired the composition of a wealth of popular, nationalist histories. Thus Iggers argues that 'the new historical profession served definite public needs and political aims' (Iggers:1997, 23).

But the nineteenth century was not only a century of nationalism and politics. It also grew out of an age of science, reason and development, pushed home by the industrial revolution which spread across Europe during the course of the century. Historians too were swept up in the enthusiasm for science and the validation which 'scientific method' could bring. Strongly influenced by the writings and teachings of the German historian, Leopold von Ranke, western historians began to see themselves as specialists whose task it was to discover the true secrets of the past with scientific accuracy. Thus even at the birth of academic history, a tension existed over its nature and purpose. On the one hand, there were the political and popular needs of the nation, which looked to history and academic historians to provide a supportive unifying force by encouraging national identity through collective memory, and justified their very existence as state-funded professionals (Iggers, 1997:28). On the other was the desire by professional historians for an objective, scientific investigation of the past which (it was thought) would yield accurate historical accounts (Iggers, 1997:23). By the end of the twentieth century, this tension between an objective ideal and a subjective reality would be at the forefront of the thinking surrounding western historiography.

The early part of the twentieth century was characterised in the western world by a general sense of confidence and faith in the success and progress of the future. Scientific advancements and technological developments encouraged the belief that civilisation could only go forward. But by the middle of the century, after two world wars, a devastating economic depression and the horrors of Hiroshima and the Holocaust, the West found itself in a far less optimistic position. Speaking generally of the western intellectual scene, Furedi explains

The [second world] war had undermined attachments to the past and to tradition and had discredited the concepts of nationalism and national destiny. Precisely these values had been closely identified with...fascism and the perceived causes of war. [This association] forced explicit conservative ideas to the margins of social thought...Nationalism, race, Western superiority, imperialism, virtually the entire political vocabulary of the right was put under critical scrutiny (Furedi, 1992:128,130).

As the Soviet communist and nuclear threats of the Cold War began to permeate the certainties of western society, the afterglow of victory began to fade. The advances of science and technology had not brought about progress, development and success, they had brought

tragedy, destruction and fear. A reaction against the establishment was almost inevitable. In the words of Furedi

During the 1960s, establishment values were ridiculed and rejected by an active minority of young people. This was the period where nothing appeared sacred. National traditions were mocked and authority became more and more questioned...For the first time there were no popular optimistic visions of the future. Science and modernity had lost its mystique (Furedi, 1992:152).

As these Grand Narratives of modernity fell from grace, alternative narratives clamoured to be heard and civil rights movements, feminist marches and anti-war protests dominated the western streets. With these new narratives came new histories as feminists, ethnic and minority groups and newly independent ex-colonial states struggled to find their own identities. The preeminent nationalist, political history of the great, white man suddenly found itself disputed.

In the 1970s and 80s, new areas of enquiry and specialisation emerged in western university history departments to cater for changing student interests (Kaye, 1991:21). But their emphasis on competing histories placed a question mark over the ability of historians to provide their readers with a true account of the past, and a new postmodernist philosophy was rapidly gaining strength. It suggested that 'there is no final narrative to which everything is reducible, but a variety of perspectives on the world, none of which can be privileged' (Rohmann, 2000:310).

Today, the Rankean aspiration that historians can tell their readers 'how it actually happened in the past' by providing them with an objective body of facts which has been scientifically obtained 'is generally considered to be unrealistic' (Burke, 1991:5-6). As Keith Jenkins points out, a distinction must now be made between the past as an unknowable reality and histories which offer interpretations derived from examining traces of the past (Jenkins, 1991:49). Postmodernist philosophy reinforces the notion that everything is context-bound (Berkhoefer, 1995). Lowenthal explains, for example, that when we read an historical account, we are not aware of what has been excluded, or what simply went without saying at the time (Lowenthal, 1996:114). Thus the sources and texts on which historians base their

accounts arise out of particular contexts in the past and we interpret these texts from our own subject positions in the present. In other words, historical documents and sources are constructed in a past reality which we can never really know or truly understand outside the text itself (Berkhoefer, 1995). This development has obviously also had implications for historians writing historical accounts in the present. They too are writing within a particular context, communicating a particular world view.

But, as Mark Poster has pointed out, '[t]he historian does not want to be reminded that texts intervene between him/herself and the historical moment, that texts have multiple meanings, and that reading them is not only an act of decoding but also an interpretation, one that relies in part on the historian's own situation' (1997:43). This would potentially challenge the scientific credibility and authenticity of their work. What then would prevent historical accounts from crossing into fiction (Munslow, 1997:164)? Nevertheless, as Burke argues '[h]owever hard we struggle to avoid the prejudices associated with colour, creed, class or gender, we cannot avoid looking at the past from a particular point of view' (1991:6). Motivated and influenced by historians own perceptions and needs in the present, Keith Jenkins points out that 'history is never for itself, it is always for someone' (1991:17).

History in the Everyday

From the early 1970s to the early 1990s, academic history in the west found itself facing another far more tangible challenge than the ones which, over the same period, were being presented in the theories of postmodernism. The number of history students registering to study history at western universities appeared to be in decline. In 1992, Frank Furedi wrote

historians on both sides of the Atlantic have long been preoccupied with what they regard as the crisis of their subject. Their concerns about the fragmentation and lack of direction in the study of history have gathered momentum over the past two decades, particularly in the USA, where historians have faced declining job opportunities...Historian James Turner noted that enrolments in history courses had plummeted and that faculties had vanished (Furedi, 1992:18).

Although this appears to have been a temporary trend in response to political and economic

conditions in the 1970s (Richard Evans makes this case for Britain in his book *In Defence of History* in 1997), and not a signal for the death of academic history, the ‘frustrating paradox’ pointed to by Harvey Kaye is that at the same time as the demand for history education and academic history was decreasing amongst the broader public, popular enthusiasm for the past was visibly increasing. In 1991, Kaye argued that

historians have failed to attend to on going changes and developments in the larger culture and, as a consequence, they have both lost their traditional (‘educated’) audiences and been out of touch with and unresponsive to the growing popular demands for the past which have been aggressively catered to by other interests (1991:35).

These ‘other interests’ took the form of new ‘sites’ of historical production: heritage industries which sought to preserve, display and promote whatever vestiges of the past they could lay their hands on; the return of 1960s fashion to western retail clothes racks, Hollywood blockbusters retelling great epics complete with the latest special effects, and reality television shows where contestants are expected to spend a month living as they did, say, in Victorian times or the Iron Age. Despite postmodernist assertions that nothing is real except our position in the present, the making use of histories, it would appear, is very much alive.

Some western historians such as Patrick Wright (1985), David Lowenthal (1985 and 1996), Raphael Samuel (1996), Greg Denning (1996), Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen (1998) have begun to investigate this swell of western enthusiasm for the traces of past. In 1985, Lowenthal wrote ‘The past is everywhere...Once confined to a handful of museums and antique shops, the trappings of history now festoon the whole country’ (1985:xv). This longing for the past is described by Furedi as a symptom of a fear of uncertainty in the present and a loss of confidence in the progress of the future. He explains that

The prevalence of an outlook that prizes the old and scorns the new implies a negative judgement on contemporary society. Nostalgia for the past, for the ‘good old days’, suggests a degree of disenchantment or at least lack of enthusiasm for life in the present (Furedi, 1992:18).

In other words people in western societies began to turn to the comfort of their own homemade pasts to guard them from insecurities in the present.

In their respective books, influenced by postmodernist thought and drawing on the idea that history is ‘a heteroglossia, defined as “varied and opposing voices”’ (Burke, 1991:6), the historians named above discuss the different ways in which histories are made and used by ordinary people in their everyday lives: as collective or individual memory (Wright, 1985) and nostalgia for a different world (Lowenthal, 1985, 1996); as entertainment (Samuel, 1996) and performance (Denning, 1996); as a means of connecting with relatives and continuing tradition (Rosenzweig and Thelen, 1998).

South African historians have taken longer to turn their attention towards other forms of history outside the academy. The country’s long colonial past, which was followed by an apartheid regime that consolidated white domination and the exploitation of a largely black working class, saw the emergence of resistance or ‘struggle’ histories which grew up in opposition to white domination and preoccupied the minds of many South African historians. As Nuttall and Wright explain, ‘Particularly since the 1950s and the intensification of political conflict, intellectual energies have cohered around bi-polar stances which supported or opposed racial domination’ (2000:30). But with the democratic elections in South Africa in 1994 the need for ‘struggle’ histories has fallen. As the nation turns its head towards reconciliation, South African historians have found themselves with more time to pursue new opportunities. Spurred on by declining student numbers and a concern for the future of the profession, some South African historians have begun to turn their attention to forms of history outside the academy. One of these new ‘sites’ is the making of histories in the public sphere inspired by the growth of a vibrant heritage industry in South Africa through which the nation is attempting to commemorate and remember its struggle for freedom against the apartheid regime (see Chapter Three).

Another area outside the academy where South African historians have shown concern is the issue of school history education. In his article ‘Tensions within the Practice of History’, Paul Maylam (1995) argues that one of the roles of an academic historian is to teach the students of history. But Maylam explains how emphasis on this area of their work often falls by the wayside as historians struggle to keep up with the demands of research and publishing placed on them as academics. He describes this as ‘the limitations imposed by academia’s

systems of incentives and rewards' (Maylam,1995:10) and argues that there are many other areas in society, apart from specialised historical research, in which historians can be involved. In particular, he mentions schools and the role that historians can play in the revision of school history syllabuses and textbooks, and debates on how to improve school history teaching.

In an article titled 'The Future of the South African Historical Society', Johan Bergh (1997) points to the aloofness which members of this society have shown towards history education at this level, and suggests that historians should take more of an interest in history education at secondary level. An article published as an official statement by the South African Historical Society (SAHS) in 1998 discusses what academic historians can do for school history, arguing that '[p]rofessional historians can play a critical role in bridging the gap between advances made in academic research and the history which is taught in schools' (SAHS, 1998:203).

When I first began this study, I drew on these arguments to support the position that my study belonged within the discipline of History rather than that of Education. My argument was that historians needed to devote more of their time to widening and understanding their audience. Part of this audience is composed of young adults, and in the case of this particular study, of school learners. Thus, I felt that historians needed to gain a better understanding of the attitudes and senses which Grade 12 learners (both history and non-history) have towards school history and the past. Moreover, very few of the studies which have investigated the 'problems' surrounding school history education have actually been conducted from within the discipline of history. I reasoned that if historians wanted to encourage more learners into the study of history at tertiary level, they should take a more active interest in the way learners think about and experience history at school.

But my reading around the recent developments in academic history (as discussed above) suggested that since institutional history should be viewed from an historical perspective, finding ways to encourage learners back into its confines may simply be missing the point. In the future, it is possible that institutional history as we have known it may not even exist, out-

maneuvered by new ways of thinking about history. Rather than trying to find solutions to the ‘problems’ facing school history education, what if we begin to think about school history in a completely different way? What if we begin to think of schools not simply as centres of teaching and learning history as a tool to mould the nation, or as an opportunity to provide learners with formal instruction in the ways of the academic historian, but as important sites of historical production alongside the many others that are now being taken seriously by an increasing number of historians (academic and otherwise) such as ‘heritage’, ‘popular history’ or ‘history in the everyday’. New approaches to understanding the nature of history suggest that it is useful to see schools as places where the younger generation congregate as learners and bring with them a whole host of perceptions, emotions, stories and anecdotes about the past which have very little connection with the history they learn at school but are valid histories in themselves, nevertheless.

This thesis presents a preliminary investigation into the possibilities and feasibility of viewing schools as sites of historical production of a particular kind. It is a study in two parts. The first arises out of my earlier thinking by examining *learners’* attitudes to history as taught and learnt in schools amongst both those learners who have chosen to study history as a subject to Matric and those who have not. It traces the history of history education in South Africa and argues that it is partly as a result of this history that history education authorities have tended to conceptualise the various challenges which have faced history education over the years as ‘problems’ which have needed ‘solutions’. It argues that at the very least, these authorities should try to work towards a more concrete understanding of learners’ attitudes to history as a school subject.

But the study also seeks to explore the various ways in which *adolescents* acquire their own, personal ‘sense of the past’. It examines recent thinking and investigations into how and why ordinary people set about making usable pasts in the everyday, and tries to establish a preliminary answer to the question: How do adolescents perceive the past, and what are the particular ways in which, both consciously or unconsciously, they draw on or make use of their knowledge and senses of the past (if at all) to make meaning of their lives in the present? It also poses the question: why are so many learners choosing not to study history as a subject

at school? And it considers whether this apparent lack of enthusiasm for school history could perhaps reflect adolescents' attitudes towards the past in general. In other words, it seeks to establish whether or not there is a relationship between learners' attitudes to school history and the way in which they think about the past, and if so, what the nature of this relationship actually is. It also serves to document some of the attitudes to history and senses of the past held by the young adults of the first generation to grow up in the early post-apartheid years to serve as a point of comparison for any further research which may be conducted in this area at a future date.

A signpost for what is to follow

In investigating learners' attitudes to history and senses of the past, my research took two distinctive forms: Literature-based research and research based on the findings of a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews administered to a group of South African adolescents (learners) who were in the process of completing their final year of schooling.

The next two chapters are drawn from a literature- based research method:

- * Chapter Two will explore the idea of 'State History Education as a Socialising Force: Schools as Centres of Teaching and Learning'. It will provide a brief background to the history of school history education in South Africa and will outline the various ways in which South African history education authorities have tried to develop and improve school history education.
- * Chapter Three examines 'Thinking About History in the Everyday: Implications for School History Education'. It will explore new ways of looking at and thinking about history and will relate developments in the wider western world to the current situation in South Africa where, with the exception of oral histories, work on history in the everyday is still rather limited.

The next three chapters of this thesis, explain, present and analyse the methods and findings of my original research:

- * Chapter Four will outline the methodology of my practical research which took the form of a research questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.
- * Chapter Five will present the findings of learners' attitudes to *school* history, drawing from responses to questions in the questionnaire.
- * Chapter Six will present the findings on learners' senses of the past looking at factors other than school history. It will draw on the responses provided by learners in both the interviews and the questionnaires.

The final chapter

- * Chapter Seven, will provide a final analysis of the original research findings within the broader context of the study itself. It will also provide a summary of what has been argued in this thesis. Finally, it will point to the possible implications which this study may have for school history education in South Africa.

CHAPTER TWO

STATE HISTORY EDUCATION AS A SOCIALISING FORCE: SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS AS CENTRES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Introduction

Schools are institutions supposedly created for the practice of education. Schools...cannot simply be thought of as “educational institutions” cut off from political, economic and social factors...Schools have certain dominant characteristics, world-wide. They tend, world-wide, to operate in the service of the dominant classes and groupings in society. Schools do so both by promoting the views of the dominant order and by functioning to reproduce and consolidate the dominant, economic and political order - that is, schools tend to play a reproductive ideological and structural role in society (van den Berg: 1991:6).

The suitability of school history education to socialise the younger generation into the values and traditions of their particular society was considered in Chapter One. This chapter will argue that in South Africa, the long colonial, settler-dominated past in which white people sought to maintain control over the larger indigenous black population has resulted in state education systems that, until 1994, have tended to be used by government education authorities to present and promote a particular world view (as discussed by van den Berg in the quote above) particularly through the use of school history in an unproblematic and uncritical way. Chernis writes

The history of history teaching [in South Africa] illustrates the massive degree to which the state has attempted to influence or steer the objectives and nature of history as taught at school. History teaching, i.e. the institutionalised state-supervised part of the process, as a rule follows the current, sanctioned spectrum of historical consciousness (1990:30).

With the power to select which sections of history are taught and determine the way that they were presented, South African education systems tried to encourage loyalty and submission

through authority by generally avoiding the responsibility of teaching their charges how to critically engage their world. Mulholland, writing in 1981, suggested that ‘the more closed the political system, the more emphasis there has been on history teaching and learning, and the more forcibly do the rulers wish to impose their views’ (1981:iii) in their attempt to stamp out any sign of opposition or resistance. History education in South Africa has a long history of syllabus adjustment as different power holding groups tried to ensure that school history met certain political and social demands.

This chapter examines three main themes in the history of South African history education. The first, which focusses mainly on the pre-apartheid period, looks at school history education as a form of socialisation through the use of content. The second explores increasing challenges to the apartheid state’s attempt to use school history education as a socialising force, paying particular attention to the question of history pedagogy. Thirdly, this chapter will argue that the historical context of history education in South Africa, its diminishing status (as established in Chapter One) and recent debates surrounding the development and introduction of Curriculum 2005 have thrown the nature and purpose of school history education into question. It will suggest that in South Africa this question appears to have been solved by viewing school history as a useful tool to promote democratic values such as freedom and equality through critical enquiry. In doing so, this chapter provides a benchmark for an examination of schools not simply as centres of teaching and learning history where learners are ideally socialised into desired behaviour and beliefs, but also as sites to which learners bring their own perceptions and senses of the past, perceptions and senses which have been formed and shaped by forces which exist outside school history education.

School history education as a socialising force: a question of content

The history of school history education has been very sparsely researched in South Africa. However, two unpublished studies, Mulholland (1981) ‘The evolution of history teaching in South Africa: A study of the relationship between the modes of political organisation and the

history taught in schools', and Chernis (1990) 'The past in service of the present: A study of South African school history syllabuses and textbooks 1839-1990', have been especially useful in providing an overview, particularly regarding disputes about the question of content in school history education.

The formal teaching of history as a school subject in southern Africa (and indeed, the world over) is a relatively recent phenomenon. Formal schools were established amongst the early Dutch settler communities in the Cape as early as the mid-seventeenth century (Mulholland, 1981). Frank Molteno (1984) reports that the first school was established in the Cape Colony in 1658, with the purpose of educating the Dutch East India Company's (DEIC) slaves in the fundamentals of Dutch language and the Christian religion. In 1663, a second school was established for the children of Dutch colonists. Molteno explains that

One of the DEIC's concerns was to see to it that its men, removed from the bonds of their home institutions, remained united in a common ideology. Religious instruction at school contributed by helping to perpetuate the set of dogmas to which all adhered. This gave rise to excessive formalism, and the teaching of the three Rs tended to be almost incidental to religious instruction (1984:47).

From the very beginning, the content matter of school education in southern Africa was specifically chosen to promote the dominant doctrine of the time. In 1799, Molteno reports,

the first school specifically for Africans was established...From the turn of the century, missions started setting up more such schools, particularly on the fringes of settler penetration...[thus schooling contributed] to the social consolidation of conquest and the control of the conquered' (1991:49).

The education system adopted by the Dutch white settlers in the Cape was imported from Holland 'with little modification' (Mulholland, 1981:83). It was based on the authoritarian Calvinistic belief that '[t]he freedom or development of the individual per se was not of prime importance, the most essential aspect of education was to know the Bible' (Mulholland, 1981:97) and was directly controlled and instructed by appointees of the Dutch Reformed Church. This Calvinistic approach to education with its strong religious element was to form one of two main building blocks of South African education.

In 1806, the Cape came under British control. Mulholland suggests that

[a]s the [Cape] colony was subject to autocratic political rule it was easy to impose a centralised, state controlled system of education long before this was considered feasible in England. The fact that the Cape was a colony, and furthermore, a colony inhabited largely by non-English speaking people, seemed to force the pace of education to levels which were not at the time considered appropriate in England (1981:92).

In 1839 a Department of Education under a Superintendent General was established in the Cape which formally shifted the control over education away from the Dutch Reformed Church and into the hands of the government, although, in reality, the two remained closely tied (Mulholland, 1981:88). Mission schools were also formally brought under the jurisdiction of the Department, but ‘in the main, schooling [for African children] was left to the churches and missionary societies’ with very little support from the government (Molteno, 1991:49). From 1839, a more deliberate attempt at history education is also evident in white schools in the Cape colony, although there was no formal history syllabus. ‘Outlines of General History’ (which seems largely to refer to a history of the British Empire) was included in the Senior Division Elementary Course under the Government Memorandum of May 1839 (Chernis, 1990:62). By the late 1850s, history had been included as one of the subjects required for a number of examinations offered in the Cape, overseen by the Board of Public Examiners in Literature and Science (Chernis, 1990:63). By this time, forms of a more formal history education had also appeared in the Natal Colony, falling within the subject matter covered by English (Chernis, 1990:77).

History education in the British colonies of the Cape and Natal was entirely British in orientation and content, with a particular focus on English history. Mulholland explains that

[b]ecause the system was controlled and staffed by teachers who had been educated in England, or in the case of those trained here [South Africa], in the English tradition, the outlook and philosophy of education in the government schools was thoroughly English (1981:93).

And Chernis remarks

[w]hat is noticeable about history taught in Cape schools in this period [mid-nineteenth

century] was the heavy emphasis on English history to the exclusion of all other. Even general European history was excluded, let alone Cape history (1990:66).

This emphasis on British and English content also helped to press home the British policy of anglicisation. Mulholland points out that during the nineteenth century, the Dutch-speaking inhabitants in the vicinity of Cape Town tended to support the private Dutch schools set up by the Dutch Reformed Church, rather than attend the English schools of the British. She also explains that 'there was no compulsion on private Dutch-controlled schools to alter their syllabi in any way' (Mulholland, 1981:93).

Chernis comments on two developments in Cape history education. The first came after the Constitution Ordinance Amendment Act in 1872 which granted the Cape Colony responsible government. Soon after this, elements of Cape colonial history began to be included in the history syllabuses of Cape schools (Chernis, 1990:69). (The first local history was introduced in the Natal schools in the late 1880s and further reinforced in 1890 when 'outlines of the history of Natal' was prescribed for the Collective and Bursary Examinations (Chernis, 1990:79). Chernis also reports that a textbook by Robert Russell called *Natal. The Land and Its Story: A Geography and History for the Use of Schools* was being used by pupils between standard four and standard seven in the early 1890s (Chernis, 1990:79).) The second development in Cape history education came after the defeat of the Afrikaner Republics in 1902 with a shift away from a history of the colony to the 'Outlines of a History of South Africa'. Chernis explains that '[o]ne recognises here an increasing national awareness of a common white South African identity and of South Africa as a political entity' (1990:72).

Mulholland argues that the consequence of education in the Cape being under British control meant that it maintained access to more liberal and secular developments in education overseas.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century...education moved away from discipline and drill leaning toward a concept of education as a possible means for developing individual talents and potential. Despite the political and social conservatism inherent in all educational schemes, this system, biased though it was to English authority, within the South African context formed a liberal tradition (Mulholland, 1981: 94).

This formed the second building block in South African education. These two system, 'one inspired by [a Calvinistic belief], and the other shaped by British circumstance would compete for authority' (Mulholland, 1981:98-99) throughout the nineteenth century.

There was little emphasis placed by the British on Dutch settler history in the Cape. However, Motley's *Rise of the Dutch Republic* was included in the history syllabus in 1858 and examined for the first time in 1867, which at least paid lip service to the presence of a Dutch heritage in the Cape (Chernis, 1990:66). Chernis goes on to state, however, that

[f]rom the late 1860's, the reaction from the Dutch colonists became increasingly vociferous.... Increasingly, a demand was felt for "true history" to be taught at school. Self-discovery directed attention to history and the indignation aroused by what was perceived to be a unjust view of the past, led to a demand for an "accurate" presentation of the past (sic) (Chernis, 1990:66-67).

The Dutch-speaking settlers in the Cape were beginning to become more aware of their own heritage. Chernis explains that 'growing indignation at what they perceived as British injustices led to the awareness and appreciation of the Republican northerners and themselves as an entity' (Chernis, 1990:67).

History education in the Afrikaner republics only really came into its own in the late 1870s. Although there had been moves to teach Bible and 'Vaderlandsche' history before the British annexation of the Transvaal in 1877, history education received little attention. This was largely due to the fact that an Afrikaner consciousness was not yet very much in evidence. However, during the British annexation of the Transvaal, 'considerable attention' was devoted to the teaching of English history by the then Superintendent-General of Education, Vacy Lyle (although 'by 1877 only 8 percent of children of school-going age were actually in school in the Transvaal') (Chernis, 1990:123). Nevertheless, this experience of British annexation helped to spark the growth of Afrikaner nationalism. After the Transvaal regained its independence in 1881, 'renewed emphasis was placed on history as a school subject' (Chernis, 1990:125). During the 1880s, history education in the Free State and the Transvaal concerned itself increasingly with the history of the Dutch settlers and the Afrikaans-speaking people in southern Africa. One textbook writer who was particularly influential at this time

was George McCall Theal who, van Jaarsveld points out, 'adopted a broader view of South African history by including the history of the Boer republics, and defending them against the actions of British imperialists' (Boyce, 1968:3).

When the Afrikaner republics were defeated in the South African War, however, British High Commissioner, Lord Alfred Milner, pursued a vigorous policy of Anglicisation in what were now the colonies of the Transvaal and Orange River Colony. The new syllabuses in these colonies were based on the Cape syllabus. South African history was barred (Chernis, 1990:161) as it supposedly encouraged disloyalty to Britain. Emphasis was placed on British imperial and colonial history. In reaction to Milner's policy, the spirit of Afrikaner nationalism increased. In the case of education, the Christian National Education movement, headed by the Dutch Reformed Church, established non-state schools (particularly in the Transvaal (Ashley, 1989:7; Mulholland, 1981)) where 'a "Christian National Spirit of Education" would prevail' (Chernis, 1990:165). Dutch was the medium of instruction and the history of the Afrikaner people was taught. But as Mulholland pointed out, in neither case

was history being used as a subject with intrinsic value, a subject about which more than one opinion is permissible. The syllabus laid down reflected each party's political preoccupations and attempted to formulate the opinions and win the child's allegiance during its formative years (1981:143).

The Act of Union in 1910 prompted the inclusion of some South African history in the official history syllabuses of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, albeit within the context of British imperialism. The South African War was often deliberately excluded (Chernis, 1990:170) in the interests of building a new South African state. Chernis explains that in the period from 1910 to 1918, '[a]s far as history was concerned [in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State], the education authorities were clearly uncertain as to which history should be taught, and how' (1990:171). However, in 1918 the first Afrikaner was appointed as Superintendent of Education at the Cape and 'British History' was removed from the Cape syllabuses (Chernis, 1990:204).

Between 1918 and 1948, two different visions of the South African nation dominated political discourse. Their chief articulators were respectively Jan Smuts and J.B.M. Hertzog.

Smuts saw South Africans as a united white nation, 'in which the English element was likely to be dominant' (Chernis, 1990:205), South Africa being a part of the greater whole.

Hertzog, on the other hand, saw two separate white populations (the English-speaking and the Afrikaans-speaking) united as South Africans and loyal to South Africa before the empire.

Chernis remarks that '[t]he compromise between the...two approaches is clearly reflected in both the syllabuses and textbooks of the period' (1990:206) and that during this time 'history teaching was non-committal, at least as far as the official syllabuses were concerned' (1990:270).

As far as the education of black people was concerned, Molteno remarks that the year 1854 'marked an important point in the development of state interest in, and support for [through state subsidisation of the missionaries], the schooling of black people' (1991:50). He explains that in that year, Sir George Grey was appointed as governor of the Cape. 'He held education to be a prime weapon in the subjugation of the indigenous population...In 1868 [Dr (later Sir) Langham Dale, the Superintendent General of the Cape at the time] was urging that "the spread of civilisation, by school instruction and the encouragement of industrial habits among the Natives in the Border districts, is of importance to the political security and social progress of the Colony"' (Molteno, 1991:50-51). Molteno also states that for most of the nineteenth century, black people's response to state funded mission schooling (which was not compulsory at the time) came 'in the form of [considerable] outright rejection or avoidance' (1991:52). In the latter half of the nineteenth century, after the South African mineral revolution, the Eiselen Commission of 1951 reports, "Bantu education...became increasingly the care of the government concerned because the Bantu were increasingly affecting the economic and political life of the country"' (cited in Molteno, 1991:57). In 1879, in the Colony of Natal,

the first syllabuses for elementary black schools were issued. Hygiene and traditional crafts were emphasised and a fifth of school time was to be spent in manual work (Molteno, 1991:58).

The teaching of more academic subjects, such as history, was expected to be 'purely elementary' (Sir Langham Dale cited in Rose and Tunmer, 1975:217).

Moreover, black people featured in the official history syllabuses only when they came into contact with whites. Whatever interaction was reported was done entirely from the 'white man's' perspective (Boyce, 1968:6). Nevertheless, despite the absence of black histories from the official syllabuses, Bozzoli and Delius report that in the last decades of the nineteenth century, black writers, drawn mainly from the Christian and educated elite of the time, 'explored precolonial and African history and sought to recover the oral traditions of their communities' (1991:5). These studies developed mostly outside of university history departments and 'grappled with the experiences of African dispossession and resistance, and questions of race and nationalism and their variable and complex relationships to those of class and capitalism' (Bozzoli and Delius, 1991:5).

F. E. Auerbach (1965) comments on the fact that in the 1920s, the more scientific approach to historical writing which began to emerge in South Africa led a number of academic historians, W. M. MacMillan, C. W. De Kiewiet, E. Walker, P. J. Van der Merwe and J. S. Marais, to revise the works of earlier settler historians, particularly those of G. M. Theal. He explains that '[t]hey all attempted to reassess the full story of the contact between Bantu, Boer and Briton between 1700 and 1900' (Auerbach, 1965:4). Bozzoli and Delius argue that

Macmillan and de Kiewiet's work represented a form of social democratic thought which had radical implications. Concerned as they were to debunk the then dominant version of South African history as the story of the triumph of white settlers over barbarous blacks and meddlesome missionaries, they rejected the segregationist perspectives which dominated intellectual and political life - including that of contemporary liberals - in the interwar period; they argued that economic interaction and interdependence between black and white were the central themes of South Africa's past and present (1991:6).

However, Auerbach reveals that very little of this work found its way into school textbooks despite calls by respected history teachers for their revision (1965:4).

After the National Party came to power in 1948, the Afrikaner nationalist apartheid government based their philosophy of education on Christian nationalist principles. In 1949, the Cape Education Department announced that 'at the end of the course the child should have "a fairly clear idea of the growth of his own nation"' (original emphasis) (cited in Chernis, 1990:277-278). Elements which were particularly emphasised in the general aims of

history teaching were the bringing of civilisation to South Africa by the whites, and patriotism towards the fatherland. Rose and Tunmer write that ‘three distinct trends in educational theory and practice can be observed’ under the Nationalist Government (1975:50). The first ‘saw the diminution, through legislation, of provincial government powers’. The second trend was ‘the creation of an educational policy which could be applied to all the provinces’. This began with the creation of the National Education Advisory Council in 1962. Finally, the administrative power of the provinces ‘over almost all types of primary and secondary education’ was restored, ‘while retaining the broad direction of policy in the hands of central government’. Rose and Tunmer cite the phrase “‘Uniale beleid maar Provinsiale beheer” (Union policy but Provincial control)’ (Rose and Tunmer, 1975:50). However, the Bantu Education act of 1953 ‘removed African education from provincial control’ and two more acts in 1963 and 1965, respectively, ‘placed Coloured and Indian education in the hands of central government’, thus only white education was left in the hands of the provincial government.

When it came to history, Mulholland writes,

History was looked upon as “the fulfilment of God’s decreed plan for the world’ and it was contended that “God...willed separate nations and peoples, and He gave to each nation and people its special vocation, task and gifts”.... Once the National government assumed power not only did history become a political talking point, but many wished to make the subject compulsory.... History was seen by one Parliamentarian as one of the most powerful factors for building the nation (1981:242/265).

Chernis argues that ‘[h]istory syllabuses mirror[ed] the growing dominance of apartheid policies in South African politics from 1948 onwards’ (1990:276). Mulholland also writes that ‘[t]he teaching of history was, in this period, an overt political issue. The early fifties saw history as taught in schools become the focus of attention in newspapers as well as educational publications (Mulholland, 1981:242) exalted by Afrikaner nationalists and condemned by their opponents.

History educators F. E. Auerbach (1965) and A. N. Boyce (1968) spoke out against the racism in the syllabus in the 1960s. They argued that history education in South Africa helped to perpetuate past differences through the biases and prejudices towards other races present in

the textbooks. In his book, *The Power of Prejudice in South African Education*, Auerbach called for an examination and revision of the textbooks then currently in use. He also cites protestations from Arthur Keppel-Jones and F. A van Jaarsveld in the 1950s (Auerbach 1965:4) and questions the government's official position that "there was no necessity of revising school textbooks, as only irreproachable books, approved by the authorities, [were] used in schools" (cited in Auerbach, 1965:3).

In 1968 Boyce made the point that

Afrikaners have continued to concentrate on themes which were of special interest to Afrikaners, and these have been handled from their own point of view, e.g. the Great Trek, the founding of the Boer republics and the defence of their freedom against British aggression. Afrikaner historians have, according to Van Jaarsveld, treated history "as a great national epic...[h]is historical writing had to serve the purpose of preserving his identity" (1968:5).

Amongst the many forms of black resistance that arose against Bantu Education, one took the form of 'Cultural Clubs' which were set up by the African Education Movement (AEM) which was established by the African National Congress (ANC) in Johannesburg in May 1955. These Cultural Clubs 'were effectively alternative schools' which were supplied by the AEM with 'good quality educational material' covering history, amongst a number of other subjects (Hyslop, 1999:72). Hyslop writes that the AEM drew its material from diverse traditions, featuring both African folk tales and western nursery rhymes; however

some of it did address social and political issues. A well-written history lesson sought to make complex points: For example that 17th century Dutch colonists thought in terms of a Christian/heathen rather than a white/black distinction, and that South Africa had been settled by blacks before the arrival of whites (1999:72).

As the years of apartheid wore on, the tension over history content manifested itself increasingly along white and black lines. Writing about history education in South Africa from the nineteenth century through to 1980, Mulholland argues that

[t]exts throughout the period, with very few exceptions were racist in tone, non-white peoples in particular were objectified as "problems", "savage attackers", or "objects" of policy. The Euro and Anglo-centric texts gave way in the mid-twentieth century to those largely

depicting and often glorifying the role of the Afrikaner in the history of South Africa and by weight of syllabus determination, South Africa became the central focus for school-going students of history. A Calvinistic outlook and a concentration on themes of racial separation and racial purity took over from the more blatant racial bias of earlier years... South African history merges more and more with the story, not only of the Afrikaner, but with the policy and intent of the National Party, until in the present Matriculation syllabus the South African section consists almost entirely of the history and policies of the party. History thus becomes a means and is thereby degraded (1981:324).

Mulholland's observation is particularly jarring in the light of Chernis' argument. He explains that during the 1980s the National Party 'underwent a fundamental transformation' in its attempt to gain a larger support base by including more liberal members and supporters within its ranks (Chernis, 1991:330). Writing about this transformation in the late 1980s, he argues, 'Present syllabuses are perpetuating an image of the past not necessarily still accepted by the ruling party, and helping to prop up a political and social dispensation which no longer exists' (1990:331).

Chernis also makes the point that before the 1970s Afrikaner Nationalists were more than willing to argue in the defence of heavy emphasis on Afrikaner nationalist content of the history syllabus, but during the 1970s, he states, this debate about content dried up.

The only defendants of the current syllabuses are those Whites to the right of the Government, representing about one-third of the White electorate. The rest of the Whites, and of course, the other 86% of the population, appear to be insisting, with various degrees of vehemence, on an immediate and drastic revision of the history syllabuses (Chernis, 1990:131-132).

The content of history education in South Africa has been a contentious issue since school history's formal introduction to the Cape Colony in 1839. First British and then Afrikaner government education officials deliberately selected the historical content which they thought would help to socialise and condition the children of their own, and those other population groups, into their particular world view and excluded or ignored the content matter which stood in opposition. The introduction of the apartheid state and its centralised policies of Christian Nationalist and Bantu Education simply served to fuel an already historically charged issue which brought the content of history education to the forefront of discussion. But before the more recent developments in the content of history education are discussed, a second area of school history needs to be investigated. The next section will show that

increased attention to the *practice* of history education in South Africa, partly inspired by developments in history pedagogy in Britain during the 1970s and partly influenced by the liberal Africanist and radical marxist histories emerging from the South African history academy in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as increased opposition from within those sectors of the population who were supposed to be undergoing socialisation (school pupils), helped some South African history teachers and learners to challenge the socialising forces of state history education.

Challenging state history education: a question of practice

Although the question of history content was a controversial issue amongst history education authorities during the apartheid years, perhaps more problematic was the absence of a critical approach by history teachers towards the material on offer. Mulholland asserts

Alas, the study of history is often a frustrating and uncomprehending exercise in rote learning, which yields no apparent reason for this exertion and reveals no understanding of the relationship between facts, so laboriously committed to memory, and the structures of the real world...[In] the South African history sections of primary and high schools so much that is interesting and informative is ignored, so much that is of limited appeal and often limited value is repeated and very little is truly questioned, with the result that not only does school history hold no excitement, but far from laying the foundations for a pursuit of historical knowledge, it becomes a discipline to be ignored later in life (1981:3-4, 326).

Teachers (especially those employed by the Bantu Education Department) were closely monitored in South Africa during the apartheid period, particularly after the passing of the National Education Policy Act in 1967 which, amongst other things, vested the right to inspect schools directly with the government Minister of Education 'who could use this power to ascertain the extent to which national policy was being carried out' (Rose and Tunmer, 1975:73). Previously this right had lain with the National Advisory Education Council; thus the act of 1967 helped to further centralise government control. Those teachers who deviated from the official syllabus ran the risk of losing their jobs (Kallaway, 1995:12).

Nevertheless, Kallaway (1995) shows that during the 1970s, small groups of teachers and historians influenced by the History Workshop (see Chapter Three) in Johannesburg and the

Natal History Teacher's Society began to make some attempts to challenge the official history syllabus. Kallaway himself is one such example. He explains that during the 1960s, employed as a history teacher at an all-boys, white school in the Orange Free State, he 'made it [his] daily business to demythologise the history curriculum' by 'tackl[ing] the essential issues of the partialness of knowledge and the fragility of our interpretations' (Kallaway, 1995:11). Thus he explains that at the height of apartheid, he was able to give his pupils a more critical understanding of history irrespective of whether they stood in support of the apartheid system or not.

Progressive history teachers in South Africa were partly inspired by the New History movement which arose in the United Kingdom during the mid-1970s. Alan Gunn explains that 'the term 'new history' was increasingly used, in a general sense, to describe the movement away from the chronology-bound and content-based approach to the subject at school' (Gunn, 1990:47). 'New' history focusses on a process (i.e. historical enquiry) not a product (i.e. the facts of the past). The past is seen as a resource for creative activity with an emphasis on constructing a range of histories from a range of sources' (Jenkins and Brickly cited in Gunn, 1990:47). Kallaway writes that

Teachers seminars on African history and the neo-Marxist historiography [that began to be produced in universities in America, western Europe and other parts of Africa during the 1960s], as well as the introduction of "New History" methodology...broke the ground for teacher involvement in the production of resource materials on a modest scale (Kallaway, 1995:13).

History teacher, Alan Gunn reports that his experiment with the methods of 'New History' in his own history classes at a High School in Cape Town during the early 1980s were cut short due to the fact that they did not help to equip learners for the heavy emphasis on content evaluation in their final examinations (Gunn, 1990:ix). Gunn explains being both 'frustrated' and 'perplexed' that although the ideas of new history were known to education authorities in South Africa, there had been no official attempt to consider the possibilities of using the approach in South African schools.

The Soweto uprising against the use of Afrikaans in African schools in 1976 increased the

intensity of African resistance towards the Bantu education policy of the apartheid state. The uprising gave birth to a larger movement which came to be known as People's Education (See the discussion of People's History and Worker's History in Chapter Three). Johan Muller writes

For many, the evolution of people's education through...two consultative conferences, can be understood as a shift from "liberation first, education later" to "education for liberation". It marked the change from a strategy of potentially militant struggle which was temporarily willing to forfeit education, to a struggle of emancipatory education as an **alternative** to militant struggle (original emphasis) (1991:326).

Increased student resistance and school boycotts meant that '[b]y the end of 1985, urban black education had totally collapsed' (Hyslop, 1999:173). Beinart writes that

[t]he cycle of insurrection and repression based around schools, universities, factories and townships which began in 1976 rose to a crescendo between late 1984 and early 1986. This marked the turning point for the apartheid state (1994:234).

In memory of the 1976 Soweto uprising, black students throughout the country were planning a 'Year of No Schooling' for 1986. Aware of these plans, parents in Soweto formed the Soweto Parents Crisis Committee which called a National Education Crisis Conference in December 1985. It helped to establish other crisis committees across the country, to be coordinated by the parent body: the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) (Hyslop, 1999:174). Between 1987 and 1988, the National Education Crisis Committee set up a People's History Commission which aimed to help to draw up an alternative to the official history syllabus. Although it concerned itself mainly with political mobilisation, its workbook promoted a more critical approach to history education, 'African history and the history of the liberation movement was given a position of prominence, and the issue of methodology and interpretation was highlighted in the group's publication that emerged at the beginning of 1988' (Kallaway, 1995:14). But Kallaway explains that 'the initiative failed to make much headway with regard to school history.... The [Department of Education and Training] refused permission for the publications of the NECC to enter its educational institutions' (1995:14).

Also during the mid-1980s, a small publishing house in Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter,

approached a small group of teachers and academics to write an alternative text book series, *History Alive*, still in keeping with the requirements of the official syllabus, but more interrogative and critical in nature. Kallaway writes that the series was ‘welcomed by a number of teacher organisations and very well received by the liberal press’ (1995:13).

By the late 1980s, increased levels of violence on the part of the apartheid state in its efforts to quell the rising tide of resistance amongst the black majority brought increased international pressure against the apartheid regime. Speaking about the late 1980s, Shillington writes, ‘The government of the Afrikaner National Party was rapidly losing credibility, even among its own supporters’ (1995:430-431). This political crisis together with the controversy surrounding the question of history education led the Government-funded Human Sciences Research Council’s (HSRC) Education Research Programme to set up an independent inquiry into the teaching of history in South Africa between 1988 and 1991. Kallaway explains that

the culture that grew up within the context of this group reflected a much greater degree of agreement on principles and objectives than had ever been experienced in the past...a common concern for the state of the subject in schools was manifested by a broad commitment to the goals of the new history...[and] there was at least a common commitment to a critical skill-based curriculum (1995:15).

However, the HSRC investigation also came under quite a lot of criticism. Kallaway (1995) who was involved in the investigation pointed out that it did not achieve a clean break from the apartheid history of the past, especially in the area of content revision, not least because the investigation was conducted mainly by white, Afrikaans men. Lowry (1995) also states that the committee failed to take account of the broader context in which it was operating. He explains that ‘[t]he failure to undertake a thorough analysis of the situation within which history is taught is a major shortcoming of the research’ (Lowry, 1995:109).

Perhaps a more comprehensive examination of the curriculum came from the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) in December 1990. Following the change in the leadership of the National Party in 1989 and the promise of political transformation with the unbanning of the ANC and the release of its future president, Nelson Mandela in the February

of that year (Shillington, 1995:431), this investigation was commissioned by the NECC with the purpose of analysing 'education options and their implications in all major areas of education policy' (NECC, 1993:1). It stood in opposition to a document released by the Committee of Heads of Education Departments which 'outlined the Nationalist Party Government's approach to the curriculum' (Lowry, 1995:106). The NEPI was more concerned than the HSRC investigation had been about redressing the imbalances and inequalities in education and also looked more carefully at the *context* in which a curriculum is developed. This helped to address a concern raised by Mulholland who wrote, in 1981

At the present time, much educational research is devoted to subjects such as - how to improve pupil performance, teacher-pupil relationships, teacher-training, revision of the curriculum and analysis of the techniques of learning. [However, these investigations fail] to examine the underlying structures of society which affect, determine and possibly distort our quest for true education of the liberating kind (1981:1).

The NEPI report emphasised that

[t]he curriculum is not a neutral or technical account of what schools teach; it is a contextual and historical settlement which involves political and economic considerations as well as competing interests. The curriculum itself embodies the social relationships of its historical context (cited in Kallaway, 1995:15).

These developments suggest a more conscious shift in the thinking surrounding history education, by expanding its scope from more narrow discussions on the content and practice of school history to the context out of which these sorts of debates arise.

As negotiations and political transformations in South Africa gathered pace, the HSRC and NEPI investigations also spurred on another set of discussions surrounding history education in the form of a series of history conferences held at the Universities of Natal, Witwatersrand and Cape Town in the February, March and May of 1992. The conferences were organised by the History Education Group, which had been established in Cape Town in the mid-eighties by those contributors to the *History Alive* series who 'wanted to continue their informal involvement' with the more critical approach which the series had brought to history education (Kallaway, 1995:14). Lowry argues that '[t]he most important concern of those

organising the conferences was that since there were negotiations concerning a new constitution, any changes to the history curriculum should reflect the changes happening in the rest of society' (1995:112). Thus it is significant that a very diverse group of people - teachers, academics, members of various political and educational organisations - from a range of different backgrounds chose to participate in the conferences, which brought together a much more divergent range of interests than had been present in the HSRC investigations. These history conferences discussed alternative approaches to school history education, including issues such as content selection, the role of skills formation in school history education and issues of multi-culturalism in anticipation of the political change and transition to democracy that was expected in 1994.

School history education as a socialising force: a question of purpose

In 1993, National Party President F.W. de Klerk set up the National Education and Training Forum (NETF). Its purpose was twofold. The first was the urgent task of designing a new interim curriculum which was to be introduced to schools at the beginning of 1995; the second required the development of a new national curriculum which was to be in schools by 2005 (Hindle, 1996:4). The new curriculum was to be founded on an outcomes-based education (OBE) curriculum theory. Jacobs and Chalufu explain that '[a]n educational system based on outcomes gives priority to end results of learning, accomplishments of learning and demonstrations of learning' (2003:99). Outcomes-based education curriculum theory first emerged in the United States in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and grew into a small movement over the 1990s (Jacobs and Chalufu, 2003:99). South Africa is one of the few countries to have adopted an outcomes-based curriculum over this time.

This process of curriculum revision stimulated much discussion over the future role of history in South African schools. In 1995 the National Curriculum Development Committee took over the responsibilities of the NETF. History as a formal subject fell away under the new 'learning area' created under Curriculum 2005. Sieborger remarks that '[t]he learning area committee and other curriculum committees, were... formed on a stakeholder basis, with a

majority of departmental officials (who were not appointed in any systematic way and served as representatives rather than experts)'. Sieborger writes that very few history teachers or history academics were actually involved in the process of revising the history syllabus, despite much enthusiasm and interest (Sieborger, 2000).

Consequently, Curriculum 2005 was not very well received by academics and history teachers. Referring to its potential to offer students 'an expanded repertoire of knowledge and creative ways to overcome the old, staid subject divisions', Cynthia Kros, an historian at the University of the Witwatersrand, wrote that '[t]here is much in *Curriculum 2005* to quicken the pulse of the progressive educator'. But, she argued, History 'may well be one of the casualties of the new curriculum' (Kros, 2000:69). As the initial drafts of Curriculum 2005 filtered through towards the end of the 1990s, two main criticisms were levelled at the treatment of history. First, at GET (General Education and Training) level, History was lumped in with Geography and civic education under the general heading of Human and Social Sciences with very little time allocated to either subject in the overall structure of the curriculum, and second, the heavy emphasis on developing historical skills led a number of education authorities to reconsider the role of content in history education. The South African Historical Society argued

that historical skills cannot be successfully achieved outside a coherent historical context, which is at present lacking in the curriculum documents. We urge, therefore, that this outcome [HSS S09] be developed in future within the context of specific historical content material, to avoid the pitfalls of skills being 'learnt' in isolation (1998:202).

In 2000, Cynthia Kros argued that

criticisms of 'content', meaning the kinds of detail, context, texture and evidence which distinguish History from other ways of understanding the world - leave the newly constituted 'learners' with no leverage to challenge established precepts (2000, 88).

It would seem that in their eagerness to remove content bias from the syllabus, curriculum developers virtually removed content from the syllabus altogether. Spurred on by such dissatisfactions, the then Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, launched a History and Archaeology Panel in September 2000, to investigate:

- the quality of the teaching of history and evolution in schools
- the state of teacher training
- the quality of support materials (Department of Education, 2000).

The report argued that as far as the existing history curriculum was concerned, it '[did] not effectively help to explain the formation of the present', it was found to be 'seriously disjointed' and the Senior Certificate phase was described as 'crowded and content-driven' placing time pressures on learners in this phase. Curriculum 2005 was found to be positive in the sense that 'it shifts assessment quite radically, focussing on what the learner should get out of his or her education', but the report also argued, amongst other things, '[t]he absence of guidance on content is keenly felt' (Department of Education, 2000) (see Chapter One, p. 4 for the report's findings on the diminishing status of history in school).

Although the Report of the History/Archaeology Panel commented at length on how the various problems which face history education could be addressed and overcome, very little attention was paid to the question of learner attitudes to school history, despite the recent emphasis on a more learner-centred approach to education as outlined in Curriculum 2005. The reasons for this were not clear. It would appear that the widespread speculation over why more and more learners are choosing not to take history as a subject to Matric (see the discussion in Chapter One) has satisfied the curiosity of history education authorities. Moreover, the controversy surrounding school history education in South Africa over the last century and beyond has resulted in a tendency for history education authorities to focus their attention on ways to improve history textbooks, history pedagogy, and the history curricula and syllabi, assuming that by addressing these factors, they would be improving the quality of school history education and thereby bettering the lot of history learners, despite the fact that no concrete understanding of learners' perceptions of and attitudes towards school history education appeared to exist. Current debates surrounding the future of history education in South African schools highlight some of radical transformations which school history education has undergone since its unproblematised beginnings in the nineteenth century. But in other respects, these debates continue to pay very little attention to the views and attitudes of the learners themselves.

The present study suggests that at the very least, an attempt should be made to see whether an investigation into the attitudes of learners towards school history would prove to be a fruitful line of enquiry for historians and history education authorities who are concerned about the future of their subject and are looking to improve the quality and attractiveness of history in schools. I have only come across two other studies which explored the attitudes of learners to school history. Both limited their investigation to learners who had already chosen to take history as a subject to Matric.

In 1987, Nomathamsanqa Margaret Vena conducted an 'Investigation into problems underlying the Teaching of History as a School subject in Transkei Senior Secondary Schools'. The study arose out of her concern for the fact that '[t]he teaching of history in the Transkei is being sharply criticised from various viewpoints and its very place in the curriculum has been questioned' as well as the seemingly widespread perception that

History is often the subject of the pupils whose real interest is elsewhere; academically pupils generally prefer a soft option. It is the subject of the dullards who merely wish to continue the familiar book-learning they have acquired at school (Vena, 1987:1).

Vena distributed questionnaires to history college lecturers, standard ten history learners, history college student-teachers and history subject advisors to try to find ways to improve school history education in the Transkei. Her findings were similar to the problems with school history identified earlier by van den Berg and Buckland (1983). However, she concluded that '[p]upils have shown positive feelings and attitudes towards history. This is contrary to the view that has been held all along that students do not like the subject' (178).

A similar finding was recorded by Boateng Kofi Atuahene-Sarpong (1992). In his thesis he stated

The result of this study reveals an interesting paradox. The problems associated with History teaching revealed by the study should be enough to take the 'slightest interest' out of the heart of History-loving pupils, but this was not so. Despite the problems...pupils showed marked interest and strong liking for the subject (1992:109-110).

These studies helped learners to voice their problems and difficulties with school history and

suggested ways in which history teachers could make the subject 'more alive and interesting to pupils' (Atuahene-Sarpong, 1992:115). The fact that these two researchers also made unexpected findings (as explained by Atuahene-Sarpong above) suggests that history educators cannot always accurately predict the attitudes and views of learners and therefore more attention should be paid to studies of this nature.

Perhaps the most pressing question, though, relates to the nature and purpose of history in schools. For the History and Archaeology Report Panel

the severe erosion of history as a distinctive discipline...results in these learning areas being deprived of the space and scholarly stature to play their full role in challenging the racial and other mythologies which remain part of our society (Department of Education, 2000).

Educationalist June Bam explains, '[t]he South African History Project...[was] charged with the national task of implementing a history that will promote democratic values, tackling the warts of racism, sexism and xenophobia in our society' (2001:5). South African history education seems destined to continue to promote particular world views. But to what extent *are* learners' senses of the past and attitudes to history shaped and influenced by the socialising forces of school history education?

In the early 1970s, Education lecturer Lynn Maree conducted a small research project which aimed, in part

to discover whether the architects of Bantu Education had succeeded in establishing what Bourdieu calls "systems of thought". Did the teachings of school, supported by informal education, come to set the parameters within which any thinking, any accepting or even opposing, could take place... Had the rulers of South Africa succeeded in obtaining what Gramsci called 'hegemony' (Maree, 1991:150)?

Her conclusions were that

it would seem that Bantu Education had not succeeded in turning [student's] eyes away from forbidden pastures: the experience of life in Soweto, the reading of newspapers, and possibly a sense of history of opposition, were together stronger than the textbooks and the segregated structure of their schools. But the wider parameters of thought and ways of understanding had been influenced. [Students] reflected a certain passivity... Schooling...removes the responsibility of learning from the learner [and] legitimises what schools teach over other

knowledge (Maree, 1991:157).

Nevertheless, Maree went on to say

It is possible in the secondary school to become critically aware of being manipulated, and therefore to be fairly cynical about what is taught. Black children of secondary age in urban areas are aware of their exploited position and the education system does not succeed in winning acceptance of it (Maree, 1991:158).

Are learners perhaps rejecting history as a Matric subject because by grade ten they have ‘become critically aware of being manipulated’ into a particular world view? Do their senses of the past, as formed and influenced by their experiences in the everyday, clash with the way in which they are expected to interact with and use their knowledge of the past at school? In their report, the History and Archaeology Panel wrote

we have to recognise the fact that everyone has a form of historical consciousness. This historical consciousness is not crafted on a blank slate by teachers in schools, or by professional historians in universities. It is created in and by the family, the community, churches, the media and other areas of communication, interacting with individual experience. In this, the value of the formal study of history is that it aims to develop this latent consciousness into a conscious consciousness (Department of Education, 2000).

In the next chapter, this study will argue that it is equally important to understand *how* histories are made and used by learners in the everyday; how these “latent consciousness” which learners bring with them to school, materialise and are used (if at all) by learners in the first place. For without such an understanding, this study suggests, history educators’ attempts to understand how learners respond to school history will be only partially successful.

CHAPTER 3

THINKING ABOUT HISTORY IN THE EVERYDAY: IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL HISTORY EDUCATION

[H]istory is not the prerogative of the historian, nor even, as postmodernism contends, a historian's 'invention'. It is, rather, a social form of knowledge; the work, in any given instance, of a thousand different hands...[T]he point of address in any discussion of historiography should not be the work of the individual scholar...but rather the ensemble of activities and practices in which the ideas of history are embedded or a dialectic of past-present relations is rehearsed (Samuel, 1996:8).

In 1985, Lowenthal wrote '[t]hough the past is a topic of almost universal concern, little research explicitly focuses on how people in general see, value or understand it' (1985:xxvi). In other words, Lowenthal was arguing that very little attention had been paid by western historians to the processes by which histories are made and used outside the academy, more specifically, how histories are made and used by people in their ordinary, everyday lives. Nevertheless, over the last twenty years, a number of western historians have published pioneering works which signal a wide scope for new and diverse ways of thinking about history outside the academy, particularly in the area of "history in the everyday". These works, together with a handful of key South African texts which also deal with the making of histories outside the academy, are particularly relevant to the development of this study.

The previous chapter established that there is a very clear tendency amongst history education authorities to pursue lines of enquiry that will encourage a greater number of learners to benefit from the 'values' which the guided study of history at school can provide. From within the context of schools viewed as centres of teaching and learning, history educators aim to shape learners' views, values and understandings of the past by helping them to become more 'historically conscious' in the present. However, this chapter will argue that

very few researchers have actually concerned themselves with factors outside school history which also influence, shape and develop learners' 'senses of the past'. Consequently, very few educators have actually tried to understand how learners, as individual agents, make meaning from their own past experiences, including their experience of various forms of past representation such as school history, national heritage and family stories. The process by which individuals make meaning of the past through their own experience is interpreted by this study as the activity of making history in the everyday. This chapter will suggest that a recognition by academic historians of the variety of sites where histories are made, has significant implications for the ways in which history education authorities view the nature and purpose of history as taught and learnt in South African schools.

Literature on western experiences of history in the everyday

The current literature on the making and use of history in the everyday is dominated by western thought. In South Africa (as well as other parts of Africa), this area has particularly begun to be explored in the more recent works of some oral historians. However, the issues raised in the western literature on history in the everyday provides a very useful foundation from which the discussion surrounding the making and use of histories in the everyday in South Africa can be explored.

One of the seminal works concerning the role of a sense of history in people's ordinary, everyday lives is Patrick Wright's (1985) *On Living in an Old Country*. Wright examines the nature of Britain's national past in an attempt to see how it connects to people's individual historical consciousness in the everyday and tries to 'trace the possible sources of a shared sense of history in contemporary everyday life' (Wright, 1985:7). He argues that although the 'tensions and aspirations of everyday life find expression in the modern past...the "national past" doesn't exhaust or fully express everyday historical consciousness' (Wright, 1985:24-26) for

while an 'anxious readiness- to-receive the past exists as something of a generality in modern everyday life, closer historical attention will also reveal that very different versions and

appropriations of the past continue to emerge from different classes or groups (1985:25).

Referring specifically to 'the sense of history, tradition and cultural identity which plays such an influential part in the British national imagination' (1985:5), Wright argues that 'the unity of the nation is achieved at the cost of considerable mystification' (1985:4) for how else 'can the forms of self-understanding which it promotes come to be shared by people of strikingly different situation and circumstance' (1985:5)? He goes on to contemplate

whether everyday historical consciousness might be *detached* from its present articulation in the dominant symbolism of the nation and drawn into different expressions of cultural and historical identity (original emphasis) (Wright, 1985:26).

The significance of Wright's argument to this study is twofold. Firstly, by exploring the 'myth' of the national past, he identifies other sites of historical production outside the traditional confines of the academy, and second, he begins to imagine alternatives to the historical consciousness which is wrapped up in the idea of a national past by concentrating on more particular forms of everyday historical consciousness. Wright helps to pose the question: where else do everyday forms of historical consciousness play a role?

Wright also draws on the work of Agnes Heller who argues that 'everyday life has its own forms of historical consciousness' made to suit our needs in the present rather than to show the past as it really was in our attempts to understand where we have come from, what we are and where we are going (Wright, 1985:14). For Heller, an everyday historical consciousness is not static: '[i]t also includes a sense of historical development or change as it impinges on everyday life'. Heller calls this a 'sense of historical existence' (cited in Wright, 1985:16) which is constantly working towards what Heller terms 'making sense'. She explains that in a

static, preindustrial world...meaning was once 'given' and no specific effort or intention was needed 'for making sense of one's *own* life,' this has changed with the development of the capitalist and industrialised economy. In modernity the forms of life are open to interpretation and 'Man's life is no longer written in the stars (sic) (cited in Wright, 1985:16).

Thus

the subject of everyday life is constantly re-evaluating and rearranging itself.... Particularistic interests are harmonised (or otherwise) with the customs, values and norms of external authority, options are assessed in the light of conscience, experiences are remembered and reinterpreted in the light of age, feelings are framed and arranged in a way that fits them into the historically defined tasks and demands of the external world (Wright, 1985:11).

This point is echoed by David Lowenthal (1985), another pioneer who investigates the nature of history in the everyday. He too comes to the conclusion that in our desire to preserve the past, we are actually simply adapting it to our present needs. In his widely cited book, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Lowenthal explores the various ways in which people in the everyday want and know the past. He examines the relationship between past and present by exploring the various ways in which people relive the past, through dreams, nostalgia, memories and tradition, and argues that 'historic preservation has helped us to see how much the past is altered to suit the present' (1985:410). But he also acknowledges that it is rather alarming to come to the realisation that the past is both altered and alterable. 'What reassurance', he asks

can be gained from vestiges of a past so prone to vicissitude? What virtue has a heritage whose permanence is chimerical? The answer is that a fixed past is not what we really need. We require a heritage with which we can continually interact, one which fuses past with present. This heritage is not only necessary, but inescapable; we cannot now avoid feeling that the past *is* to some extent our own creation...When we realise that past and present are not exclusive, but inseparable realms, we cast off preservation's self-defeating insistence on a fixed and stable past. Only by altering and adding to what we save does our heritage remain real, alive, and comprehensible (Lowenthal, 1985:410-411).

Lowenthal explains that this acknowledgement means that we create a past that is 'coherent' and 'believable' in the present, knowing that it will be revised to suit a new present in the future (1985:411). But just because we are now aware that we can never know the past as it really was, does not mean that the past is not important for the present. As Lowenthal explains, 'the cult of nostalgia, the yearning for roots, the demand for heritage, the passion for preservation show that the spell of the past remains potent' (1985:412). The forces which drive these sentiments deserve further investigation.

In his *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (1996), Lowenthal takes his discussion one step further by exploring the paradoxes evident in the recent explosion of the western heritage industry. He argues:

All at once heritage is everywhere.... It is the chief focus of patriotism and the prime lure of tourism... Every legacy is cherished...; we mourn worlds known to be irrevocably lost - yet more vividly felt, more lucid, more real than the murky and ambiguous present. We yearn for rooted legacies that enrich the paltry here and now with ancestral echoes (Lowenthal 1996: ix, xi).

Lowenthal explores the conundrum that whilst we may wish to cherish, revere and preserve the past,

much that we inherit is far from 'goodly', some of it downright diabolical. Heritage brings manifold benefits: it links us with ancestors and offspring, bonds neighbours and patriots, certifies identity, roots us in time-honoured ways. But heritage is also oppressive, defeatist, decadent. Miring us in the obsolete, the cult of heritage allegedly immures life within museums and monuments. Breeding xenophobic hate, it becomes a byword for bellicose discourse. Debasing the 'true' past for greedy or chauvinistic ends, heritage is accused of undermining historical truth with twisted myth (Lowenthal, 1996:ix-x).

He draws a distinction between the realm of academic history and its attempts to produce verifiable versions of the past, whilst acknowledging that we can never really know the past for what it was, and the domain of heritage, within which demands for verification detract from what heritage really is. He argues that heritage, by its very nature, *must* depart from verifiable truth (Lowenthal, 1996:250).

In domesticating the past [through heritage] we enlist it for present causes...At its best, heritage fabrication is both creative art and act of faith. By means of it we tell ourselves who we are, where we come from and to what we belong. (Lowenthal, 1996 xi,xiii).

Heritage has become a new and popular way of thinking about the past, outside, but still closely monitored by, history in the academy. In our efforts to rescue and hoard, through heritage, whatever traces and relics of the past we can lay our hands on, we create new histories, new sites of historical production, new and different ways of thinking about the past.

Historian David Cohen was one of the earliest academics to talk about the 'production' of history. In his book *The Combing of History* (1996), Cohen explores the fact that the work of academic historians is governed by a number of conventions of research and interpretation. Rather than focussing his attention on what texts appear to say about the past, he chooses to explore how the texts and the knowledge within them came to be (Cohen, 1994:xv). He

explains,

I was moved by the observation that while the academic guild of African historians debated methods and experiences of handling specific texts, and also oral tradition generally, people across Africa were themselves producing, using and actively debating their pasts in ways virtually inaccessible to guild interests in evolving something like a science of oral historiography (Cohen, 1994:xv).

This point is particularly relevant for the purposes of this study, for not only is Cohen pointing to another site of history production outside the academy, but he is also arguing that this use of histories in the everyday is dynamic and complex and does not fit neatly into conventions produced in and imposed by historians in the academy.

Other Histories (1992), edited by Kirsten Hastrup, helps to reiterate this point. Written by anthropologists, it explains that a growing awareness of history amongst anthropologists allowed for 'an increasing sensitivity towards different modes of producing and thinking about history in different societies' (Hastrup, 1992:1). The book is an indication of the fact that the construction of histories is a complex, colourful and textured affair differing from one individual, society and culture to another and cannot be easily tamed into the linear, scientific and 'verifiable' accounts with which academic historians prefer to work. It also points to the fact that, as one of the contributors puts it, 'if we [anthropologists] wish to incorporate history into our analysis and explanation of social activity, we must pay attention to ways in which people construe the past' (Davis, 1992:14). For as Greg Denning points out in his book, *Performances*, 'we all make histories endlessly' (1996:35). As soon as the present has gone by, we are already trying to make sense of it. We tell stories about it, interpret the meanings of gestures made, words spoken and actions done and make narratives of the past in our minds and conversations (Denning, 1996:35). Denning explains that the past can only be known 'through symbols whose meaning is changed in the reading and preserving of them' (1996:43). And he points to a wide variety of ways in which these symbols of the past are preserved and read: legend, folklore, tradition and myth; rumour, ballad or parable, annals, chronicle, report (1996:37).

Denning goes on to argue that 'in history we are *entertained* by the meanings we put on the

past' (original emphasis) (1996:47). He explains that

the past is constitutive of the present in the entertainment that histories give. Histories are the theatres of this entertainment. Rather, histories are the varied theatres of this entertainment. That is, histories are not just the content of a story or an interpretation of the past. Histories are not just a message. Histories are the mode of the story's expression, the public occasion of its telling (Denning, 1996:48-49).

Raphael Samuel (1996) also explores the idea of being entertained by history. In his book *Theatres of Memory*, he argues that people engage with and remember those aspects of the past which entertain, enthrall, excite or scare them. They remember 'the remarkable occurrence and larger than life personality which stirs the interest of listeners, readers or viewers' (Samuel, 1996:16). Writing about English history, he explains that

George III is remembered because he went mad...; Henry VIII because he married six times and executed his unwanted wives.... "The events which leave the deepest impression on the minds of the common people" were not "gradual progress" but some period of fear and tribulation: "They date by a tempest, an earthquake, or bouts of civil commotion" (Lovel cited in Samuel, 1996:6).

So how do people use this unofficial historical knowledge which they produce in their everyday lives? In their book, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (1998), David Thelen and Roy Rosenzweig report on the findings of a large survey which they conducted amongst the American public, and reveal a wide variety of ways in which Americans engage with and are entertained by their interactions with the past. They argue that although many surveys have been conducted with findings which seem to suggest that the average American is fairly ignorant about the past, and although there is a body of scholarship which is aware of the way in which the past is popularly presented, no-one has actually examined how Americans *understand* and *use* the past (1998:3-4). Rosenzweig and Thelen's study reveals that Americans actually seem quite closely connected to the past. From telling stories around the dinner table to collecting old motorcycles, respondents to their survey seemed to be actively engaging the past in their everyday lives. Preferring to construct their own narratives, they were also able to engage critically with others (Rosenzweig and Thelen, 1998:178). In the light of their findings, Rosenzweig and Thelen point to the need to reimagine the relationship between history professionals and popular history makers. They

argue that

[t]he interests and passions that our respondents have described suggest bases for forging new connections, alliances and conversations with those diverse audiences... Scholars and public historians need to better respect, understand, invoke and involve the very real authority their audiences bring to a museum exhibit, a popular history book or a public programme (Frisch cited in Rosenzweig and Thelen, 1998:178-179, 181).

In keeping with what Denning (1996) and Lowenthal (1985 and 1996) have to say,

Rosenzweig and Thelen observe that

the most powerful meanings of the past come out of the dialogue between the past and the present, out of the ways the past can be used to answer pressing current-day questions about relationships, identity, immorality and agency...For our respondents, the past is not only present - it is part of the present (1998:178).

In South Africa, widespread illiteracy amongst the majority of South Africa's population and a lack of control over the printed word, together with an appreciation of the importance of community amongst South Africa's indigenous population meant that this 'dialogue between past and present' took place largely in the realm of the oral histories produced in South Africa's indigenous societies.

South African literature on history in the everyday

For academic historians in South Africa, an appreciation of 'oral tradition' as an historical source dates back to the mid-twentieth century. In an article titled "'Living by fluidity": oral histories, material custodies and the politics of archiving', Carolyn Hamilton (2002) traces the developments of academic thought around the question of 'oral histories'. She describes Jan Vansina as 'the pioneering figure in the study of African oral traditions' and refers to his methodological approach to oral histories which he published in 1961. This method was used and adapted by other oral historians in their attempts to counteract a number of problems which Hamilton explains have been regarded as typical of oral sources:

Transmitted by word of mouth, oral accounts have been considered by scholars to be

notoriously open to accretions over time, to selective adaptations, and to be permeable to the orientations, biases and even manipulations, of their narrators. These problems have been understood to be compounded by the vagaries and deficiencies of memory. Oral accounts have been considered typically to lack clear chronological organisation and to focus on the history of rulers at the expense of ordinary people (Hamilton, 2002:212).

Vansina's methodological approach to oral history enabled historians to turn oral histories into academic sources. Vansina's contributions also meant that historians such as Paul la Hausse (1991) could comment that, amongst other things, '[t]he use of oral history has enabled South African historians to construct a culturally sensitive understanding of class, compelling them to relate issues of class formation to those of ethnicity, community, gender, youth and the family' (1991:346). He wrote of 'retrieving' the history of working-class life in urban communities (la Hausse, 1991:347), thus perpetuating the assumption that oral histories are out there waiting to be found and academically verified. But Hamilton (2002) argues that La Hausse only focusses his attention on how academic historians *use* oral accounts as 'sources' to construct their own histories. He does not, she says, examine how 'ordinary' people use and make oral histories in their everyday lives (Hamilton, 2002:215).

This discussion fits into a broader debate which has been playing itself out between Jan Vansina and historian David Cohen (mentioned earlier) since the late 1970s, the particulars of which are outlined by Hamilton (2002). Hamilton points out that, contrary to Vansina's view that oral historians require their 'own distinctive methodology', Cohen argues 'for the "undefining of oral tradition"' (cited in Hamilton, 2002:216) which essentially suggests that oral historians should rethink the idea that oral histories can be subjected to a distinctive methodology at all. Hamilton remarks that

the possible implication of Cohen's work [is] that oral forms of historical knowledge [are] subject to such complex processes of creativity that the academic historian could never establish a method guaranteed to recover "the historical meaning of a text" (Hamilton, 2002:217).

In addition, Hamilton also comments that Isabel Hofmeyr's position - that oral histories 'live by [their] fluidity' - and that their changing nature as living histories in the present should be seen as a strength rather than a flaw - is one which still receives little attention from historians (2002, 218). Hamilton qualifies her position by explaining that she does not think that

historians should stop recording oral histories as ‘sources’, but she underlines the fact that it is also important to remember that ‘the fixing of oral accounts may undermine their resilience and disempower precisely those people who are deemed to have the greatest need of the history that the oral accounts contain’ (2002, 219). It is this notion of ordinary people (learners), involved in the making and use of ‘living’ histories in their everyday lives with which this study is concerned.

But the making and use of oral histories by ordinary people in South Africa has been largely overshadowed by the need for the ‘resistance’ or ‘struggle’ histories used to counteract a white-dominated apartheid state. The development of a popular history movement or ‘history from below’ which began to take shape within the independent labour movement in Durban in the mid-1970s and burgeoned into a wider movement during the 1980s was a product of these broader political conflicts. Luli Callinicos writes that ‘[i]n the popular writings of the 1980s, two approaches can be detected’ (1990:285): workers’ history and peoples’ history.

Callinicos explains that workers’ histories were ‘aimed at a specifically working-class audience, and class struggle was their central focus’ (Callinicos, 1991:286). It saw the emergence of publications such as *The Sun Shall Rise for the Workers* which tells the story of a metal worker on the East Rand and *Gold and Workers*, ‘a history of the gold industry from the perspective of working men and women’ which were published by Ravan Press in Johannesburg. ‘[B]ooklets on key labour history events [were] produced by the Labour History Group in Cape Town’ (Callinicos, 1990:259). Later labour publications came from the trade unions themselves such as *Political Economy: South Africa in Crisis* which was published by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in 1987. In 1989 the South African Council for Higher Education (SACHED) published *Freedom from Below: The Struggle for Trade Unions in South Africa* which told the story of worker’s struggles to organise and defend the formation of trade unions in South Africa.

People’s history , on the other hand

emphasise[d] organised national struggles, focussing on heroes and leaders, and on state oppression rather than exploitation by the capitalist system. In its aim of

'nation-building', class differences [were] played down (Callinicos, 1990:288).

This was the history connected with the African National Congress and promoted in the Freedom Charter. The development of people's history mostly took place outside the realm of the academy, but the History Workshop at the University of the Witwatersrand was active in promoting the research and writing of alternative and counterhistory through its conferences, the first of which was held in 1977. In March 1986, Leslie Witz was appointed by SACHED and the History Workshop as coordinator of the Write Your Own History Project which had been set up by these two groups to 'give ordinary people the historical tools to engage with the past' (Witz, 1990:378) rather than argue over how it should be presented. The popular history movement encouraged workers and people on the ground to actively participate in the making of their own history. Those historians aligned with this movement thus appear to have concerned themselves with the history in the everyday.

However, in an article 'Orality, Memory, and Social History in South Africa', Minkley and Rassool (1998) offer an insightful critique of 'social history' in South Africa in the 1980s. They argue that social historians saw their work as 'characterised by the attempt to "give voice" to the experience of previously marginal groups and to recover the agency of ordinary people' (Minkley and Rassool, 1998:91). They assert that peoples' history produced 'a politics of history as weapon, tool, and vehicle for empowerment' (Minkley and Rassool, 1998:93) and suggest that 'social history in South Africa brought together modernist appropriations of oral discourses with nationalist and culturalist teleologies of resistance to generate a grand narrative of experience, read as "history from below"' (Minkley and Rassool, 1998:94). In the light of these arguments, it would seem that although the movement of 'history from below' did take a more definite interest in the lives and histories of people in the everyday, it was still caught up in a politics of resistance presenting another strand of history in opposition to the official version and not focussing its attention on the *processes* in which histories are made and used by people in the everyday. As Hamilton puts it,

Bozzoli described the History Workshop as promoting 'the writing of *academic* studies of "hidden histories", the preparation of accessible histories for non-academic "*audiences*" and the provision of training to non-academics for the *writing* of their own histories'. In short,

this view asserted that real history is produced by academics or by ordinary people following academic procedures, occurs in written form and is published (original emphasis) (2002:215).

However, in their article, Minkley and Rassool point to a growing realisation that

apartheid did not always produce resistance, and that resistance was not always occasioned by apartheid...alongside difference and inequality lie more subtle forms of economic, cultural and intellectual exchange tied to the layers in which past and present are negotiated through memory, tradition and history, both written and oral (1998:94).

Thus developments in the thinking around history in the everyday in South Africa have had to wait until the collapse of the apartheid state and a shift in the emphasis away from histories of resistance. Over the past decade or so, emerging out of a spirit of reconciliation and aspirations of national unity, new discussions surrounding the issue of history in the everyday have begun to emerge. These discussions centre around the making of popular memory. One of the most pressing questions is how the next generation will remember South Africa's past? In addressing this topic, Foner writes,

Historical memory, of course, is unavoidably selective, and forgetting some parts of the past is as much an element of historical understanding as remembering others. What to remember and what to forget are themselves political questions, points of conflict as South Africa moves into a new era (1995:175).

Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee's edited book *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (1998) is a collection of essays which try to understand the different types of memories, national and official, personal or public, popular or conflicting, that are being formed about the past as we try to come to grips with the reality of the new South Africa. The book also explores the various ways in which these memories may be created: through monuments, memorials, museums and landscapes, oral histories, autobiography and written narratives, popular culture, advertising, media.

Entwined with this interest in the making of South African memory is the question surrounding how the South African past is presented in the public sphere. For example, Patricia Davison explains that as 'agents of official memory' (1998:158), South African

museums have begun to rethink the way in which they want to present the South African past. Davison argues that 'museums themselves are public spaces that can be used for contesting and negotiating [power] relations' in society...There is no authentic voice...exhibitions are open to imagination and interpretation (1998:160).

Perhaps the most obvious official attempt to shape the ways in which South Africans think about and remember the past were the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) conducted over the first few years of the new democracy after election of an ANC dominated government in 1994. For the first time South African people were allowed to speak freely of their experiences under apartheid without fear of retribution. Nuttall and Coetzee describe the records of these hearings as 'the repository of South African memory' (1998:1).

The South African government has also shown an interest in the shaping of memory in the public sphere. In 1996 the South African Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology released a White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage. This outlined a programme for 'the transformation of heritage policies' which was 'designed to correct imbalances of apartheid history preservation and associated resource distribution and skills development' (Hamilton, 2002:223). Robben Island, for example, became a site of struggle as 'various political groupings [competed] to reformulate the meaning of the island and its role as a national symbol' (Deacon, 1998:162).

Rassool writes that '[t]he domain of heritage and public history requires serious examination, for it is here that attempts are being made to fashion the categories and images of the post-apartheid nation' (2000:1). Cynthia Kros (1998) argues that it is still too easy to turn the old apartheid historical narrative on its head and trap ourselves in debates over who was 'good' and who was 'evil'. Unsung heroes (banished from the history books of apartheid) suddenly find themselves promoted to the front cover whilst the previously celebrated statue of Jan van Riebeeck stands forgotten on the 350th anniversary of his landing at the Cape (Witz, 2003). Kros asks whether there is

a way or ways in which apartheid - its rise and fall - can be better explained or illuminated from different angles...Can we afford to dally with different ways of seeing things without giving apartheid the upper hand or appearing to pardon the unpardonable (1998:213)?

Thus debates over the rise of the heritage industry with its emphasis on national monuments, commemorative statues of heroes of the struggle, the renaming of signage systems and the promotion of the cultural tourist industry have also made their way into the academy.

Rassool remarks that academic historians 'are being forced to reconsider the conventional routines and spaces of their literate teaching and research procedures' (Rassool, 2000:2). He explains that over the last decade,

institutions in the public domain have been the site of the production of history in the form of heritage projects, museum displays, new monuments, and the performance of identity...The domain of heritage has become the most important sphere in which contests over South African pasts have been taking place. These histories are not in the form of written texts or even oral accounts which historians have become accustomed to. Often they are of a visual nature, communicating histories through visual codes of design, curatorship, spectacle and choreography. And these are histories which do not wait for the 'Historians' first to write. Those historians who have chosen to regard 'Heritage' as an inferior domain have not understood the changed nature of their field (2000:21).

So how have historians in South Africa reacted to this increased activity over heritage? The reluctant historian to whom Rassool refers sees heritage as 'incorrect, incomplete, biased, in fact, totally ahistorical' distinct from the 'higher' activity of academic history (Rassool, 2000:3-4).

But despite this negative sentiment, a large number of historians do seem to acknowledge that 'the academy no longer floats free of the public and popular domains' (Hamilton, 1996:148) and that 'professional historians should become more aware of and involved in the production of history beyond the narrower confines of the academic discipline' (Southey, 1990:169).

Maylam argues that

the historical profession needs to examine critically the structural conditions which generate, shape and limit the production of historical knowledge... [t]his is not to downplay the importance of specialised research, but rather to call for greater balance in recognising and rewarding different forms of historical practice, different channels of historical transmission (1995:12).

In an article entitled 'Heritage vs History', Kros (2003:329) reveals her uncertainty over the rise of heritage studies and asks '[i]n following Heritage do I inevitably abandon History?' But she manages to reach a compromise by arguing that there is not really such a big gulf between heritage and history after all and that, in fact, each helps to complement the other, heritage helping to evoke emotion and history reminding us that identities and memories do not remain fixed in time.

In their essay 'Exploring beyond history with a capital H' (1998), John Wright and Tim Nuttall argue that rather than seeing forms of history, such as heritage, as less worthy than academic history, we should simply see them as new ways of thinking about and engaging with the past. Rassool asserts that,

'heritage' in South Africa is not simply some lesser zone. Rather, it can be seen as an assemblage of arenas and activities of history-making that is as disputatious as the claims made about the character of academic history. What is required, rather, is a sociology of historical production in the academy as well as the public domain and an enquiry into the categories, codes and conventions of history-making in each location and in all its variability (2000:4-5).

The discussions raised above explore the variety of ways in which people in their everyday lives view and use the past. The acknowledgement by some academic historians that there are other sites outside the academy where living histories are made and used by ordinary people to make sense of their lives in the present helps to break from the traditional top-down approach to historical knowledge that has tended to dominate the academy. What implications do these developments within the realms of academic history have for school history education in South Africa? What other forces, apart from academic, school and public history influence people's sense of the past, how do people negotiate these forces, what histories are formed as a result of this interaction and how are they used by the people who produce them? Important for the purposes of this study is the question of how learners negotiate the histories and senses of the past which they encounter and form in the everyday with the histories they learn at school.

To return to the overseas literature, against a background of increasing appreciation for the importance of history in the everyday, Raphael Samuel is one of the first to raise the question

of how school children acquire historical knowledge. He bemoans that fact that '[s]o far as pedagogy is concerned, it allows no space for knowledge which creeps in sideways as a by-product of studying something else' (Samuel, 1996:8). This could be extended to knowledge which creeps in after being exposed to other elements of history which are to be found in the everyday. Samuel asks, what about children's theatricals, autobiography, stories, legends, songs, children's games and riddles at school, graphics and television? He considers oral tradition which

wells up from those lower depths - history's nether-world - where memory and myth intermingle, and the imaginary rubs shoulders with the real. As a form of knowledge it is acquired higgledy-piggledy, in dibs and dabs, as in the proverbs or jokes which children learn from one another in the playground, or the half-remembered incidents and events which are used to fill in the missing links of a story (1994:6).

He also suggests that

[w]ithin the school syllabus it might turn out that the significant history which children learnt come not from the timetabled hours, or reading devoted specifically to the subject, but rather...[activities which entertain them] [m]odelling a Roman trireme, building a Saxon hut, or pretending to be an Arawak (1994:12).

This study argues that by looking at 'the whole spectrum of learning experiences which have no part in the official syllabus' as Samuel suggests (1996:12), researchers might discover a new wealth of 'unofficial' historical knowledge which is made and used within the school walls. By following Samuel's argument, the official historical consciousness which learners are expected to acquire through the study of history at school (as discussed in Chapter Two) may be of little significance when one considers the changing nature of historical knowledge and the vast array of other forces (outside of the institutions) which influence learners' senses and understanding of the past. So the next question to ask is, what studies have been conducted in South Africa to explore learners' senses of the past and the ways in which they negotiate the past in their everyday lives? To what extent have researchers tried to understand how children construct and use the past? To what extent have learners' perceptions of the past constituted an area of investigation at all, whether it be for the purpose of improving school history pedagogy, or to begin to understand what histories the learners themselves are producing, either consciously or unconsciously?

Previous studies investigating learners' 'senses of the past'

Kros and Greybe's (1996) report entitled, 'The Rainbow nation vs healing old wounds - an investigation into teacher and pupil attitudes to standard three history' is probably the earliest research which touches on the issues with which this study is concerned. They explain that their research originated from two sources. In the first instance, they were approached by a primary school teacher who was trying to find a more 'up-to-date version of history to teach her Standard Four class' (Kros and Greybe, 1996:3). In the second, the researchers themselves were attempting to develop new approaches to the history education of student teachers at the University of the Witwatersrand. Kros and Greybe pose the following questions:

- How do we develop a process that brings historians and teachers into curriculum development and materials production?
- What is the role of history in the education of the whole child?
- Are these aspects of history at school being taken into account in the development of new history curricula?
- How do we involve school children in a similar process to that which we developed with university students? (Kros and Greybe, 1996:5)

Dissatisfied with the curriculum development process being conducted by the National Education Department, Kros and Greybe 'decided to undertake [their] own, independent research in order to establish firstly what was happening in history curriculum and textbook development and secondly what was possible in the primary schools' (Kros and Greybe, 1996:5). In their investigation, Kros and Greybe tried to get a broader understanding of what standard three pupils bring to their history classroom. With the use of a questionnaire, they tried to ask questions that would help them 'gain access to the children's experiences of the everyday world', arguing that 'it is vital for history teachers to know about the world their pupils inhabit' (1996:15). In this respect Kros and Greybe present a pioneering study in what would appear to be a first attempt by educationists to understand the world of the learner. Kros and Greybe's study revealed the children's world was 'surprisingly sophisticated' and

suggested that the children were more ‘capable of dealing with fairly complex narratives’ than current teaching practices assume (1996:26). Kros and Greybe suspected that the difficulties many children experience with history may be found in the ‘profound dissonance between [children’s] ability to write things down and their ability to understand and enjoy complex narratives and forms of knowledge’ (1996:27). For them, this meant that children could get far more out of their history classes if teachers simply reassessed their teaching and assessment approach.

The second half of the researchers’ questionnaire was ‘designed to show children’s understandings of and feelings about history and the past’ (1996:15). They remark that children like to narrativise the past, seek refuge in it, and fantasize about being able to intervene in the past. The researchers comment that

[children] might not know exactly how many years constitute a century, or why we refer to the 1800s as the ‘nineteenth century’ but they are capable of making astute connections between past and present (Kros and Greybe, 1996:27).

Although Kros and Greybe did explore some of the ways in which children interact with and use the past in their everyday lives, and even began to build a picture of what histories or senses of the past learners hold, they were more interested in gaining a better understanding of how children negotiate their lives, and, in particular, what makes children enthusiastic, so that they could find new and different ‘ways in which one could ‘tutor’ children’s historical imagination’ (1996:27). In other words, Kros and Greybe were still concerned with approaching school history from the top down. They investigated the attitudes and assumptions that children bring to the history classroom so as to find new ways of improving history education.

This study works from the premise that although it is important for historians to involve themselves in debates about school history education, it is also important that they begin to think about the way histories are made and used in the everyday. As Samuel (1996) and Kros and Greybe (1996) have pointed out, schools are particularly conducive to this kind of research, providing a concentration of members of the younger generation who bring with them a diverse range of different everyday life experiences and senses of the past. By

viewing schools as sites where histories are made and used, historians can begin to learn how members of the younger generation interact with and negotiate their pasts.

One study which has seen the potential of viewing schools as sites of history production is titled 'Mirror of a Nation in Transition: Case studies of history teachers and students in Cape Town Schools' (1999). Researched by Canadian educationalist Sarah Dryden, the study examined how teachers and students in Cape Town schools were dealing with a changing education system and inquired into the role that education plays in the development of a nation. Dryden thought that

history classes, as a way to look at the past and the present as well as to imagine the future, would provide a *space* for me to examine how teachers and students make sense of the society in which they live (emphasis mine) (1999:1).

But this study is conducted from an educationist's perspective. Although Dryden remarks on the fact that when teachers were trying to figure out what content to teach their students, 'they were conscious of what the students themselves brought to school - the neighbourhoods in which they lived, their experiences, and ideas about the future' (1999:115), once again their aim was to try to find ways of improving their teaching methods. Dryden explains that she has 'attempted to mirror how teachers and students in Cape Town schools are dealing, through history, with an education system in transition' (1999:124). But by focussing on the process of history education, Dryden moves away from the potential to see history classrooms (and by extension, schools) as sites where histories are made and used by the children themselves.

Two other studies have recently been conducted in South Africa into the way in which children think about the past. They also explore some of the external influences which shape the way children think about and negotiate the past in the everyday. Both of these studies work from the assumption that school history is a valuable subject which can assist in the role of identity formation and nation-building. Nevertheless, they at least demonstrate an interest in the lives, attitudes and perceptions of learners involved in school history education.

The first study titled, 'National Identity, Social Cohesion and the Teaching of History in

South Africa', was conducted by a number of history and education researchers from the University of the Witwatersrand. It helped to paint a picture of how Grade Four and Grade Six learners see the South African past. The study concluded that '[i]t is difficult to change the presentation of history at school, but this case study suggests very strongly that we should not abandon it, whatever we call it... even if it is combined with other subjects. Our need to know the past must be satisfied' (Kros et al, 1998:41). But this study points to school history education being used to shape and develop learners' historical consciousness. The issue of *how* children know and use the past and what histories they produce in their everyday lives, tends to remain hidden in the background.

The second study 'The Current Relevance of Populist History in Schools: The Attitudes of Cape Town Youth to History' was conducted by educationist June Bam and completed in 2001. She aimed to investigate whether 'the historical consciousness of grade 10 youth (history learners) would increase should there be an intervention facilitated for this purpose, that is that they would show a heightened consciousness of the relation between school history and current affairs, politics and other societal issues' (Bam, 2001:i). Bam's investigation was inspired by two other history projects. The first was the 'My New World Project', initiated by the University of the Western Cape with the intention of providing a more 'purposeful history' for school. It was an attempt to promote a greater historical consciousness amongst South African learners by showing how controversial issues in the present related to historical developments in the past (Bam, 2001:2). The second project was 'The Youth and History Project' which was implemented in Europe in 1996. Pieter Kapp describes this project as '[t]he first comprehensive attempt to measure the outcomes of history teaching for adolescents' (1998, 105). Kapp explains that the research '[was] based on the assumption that the development of an historical consciousness is the most important long-term life skill that history teaching imparts to its students' (1998:105) and Bam argues that the Youth and History Project 'reflected the assumption that history education develops democratic values in young people' (2001:3). But again, Bam's study was an attempt by an educationist to find ways of making South African learners more aware of the relevance which their national past has to their lives in the present. The making and use by learners of history in the everyday and the possibilities of seeing and understanding history in new and

different ways, do not make their way to the front of the argument.

By exploring a variety of sites where histories are made, this chapter has argued that there are many other influences outside the confines of the school history classroom which could potentially influence and shape learners' senses of the past. The practical research component of this study which follows in the next three chapters is an attempt to try to get a better understanding of the various ways in which learners use and make sense of the past in their everyday lives. In doing so, it will attempt to establish whether this would prove a useful line of enquiry for history education authorities in the future.

CHAPTER 4

BACKGROUND TO THE PRACTICAL RESEARCH

The purpose and aims of the practical research

The practical element of my research was conducted with the purpose of explaining whether it would be feasible and valuable for historians and history education authorities to conduct further studies into learners attitudes' to school history, as well as to gain a clearer understanding of their senses of the past. As I described in Chapter One, I had originally hoped that by doing this, I would help to pave the way towards finding more innovative ways to encourage learners back into institutional history. The practical research tools (a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interview, to be discussed below) were conceived, designed and executed at an early stage in my thinking, therefore the questions in the questionnaire and the interview guideline are not all directly related to the current aims of this study. The following three chapters intend to explain, present and assess the methods and findings of this practical research component. The achievements of this research will be assessed and discussed more broadly within the context of this study in my conclusions in Chapter Seven.

The aims of the practical research component of this study are as follows:

1) To investigate learners' attitudes to history as a school subject

- what aspects of school history do learners enjoy/ not enjoy?
- how have learners previously experienced school history?
- do learners think that the history they learnt at school affects their lives?
- do learners think that school history is a valuable/ worthwhile subject?

- why do history learners choose to study history?
- why do non-history learners choose not to study history?

2) *To investigate learners' senses of the past*

- how aware are learners of the role that the past plays in their lives?
- how do learners perceive the past/what senses of the past do learners construct?
- what factors influence the construction of learners' senses of the past?
- to what extent have learners' experiences at school influenced the way in which they think about the past?
- how do learners use the histories which they construct in the everyday to make sense of their lives in the present?

3) *To investigate the extent to which learners' senses of the past and attitudes towards school history are shaped and influenced by the socialising forces of school history education?*

4) *To investigate if (and if so, how) attitudes to history and senses of the past differ between history and non-history learners.*

5) *To investigate the possibility that learners' socio-economic background might affect their attitudes towards school history and their senses of the past.*

6) *To document some of the attitudes to school history and senses of the past held by the young adults of the first generation to grow up in the early post-apartheid years.*

Setting up the practical research

This chapter will explain the reasoning behind my choice of practical research methods, provide a discussion as to how some of the problems which I initially encountered were overcome, and help to provide a context for the findings and analysis of my research which will be discussed in the chapters to follow.

Grade 12 learners were chosen as the *target group* for the following reasons:

1. The majority of the participants in this study were born in the late 1980s (see point two above).
2. I chose to use Grade 12 school learners rather than first-year students at tertiary institutions because, since the study examines the theme of history in the everyday, I wanted to cut across a range of life experiences and therefore did not want to limit my study to those who had decided to study further after school. (As it turned out, 94% of the learners involved indicated that they intended to study further after school, see below.)
3. Schools are also limited in their representation of the broader young adult population because they exclude those young adults of school going age who, for some reason or another, do not attend school. Nevertheless, I chose to use schools as the location for my study because they are convenient, relatively accessible centres, with (obviously) a high concentration members of the age group in which I was interested.
4. I worked on the assumption that by the time they reached Grade 12, those learners who had chosen to study history as a subject for Matric would have a sufficient grounding in the subject to have views clearly distinguishable from those learners who had chosen not to study history.

5. I predicted that those learners who had English as a second-language should be proficient enough in the language by the time they reached Grade 12, to be able to answer a questionnaire written, in what I hoped, was fairly simple English.
6. The Grade 12s of 2004 are the last cohort of learners in South Africa who have not officially been exposed to the Outcomes-Based Education approach as outlined in Curriculum 2005. This study provides an opportunity to document the attitudes to history and senses of the past held by this group of learners.

Choosing, designing and testing the practical research tools

There are a number of reasons why I chose to use a questionnaire to conduct my research:

1. I wanted to get a relatively broad understanding of learners' attitudes to history as a school subject.
2. Questionnaires are well suited to gathering a wide range of briefly expressed opinions amongst a larger number of people than more intensive interviews would allow.
3. The findings of the questionnaire would be supplemented with individual interviews conducted amongst both history and non-history learners to try to probe the more superficial answers which could be expected to appear in the questionnaires (Gillham, 2000a:8).
4. I felt that a questionnaire was one of the least intrusive methods of conducting research in a school, particularly amongst Grade 12 learners who are preparing for their final exams (on average, it took the learners about 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire).

The reasons for my decision to use semi-structured interviews as my second practical research tool are presented below:

1. I felt that interviews would help to provide a more human element to the rather distanced responses that would come from the questionnaire. Using interviews, I would be able to observe learners' facial expressions, voice intonations, body language, and style of speaking.
2. I intended to use the interviews to probe the findings of the questionnaire more deeply.
3. The interviews were semi-structured. I constructed an interview guideline, but it was not intended to be followed in any particular order. I expected to let the learners lead the direction of the discussion with my intervention where necessary.
4. I chose to conduct individual interviews rather than group interviews because I thought that it would be less disruptive of the school day. I also thought that it would be easier to arrange a time to meet with individuals rather than groups.
5. Since this is a pilot study, I felt that I needed to have a better understanding of the learners themselves and the issues which they raised in the semi-structured interviews before I could judge whether a more directed discussion in a focus group would be fruitful.

The designing and administering of a questionnaire, was for me, as a historian, a new experience. I devoted a good deal of research time to reading up about questionnaire design (Andrews, 2003; Creswell, 2002; Denscombe, 2003; Gillham, 2000a; Mouton, 1996). I also initially drew quite heavily on the questionnaires used in other studies (Atuahene-Sarpong,

1992; Bam, 1993; Dryden, 1999; Duvenage, 1999; Kapp 1998; Greybe and Kros 1996; Kros, 1995; Kwang-Su, Lee, 1998; Thelen, 1999; Vaudry, 1989; Vena, 1987), particularly from within the discipline of Education, in an attempt to gather some ideas of the types of questions one could ask and how to ask them. In its final form, however, the questionnaire was largely of my own construction.

One particular difficulty which I was faced with was the problem of needing to design a questionnaire which would be effective in eliciting information from both those learners who took history as a subject to Matric and those who did not. In his study of history learners' attitudes to the subject (see Chapter Two), Atuahene-Sarpong (1992) had also intended to investigate the attitudes of those learners who had not chosen history as a subject to Matric. However, he changed his mind during the course of his project because 'the designing of a suitable questionnaire for that purpose not only proved to be hydra-headed, but also seemingly impossible' (Atuahene-Sarpong, 1992:31). But my study was explicitly aimed at questioning both history and non-history learners. So I was faced with a choice. Either I could distribute one questionnaire to the group of history learners and a different questionnaire to the group of non-history learners, or I could distribute the same questionnaire to all the learners involved in the study and try to design the questions in such a way that made it possible for both groups to answer. I chose to distribute only one questionnaire to all the learners, for four main reasons:

1. I thought it would be easier to compare the answers of the two groups if they had all answered the same questions.
2. It made administering and analysing the questionnaires much less complicated and time-consuming for me.
3. Despite Atuahene-Sarpong's reservations, designing a questionnaire for two different target audiences, although tricky, did not prove impossible, and in the end only two questions required two parts; one for history learners and one for non-history learners.

4. I was concerned that English second-language learners might find it difficult to follow the instructions that expected history learners to answer one part of a question and non-history learners the other, but I intended to test the questionnaire amongst a group which included English second-language learners to see whether the English used in the questionnaires was adequately understood.

In November 2003, quite early in the development of the questionnaire, I decided to take advantage of the fact that I was tutoring first-year students at the Edgewood Campus of the University of Natal, by distributing copies of my draft questionnaire to thirty students. This proved to be an extremely useful exercise. It was immediately obvious that my draft questionnaire was far too long (it took the students over an hour to complete). It also revealed that my focus was still unclear.

In a reflection on the testing exercise, I wrote:

Question 25 was included to try to ascertain whether or not participants could place more prominent historical events in roughly the same time sequence. The general outcome of question 25 a, b and c was that a clear majority of participants actually have no clue as to the time sequence of the historical events in question [25a) selected world events before the 20th Century, 25b) selected world events during the 20th Century; 25c) selected events in South African history] (Mackie: 2003).

Since the students were unable to place the historical events given in the correct chronological sequence, it may seem surprising that I did not include this question in the final questionnaire to see whether I got the same results from learners in my chosen schools. But in analysing the results of this test question, I drew two conclusions. Firstly, this question seemed too much like a history test and put most students on the defensive (not a very helpful reaction when one is trying to identify attitudes and perceptions). Secondly, it struck me that this inability amongst learners to place historical events in the correct time sequence is something which teachers have been complaining about for many decades. I was not out to prove that many learners have difficulty recalling facts, for knowledge of factual content is not necessarily the most influential factor contributing towards someone's sense of the past. In fact, my study was based directly on the supposition that there are many other factors

which influence learner's senses of the past.

I decided that my aims would be more effectively attained if I divided my practical research into two distinct sections. The questionnaires were quite effective in providing an overview of learners' attitudes to school history, but trying to glean learners' senses of the past from the answers provided in the questionnaires was extremely difficult as they required further probing. Furthermore, by not making any distinction between the two different areas under investigation, I felt that there was too much room for learners to simply repeat in the interviews the answers which they had given in the questionnaires. So I decided to divide the practical research into two parts:

- * a *questionnaire* which would investigate Grade 12 learner *attitudes to history as a school subject* (and could serve as a foundation for a more substantial, statistical survey in the future)
- * a series of *semi-structured interviews* with both history and non-history students which would concentrate more particularly on trying to get a better understanding of Grade 12 learners' *senses of the past* (using the results from the questionnaire as a springboard where possible)

However, as a final product, some of the questions in the questionnaire were aimed at trying to get a better understanding of how learners understood the terms 'history', 'historian' and 'the past' and a further section was devoted to trying to ascertain learners' attitudes to South Africa's past and the way this past is being viewed and addressed by other South Africans. These sections address my second aim: to investigate learners' senses of the past (which will be discussed in Chapter Six) rather than establishing learners' attitudes to history as a school subject (which will be discussed in Chapter Five). Thus the questionnaire helped to investigate both areas of the practical research.

The interviews focused on trying to glean an understanding of learners' senses of the past, but some of the interviews helped to reinforce my understanding of learners' attitudes to

school history which was examined through the questionnaire. Thus there was some *overlap* between the two practical research tools. Nevertheless, the distinction made above did helped to focus my own thinking on the two main aims of the practical research and helped me to realise which issues would be better served by more in-depth interviews, and which lent themselves to the more limited responses provided by the questionnaire.

After my test study at the Edgewood Campus, the changes which I made to the questionnaire were so comprehensive (see Appendix 2) that I realised that another test run would be necessary to iron out any problems. In February 2004, after getting permission from the headmaster, I spent a morning at a semi-rural high school just outside Hillcrest. My test group at this school stood in stark contrast to my test group at Edgewood. Whereas the Edgewood students were mostly white female, the second test group consisted of four females and two males, all of whom were black.

I had two objectives for this second test study. The first was to test my revised questionnaire, mostly to ensure that the language would be appropriate for English second-language learners and to check that the revised questions were not misinterpreted. The second objective was to conduct a discussion group with other six Grade 12 learners (these learners were not given a questionnaire to complete). I chose to have a discussion group for two reasons. Firstly, I wanted to probe some initial ideas which I wanted to pursue in the interview questions. Secondly, I was concerned that, until this point, all of my research methods had been tested on a group whose cultural background was very similar to my own, and wanted to check that my approach was appropriate for members of other cultural and economic groups who were participating in the study.

Although my second test study did not reveal any major difficulties with the questionnaire, I felt that my visit was a very worthwhile experience because it placed me in a better position to interpret and analyse the responses given in the questionnaire.

The final version of the questionnaire (see Appendix 3) consisted of 29 questions, 11 of which had two or more parts to them, giving a total of 45 questions in all. Because this was

an impressionistic study and because the questionnaire was trying to elicit learner *attitudes* to history, I tried to leave as many questions as open-ended as possible (for the different types of questions included in the questionnaire, see Appendix 4). Although the questions were organised into sections, they were not arranged in any particular order to try to ensure that the succession of questions did not lead the participant to any particular answer.

The interview guideline was designed after my visit to the semi-rural high school outside Hillcrest. It was tested with the help of five black Edgewood students, three females and two males. This test exercise helped me to identify some helpful probing questions and made me realise the importance of being flexible with my interview guideline. The students tended to raise most of the topics with which I was concerned independently of my questions, and the interviews became disjointed if I followed my guideline too closely (see Appendix 5 for interview guideline).

The Sample

The practical research was conducted amongst a sample of 100 Grade 12 learners from six different schools. The schools were of five different types and were purposely selected on the basis of their socio-economic orientation. This was done not only in an attempt to ensure that the racial groups in the Durban area were adequately (though not necessarily proportionally) represented, but also to make room for the opportunity to examine the extent to which socio-economic background from which the learners come played a role in determining learners' attitudes to history and their senses of the past. The learners were drawn from the following schools:

- * one township school: an historically black school which still has a large majority of black learners, but some Indian learners also now attend the school. The learners at this school were largely from impoverished backgrounds.

- * one ex-mission school: a private Catholic school with a majority of black learners who were mainly from less impoverished backgrounds. Those interviewed said that their parents were white-collared workers.
- * one ex-model C school: an historically white middle-class school. Now a racially mixed school although still predominantly middle-class.
- * one ex-House of Delegates school: an historically Indian school which, at the time when the research was conducted had a mixture of black and Indian learners. From those interviewed, it would appear that the parents of these learners were both blue and white-collar workers.
- * two private schools: historically, these two single-sex schools were largely attended by children of the white South African elite.

The schools which I chose for the study were selected partly because they were relatively easy to access. The first two private schools that were asked to participate in the study declined the request.

At my request, twenty learners were randomly selected (as far as was practically possible) by their teachers at each school, except in the case of the private schools. Since the private schools were both single-sex schools (one boys' and one girls'), I made the decision to combine the two private schools to count as one, and ten learners were selected from each of them. This was done to try to maintain a roughly equal division between boys and girls in the overall total (49 girls and 51 boys participated in the study), without giving too much weight in the final analysis to learners from private schools. Of the twenty learners selected from each type of school, roughly five (three out of ten in the case of each private school) had chosen to take history as a subject to Matric. Of the 100 learners who answered the questionnaire, 27¹ stated that they currently took history as a subject to Matric. Seventy-

¹If the administration of the questionnaire had gone to plan, this figure should have been recorded as 26, however, one of the supposed history learners at one of the schools stated that history is one of his Matric subjects, but then contradicted himself by saying that the last time he learnt history was in Grade 9. Although he

three participants stated that they had not chosen history as a Matric subject. Roughly a fifth of KwaZulu-Natal’s Matric learners wrote history at the end of last year, so my figure is slightly inflated.

Table 1 shows the schools which participated in the study and the numbers and types of learners selected from each school.

TABLE SHOWING SCHOOLS THAT PARTICIPATED IN STUDY			
School	Type	No. of Learners	No. of History Learners
School A	Township	20	6
School B	Ex-mission	20	5
School C	Ex-House of Delegates	20	5
School D	Ex-Model C	20	5
School E	Private Boys	10	3
School F	Private Girls	10	3
Total		100	27

Table 1

Of the 73 non-history learners, 59 stated that they had last studied history in Grade 9, the remainder last studied history in Grades 7 or 8. The Grade in which non-history learners’ last studied history would most likely have been determined by the resources and timetables of the schools which they attended. All of the schools which participated in the study obviously offered history as a subject to Matric level.

may have misunderstood the question, I suspect that he was a non-history learner who wanted to come and join his friends and so pretended to be a history learner.

The average age of the participants was 17 years. Most of the them tended to be fairly attentive, relatively able students (presumably because this was the type of learner the teachers preferred to choose to participate in the study, perhaps because they were better behaved than other learners, or, in the case of English second-language learners, had a higher language ability, or perhaps teachers wanted to draw attention to their better learners). All the history learners involved in the study stated that they were studying history on higher grade. Table 2 depicts the racial demographics of the study.

Racial demographics of study	
black	53
white	31
Indian	14
coloured	2

Table 2

Ninety-four of the learners involved in the study indicated that they intended to study further after school. The most common career choices which were mentioned by participants included qualifications in business management, marketing and accountancy, medicine, engineering and law. Only two learners indicated that they intended to study history after school.

Conducting the practical research

The revised questionnaire was administered to the learners at their respective schools during the month of March, 2004. The individual interviews with selected learners were conducted during the same period. In each case, I wrote a letter to the head teacher of the school requesting permission to come in to conduct the research at a time of their convenience (see Appendix 6). The learners took between 20 to 40 minutes to complete their questionnaires, with the English second-language learners tending to take longer than the others. The

selected learners at each school sat together whilst answering the questionnaire, but in most cases silence was maintained. Each school provided an empty classroom where those learners who were participating in the study could congregate and complete their questionnaires. The questionnaires were completed in my presence and I collected them immediately afterwards.

Of the hundred learners who completed the questionnaire, I asked twenty to participate in a semi-structured interview. I arrived at this number for the following reasons. Four learners were interviewed from each type of school. I specified that two of these interviewees (a boy and a girl) at each school be history learners, and two (a boy and a girl) non-history learners. This meant that across the spectrum of schools, I interviewed ten history learners and ten non-history learners, with five boys and five girls in each group. Since this study is concerned with senses of the past amongst both history and non-history learners, I decided to interview equal numbers of learners in each group, even though the group of non-history learners makes up a larger proportion of the total of Grade 12 learners in both KwaZulu-Natal and in South Africa (Venter, National Examinations & Assessment, 2004). So long as these specifications were met, I was not prescriptive as to who the actual interviewees were. Because I was asking a group of Matric learners to donate some of their rather pressured school time (I tried to use break time wherever possible), most of the interviewees were volunteers. Some of them were obviously trying to get out of class, whilst others told me it was an 'honour' to participate. A couple of the interviewees had been selected by their teachers before I arrived (in these cases, it would seem that the history teachers selected their top history learners), whilst others were nominated by their peers whilst I was in the room. This was possibly because the interviewees' peers were aware that they were specifically interested in history (in the case of history learners), or, as was obviously the case at one school, because the interviewees' friends seemed to think that the interview would prove to be an embarrassing or harrowing experience for the targeted learner.

The interviews were all conducted in a one-on-one situation, except in the case of two female non-history learners at School B, where two friends insisted on doing the interview together. This proved to be quite a valuable experience for me, because apart from asking the

occasional directional question, I was able to sit back and listen while the two girls talked to each other. Some of the one-on-one interviews tended to be a bit stilted as a few of the interviewees were rather nervous.

The interviews were recorded using a dictaphone so that I could concentrate my full attention on the learners during the interview and not distance myself from them, or distract them, by having to take notes. All learners were informed that the interview would be recorded, and their permission to do so was attained before the interview commenced. The interviews lasted between 15 and 35 minutes, depending on the confidence and personality of the interviewee. The structure and questions of the interview guideline were adapted to suit each individual learner, while the number of questions asked and my level of interaction tended to depend on the confidence and character of the learner involved. I transcribed all interviews myself which helped to aid my analysis since I became quite familiar with the data.

This chapter has outlined the approach used for this practical research component of my study. The following two chapters will present the findings and preliminary analysis of the results. Chapter Five will look at learners' attitudes to history as a school subject, drawing largely from responses provided in the completed questionnaire and working towards the aims mentioned earlier.

CHAPTER FIVE

LEARNERS' ATTITUDES TO HISTORY AS A SCHOOL SUBJECT: FINDINGS AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

How the results were interpreted

The practical research component of this study is mostly qualitative and impressionistic in style. As was shown in Chapter Four, the questionnaire aimed to be as open-ended as possible. The responses were therefore very difficult to analyse in any concrete way. In interpreting the results, I tried to look for trends based on the following distinctions.

- * History learners and non-history learners
- * Non-history learners who enjoyed history and non-history learners who did not enjoy history
- * Racial differences
- * Socio-economic differences
- * Gender differences

However, many of my conclusions are also drawn from my own impressions after recording the findings of the questionnaire as well as the impressions that I got from talking to the interviewees face to face.

When examining the responses to the more open-ended questions of the questionnaire, I grouped similar answers together. This helped to isolate some of the more common/dominant views and opinions of the learners, although many comments did not fit neatly into any one category. I then chose some of the comments which best illustrated the sentiments of each category of answer. The same approach was used when analysing the transcribed interviews.

The closed questions of the questionnaire were more quantitative in nature and helped to point out numerical trends on the basis of the distinctions mentioned above. These numerical trends could then be compared with the qualitative data to see whether there was any correlation. The study does not intend to reach any empirical conclusions. The chapter will now go on to present the findings and preliminary analysis of learners' attitudes to school history, drawing on learners' responses in the questionnaire.

Did you enjoy studying history? (see question 10a)

Fifty-eight percent of participants stated that they enjoyed studying History (including all 27 history learners). Table 3 shows the numerical results for this question. No clear gender distinctions were observed, but some racial distinctions were noted. Fifty-seven percent of black learners stated that they enjoyed learning history compared to 43% of white learners (79% of Indian learners stated that they enjoyed learning history, though only 14 Indians participated in the study). However, the number of black history learners was more than double the number of history learners in any other race group involved in the study. This may have inflated the results. Participants were then asked to explain their choice of answer. A summary of learners' reasons for enjoying or not enjoying school history is presented below. The quotes used are fairly typical of the other responses given and have been selected according to the process described at the end of Chapter Four.

Did/do you enjoy studying history?	Yes (no. of learners)	No (no. of learners)
All participants	58	42
History Learners	27	0
Non-History Learners	31	42

Table 3

Why history learners enjoyed history

Not surprisingly, natural, personal and individual interests seemed to play a significant role in determining who enjoyed history and who did not. Some history learners simply found history entertaining. One history learner described it as ‘very nice, interesting and fun’ (Q1¹), and another said that history ‘creates a variety in my subject package. It’s like a “story time” lesson. It isn’t as “factual” as maths, geography etc. It’s a subject that is enjoyed or not enjoyed’ (Q91). However, a number of history learners said that they liked learning and understanding how other people lived, coped and achieved in circumstances and environments different from our own, partly because they felt that we could learn from their experiences. One girl wrote, ‘History taught me a lot. It made me see how did the minds of people worked in the past and in the present’ (Q2). Another explained more clearly, ‘I find it really interesting to study what happened before I came into existence, I feel that it is a really good opportunity to be able to understand how ‘things’ were done and how it affected various people as well as how it influences the life we live today’(Q55). One of her peers remarked, ‘I enjoy seeing why the world is the way it is, and seeing what mustn’t be repeated and what should be learnt from’(Q52). Thus there is a sense in which the learners seemed to view the past as a foreign country (Lowenthal, 1985), inhabited by citizens at once both different and familiar and therefore fascinating.

Some of the learners were captivated by particular historical personalities. One boy from School C wrote, ‘I like studying about people in the past such as Hitler, Mandela’ (Q71). A

¹Each questionnaire was numbered to help with the analysis (see Appendix 7).

boy from School E also liked the more human side of history. He explained, 'History, unlike other subjects, is interesting in that the student, being one that also displays basic human characteristics, can relate and understand the thoughts and opinions of the time. A student cannot relate to Maths and Science on a personal levels, whereas, in History, the study of man allows one to be captivated and interested'(Q41). Some of the black history learners saw history as a subject which helped them to commemorate the victories of the past. 'Because History tell me about the past it shows me the way how may I became popular or a conquara. Heros Are found on the History subject. It keep me know as a black where I am coming from to' (Q16).

From their comments, it would also appear that some history learners enjoyed history because they were able to acknowledge and value the skills which they had learnt. History 'has taught me to think critically and I have learned to express myself' said one learner, 'it has also made me to look at life in a different way' (Q22). Another wrote, '[History] keeps me precise in my statements.... History to me creates an atmosphere of comprehending one's feelings and opinions regarding what is taking place now' (Q21). One black girl from School D said that she enjoyed history because, 'I get good grades and it is easy to pass'(Q56).

Why some non-history learners enjoyed history

Of the 73 non-history learners, 42% indicated that they enjoyed studying history. Sixty-one percent of the learners in this category came from School B or School C. Like the history learners, some of the non-history learners liked being able to compare the way things are in the present with the way they were in the past. For example: 'I got to know a lot of interesting things about how things were in the past and how they have changed. I also got to know how many things were invented and who invented them' (Q23). They also seemed naturally curious about learning about what happened in the past. One learner wrote, 'I was interested in History and the events that took place. Also things that were created in the past' (Q50), and another said that 'I enjoyed learning South Africa's History and enjoyed the knowledge that I obtained' (Q47), but this group of learners had less regard for the skills which they had acquired through the study of history. In the words of one learner, 'History

was fun and it fine to know about what happened in past events but it got boring when it came to writing test because it was always about dates and facts which I could not memorize very well' (Q28). Since these learners had only studied history up to Grade 7, 8 or 9, one might perhaps surmise that these learners had not yet had much exposure to the kinds of historical skills mentioned by the history learners above, although one could also suggest that the reasons why the history learners chose to take history as a Matric subject was precisely because they had already identified the value of the skills they have mentioned (see below).

Other explanations given by the non-history learners who enjoyed history were that they enjoyed the way it was taught and they found it relatively easy: 'I used to get high marks and the teacher was fascinating, really great' (Q32), 'I was good at it and enjoyed the "stories" about particular people in the past that were told to us. I only enjoyed it because I thought of the events as stories' (Q54). Despite choosing not to study history as a subject to Matric, some of the comments made by the non-history learners were extremely positive. One learner found inspiration in the past: 'I find out [what] people of an earlier period were really thinking and that gave me strength to be what I am because I knew that nothing is impossible' (Q34) and another was full of praise for history: 'It is an intriguing subject that I have always been interested in. There are so many aspects of it that I loved' (Q53).

Why some non-history learners did not enjoy history

Fifty-eight percent of non-history learners stated that they did not enjoy history. Fifty percent of the non-history learners who said that they did not enjoy history came from School A, School C and School B. The main reasons given these learners were that history was boring 'Everytime I studied History I felt asleep,' (Q40) complained one learner. 'The last teacher was teaching one and the same chapter everyday,' (Q11) another protested. Or that history included too many facts: 'It does not challenge mine mind to think quickly but just fulling it with notes and dates' (Q88). Others found it difficult: 'Because it have too many essays and in History you had to understand what you are saying which I hate' (Q31); 'I'm not good at taking notes because I'm slow writer' (Q3); 'The lessons were boring and I always failed it' (Q38). Many of the non-history learners who stated that they did not enjoy history also

seemed to find it irrelevant: 'I think it's a total waste of time which will set us nowhere if we keep dwelling on it, we must just let bugones be bugones,' (Q4) announced a learner from School A. '[The last teacher] was only teaching American History not AFRICAN that many of us loved' (Q11) said one of her peers. '[M]ost of the things we learned had no effect on my life and I saw no reason for me to continue learning History' (Q35) explained a learner from School B.

Interestingly, although both black and white learners in this group often found history irrelevant, it was mostly the white learners who found history boring. Thirty-eight percent of the non-history learners who said that they did not enjoy studying history were white learners from the two private schools and School D. A typical comment read, 'I didn't enjoy History because it was boring, and there were a lot of dates and facts to study for tests' (Q60). It is possible that this group of white, English-speaking learners who don't seem to relate strongly to either Afrikaner or African history (the two main veins which have dominated the syllabus in recent years) also feel that they are being targeted as the group who must take responsibility for the atrocities of apartheid, and are therefore quite frustrated and 'fed up' with history (see Chapter Six for further discussion). It must be remembered that although 55% of this group of non-history learners who did not enjoy history were black, only 40% of all black participants fell into this category. Fifty-two percent of white learners were non-history learners who did not enjoy history.

A number of the black learners (particularly those from School A) said that they did not enjoy History because it was sad, inaccurate or unjust: '[W]hen I here the cruelty in which our people were treated I feel sad,' (Q3) said one boy, 'because in that time black people when not apriciate. The were the white people they treat black people the way the call as Kaferi that most think that upset me about History at school,' (Q5) explained another. 'For me History is an interpretation of the other person's understanding of what happened during the past,' wrote a black girl from School D, '[i]t is not accurate and irrelevant to me' (Q70).

The findings from Question 10b, which has just been discussed above, was deliberately left as an open-ended question, placed near the beginning of the questionnaire to try to ensure that

the reasons given by the learners as to why they enjoyed studying history, or not, were as open as possible and not tainted, or shaped by other questions asked in the questionnaire.

Although one can never be sure whether the learners actually answered each question in turn, a number of these unguided responses highlighted many of the factors which I had anticipated might affect learners' enjoyment of school history and had gone on to query specifically in other later sections of the questionnaire. The analysis will now turn its attention to these factors.

Learners' Previous Experience of School History

One of the factors which I thought might have helped to encourage or discourage learners' enjoyment of studying history was their previous experience of the subject. Four questions were thus included in the questionnaire to examine how learners had experienced learning history at school. I will start by looking at the attitudes which the learners' had towards their history teachers.

The results were generally quite positive. Eighty-six percent of the learners indicated that the majority of their history teachers were enthusiastic about teaching their subject, including those learners who did not enjoy history (question 21), and 84% of the participants stated that their last history teacher was mostly 'fun' or 'ok', rather than 'boring'. A small majority indicated that their last history teacher was helpful. Those learners who did not enjoy history did not necessarily find their history teachers uninterested, boring or unhelpful (question 22a and 22b).

Twenty-nine percent of the learners said that they were 'scared' or 'sometimes scared' of their history teacher (question 22c). Unfortunately, the reasons for this were not asked. There was no clear correlation between any one school and those learners who picked these options, which rules out the possibility that a particularly school had a 'scary' history teacher. The gender division amongst the learners who chose these options also did not reveal any clear trends, as the division was almost equal (14 female and 15 male). However, 22 of these 29 learners who said that they were 'scared' or 'sometimes scared' of their history teachers were

black. Thus, 42% of black participants indicated that they were ‘scared’ or ‘sometimes scared’ of their history teacher compared to 13% of white participants and 21% of Indian participants. It is possible that black learners feel more intimidated by school teachers generally, perhaps because historically, they come from a culture which holds elders and figures in authority in high regard. But this speculation would have to be verified through further investigation. There did not appear to be any significant correlation between those learners who were ‘scared’ or ‘sometimes scared’ of their history teachers and the fact that they did not enjoy studying history.

On the other hand, when participants were asked to choose whether they felt that learning history was mostly about ‘dates and facts’, ‘stories’ or ‘analysis and investigation’ (question 13), just over half of the participants (51%) thought that learning history was mostly about ‘dates and facts’: 94% of these were non-history learners. The non-history learners who had not enjoyed history were in a slight majority (56%). The majority of history learners (70%) thought that learning history was about ‘analysis and investigation’ (See Table 4).

Learning history is mostly about...	All participants	Non-history learners	History learners
Dates and Facts	51	48	3
Stories	16	12	4
Analysis and Investigation	31	12	19
Blank or ambiguous	2	1	1

Table 4

The large majority of white and Indian learners thought that learning history was mostly about dates and facts, whereas the black learners were more divided in their opinion (See Table 5). This can probably be put down to the fact that there were more black history learners and more black learners who thought that history was mostly about stories than in any other race

group. Surprisingly, though, 73% of black learners who thought that learning history was mostly about stories were non-history learners who did not enjoy history. It might have been assumed (from comments discussed in above) that history as 'story' was an attractive characteristic for learners, but perhaps these learners found the content difficult, painful or frustrating and therefore did not wish to hear stories about what happened in the past.

Learning history is mostly about...	Black	White	Indian	Coloured
Dates and Facts	21	18	11	1
Stories	11	4		1
Analysis and Investigation	21	7	3	
Blank or ambiguous		1		

Table 5

Two other perceptions which I thought may have negatively influenced learners' attitudes to school history are that 'School history only tells one side of the story' (question 12a) and 'School history is too political' (question 12b). Thirty-eight percent of participants 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with the statement 'school history only tells one side of the story', although one-third were undecided. History learners (63%) tended to 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree', whilst 37% of non-history learners tended to 'agree' or 'strongly agree', 34% chose the option 'partly agree/partly disagree', and 37% selected 'agree' or 'strongly agree'. Perhaps the non-history learners felt that they were not in a position to speak authoritatively on this subject, not having carried the subject past Grade 9 in most cases. However, some may have chosen not to reveal their opinion, not wishing to be seen as 'politically incorrect' in a country where all stories are supposed to be equally represented (see below). Both white and black learners tended to disagree with the statement 'school history only tells one side of the story', although the opinion of the black learners was again more equally divided.

Participants were divided in their opinion of the statement 'School history is too political' although 'agree' and 'strongly agree' were the most frequently selected answers (35%). It was not established what learners understood by the phrase 'too political', but from my discussions with some of the interviewees, I would hazard the suggestion that by 'too political', learners felt that school history has too much political content which examines politicians, political conflict, and political developments (particularly South African political history). The choices 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' were most frequently selected by history learners (48%). Thirty-eight percent of non-history learners 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statement and 38% 'partly agreed/partly disagreed'. Forty-eight percent of non-history learners who indicated that they did not enjoy school history 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that school history was 'too political' and 31% 'partly agreed/partly disagreed'. Forty-eight percent of white learners also chose 'agree' or 'strongly agree' whilst black learners were again more divided, though they tended to disagree (37%). Although these results obviously require further investigation, they seem to suggest that non-history learners do feel somewhat alienated from the history taught at school and that learners have mixed feelings over the role that politics plays in the subject. This is likely to be a particularly sore point for some of the learners given the strongly political nature of school history in South Africa in the past. One girl from School F wrote 'Studying history had a lot to do with politics, and it was that aspect I did not enjoy' (96).

Relevance: Can you see how the history you were taught at school affects your life?

Despite the fact that most non-history learners seemed discontented, bored or frustrated with school history, when learners were asked to indicate whether they could see how the history they were taught at school affects their life (question 14a), 66% of participants answered in the affirmative. Of the 42 non-history learners who said that they could see how the history they were taught at school affects their life, just under half (48%) indicated that they had not enjoyed studying history at school (See Table 6). These non-history learners who stated that they had not enjoyed history, but saw its relevance in their everyday lives tended to be the learners for whom the recent past was quite painful. One learner wrote that 'The past history affect my life hardly because of bad things were happening during that time and to me bring

back tears to me eye to now how people were treated that time; but there is no need to mention' (Q10). Another explained 'It because as History is taught it builds the anger as a black student that our grandfather were treated so unfairly they had no rights but the rights to be slave' (Q30). However, some learners in this category also gave reasons such as, 'Although tedious, it does help me to empathise with others' (Q99) and 'We learnt a bit about the apartheid so it broadened my views and made me understand why things are like they are today' (Q59).

Most history learners explained that what they have learnt about the past helps them to make sense of their lives in the present by developing an understanding of why the world is the way it is today. One white boy from School E wrote, 'It brings an understanding of the present. In politics in our country the past has had a great deal of influence. It helps you to understand cause and affect in your life' (Q42). An Indian girl from School C explained that she could see how the history she was taught at school affects her life because 'In certain section you are taught about life skills, in other sections how to attain your goals and in other instances how to avoid manipulation and to overcome disappointment, which has helped me greatly, this far in life' (Q75). A coloured girl from School F agreed: 'It teaches many skills allowing me to succeed in future. I particularly feel that the factual content is a lesson for us in this time so we cannot make the same mistakes past leaders have made and also learn from the heros of our past' (Q95). Non-history learners who indicated that they had enjoyed history and that they could see how what they had learnt in the subject at school affected their lives tended to agree with the sentiments of the history learners. One learner wrote, 'Since the last time I studied history, I have started to appreciate all the legends mentioned in History, and I know how people in the past handled problems in order to be successful, so I have partially adopted some of their skills' (23).

Those learners who could not see how school history affected their lives in the everyday, gave reasons such as, 'It was always interesting but I don't find myself relating my life or anything that happens in it to something I learnt in History' (Q53), or 'I have never used it and probably never will, it just expands your general knowledge but nothing important unless you choose History as a career' (Q49). Another reason was that school history 'talked about affairs of other countries that do not concern me and my country,' (Q24). One is certainly

able to sympathise with this point which was brought home quite hard by one learner who said, 'I don't see a point in studying Napoleon and Camilla Cavour and King Victoria. Maybe if we studied South African history I would have been interested'(Q36). Clearly the British Royal Family has still not vacated the South African classroom, despite the best efforts of the Afrikaner and African nationalists. It is no wonder that some of these learners did not enjoy studying history, 'King' Victoria is certainly a very unlikely figure to muster up much enthusiasm among a class of young, black, post-apartheid South Africans.

This question also revealed a clear gender distinction. Seventy-three percent of female participants said that they could see how the history affects their life compared to 59% of males. Perhaps girls hold a stronger emotional connection to the past than boys do and therefore feel its presence more strongly. Again, this is an area that would require further investigation.

Can you see how the history you were/ are taught at school affects your life?	All participants	History learners	Non-history learners	Non-history learners (Enjoy)	Non-history learners (Not Enjoy)
Yes	66	24	42	22	20
No	33	3	30	9	21
Yes/No	1		1		1
Total	100	27	73	31	42

Table 6

Do learners think that school history is a valuable or worthwhile subject?

This section will provide a brief overview of some of the other responses which helped to paint a picture of learners' attitudes to school history. Fifty-eight percent of the participants 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that learning history at school had taught them 'more about

where they came from' (58%). Eighty-four percent of history learners 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' and 49% of non-history learners chose these options. Twenty-five percent of non-history learners chose the option 'partly agree/partly disagree'. Non-history learners who did not enjoy history were divided on the subject; 36% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' and the same percentage 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed'.

Seventy-two percent of black learners 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that learning history at school had taught them 'more about where they came from' compared to 32% of white learners (although it must be remembered that more black history learners participated in the study). Sixty-four percent of male learners 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that studying history at school had taught them 'more about where they came from compared with 51% of female learners.

Fifty-six percent of learners thought that school history had taught them 'useful thinking skills' and 74% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that studying history at school had equipped them with a useful general knowledge (question 15). All but one history learner 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with both of the last two statements. There were no obvious distinctions between gender and race on these questions, nor was there any clear correlation with one type of answer and a particular high school.

However, 64% of the participants indicated that they preferred learning historical skills (qualified in the questionnaire as: skills that help learners to find out about the past) rather than historical content (qualified in the questionnaire as: learning about what happened in the past) (question 11). History learners were fairly divided on this question (52% preferred to learn about historical content), but, not surprisingly, a clear majority of non-history learners (71%) were in favour of learning historical skills (76% of non-history learners who did not enjoy history preferred to learn historical skills). This may be because the content was seen to be painful, frustrating or irrelevant (particularly to the job market). Seventy-one percent of male participants preferred to learn 'historical skills' compared to 57% of females.

Learners seemed unsure as to whether studying history would help them to get a job, although a small majority of black learners seemed to think it would. However, I am not sure

whether they all understood the question which was rather clumsily worded.

Do you think children should learn history at school? (Question 20)

Eighty-nine percent of the learners involved in the study thought that children should learn history at school. Eight of those who disagreed were non-history learners who had not enjoyed history at school and did not see how the history they had learnt at school affected their lives. They provided statements such as 'I don't see a need for studying history because it is something that doesn't exist it is dead and buried' (Q86). But some non-history learners who hadn't enjoyed studying history themselves thought that all children should study history at school because 'They must know where they come from. They should know what their parents have been through. Why South Africa is like this today' (Q18), or because 'They are some students who wants to be writers, by knowing History they can be good writers and some wants to work for the government maybe in parliament, History can help them to secure these jobs' (Q3). Some said everyone should have the choice to do whatever subjects they chose and others agreed that children should study history at school, but laid down certain conditions such as 'They should learn history but it must not be a command to them' (Q10), 'or on condition and that is if they teach History that is related to our country because that would actually help them to know about events that have made our country what it is today' (Q24). Other reasons were along lines of: 'It does give one a better general knowledge and it helps one to understand how we got here. It makes one think about what one does because it effects the future' (Q66). The fact that such a high percentage of participants thought that all learners should study history at school suggests that learners do see some value in school history, even though they did not enjoy it themselves. It is possible, however, that the current political ideology promoting equal opportunity may have inflated the results. A significant number of learners gave special attention to ensuring that their answers were not prescriptive: everyone had the right to freedom of choice and freedom of opinion. Thus a number of learners may have indicated that 'children should learn history at school' to ensure that the option was available for those who would like to choose it.

I chose to study/not to study history because....

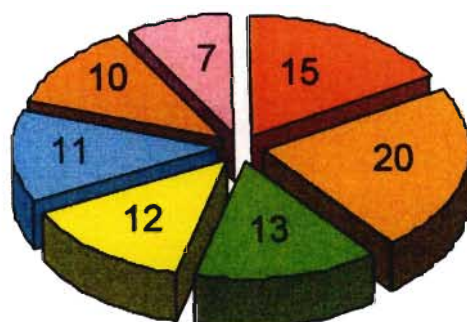
Question 26 was designed to try and tease out the most frequently mentioned reasons as to why learners chose or did not choose to take history as one of their Matric subjects. The question was split in two, offering one set of reasons to history learners and an alternative set to non-history learners. Learners were limited to three reasons each, although some only ticked one, whilst others ticked more and some wrote their own reasons in the space provided. I think that the question was by and large well interpreted and that its answers were consistent with those attained through the rest of the questionnaire.

Why history learners chose to study history

The most frequently chosen reason for choosing history as a Matric subject was that learners thought that 'we need to understand the past so that we can understand the present' (74% of history learners selected this option). History learners also felt that 'the skills which history teaches are very valuable' (48%) and they could see themselves using these skills in their future careers (44%). They also indicated that they enjoyed the challenge of history (41%) and some thought that they would use their knowledge of historical events in their future careers (26%). Of these learners, one planned to continue to study history, three wanted to be lawyers, one intended to pursue a B.Com and one wanted to be a pharmacist.

Although a few history learners were motivated by the enthusiasm of their parents or teachers, or by the fact that they did well in history, these factors do not seem to have been particularly influential in affecting learners' enjoyment of history or in motivating their

Reasons why history learners chose history



- We need to understand the past to understand the present
- I feel that the skills which History teaches are very valuable
- I will use the skills that History teaches in my future career
- I enjoy the challenge of history
- I like learning about what happened in the past
- I will use my knowledge of historical events in my future career
- Other

FIGURE 1

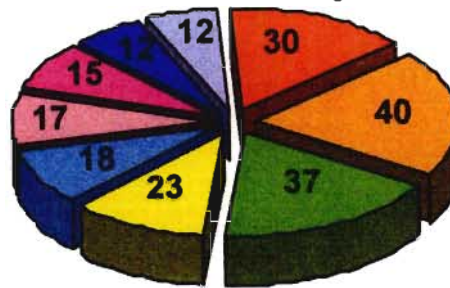
decision to take it as a Matric subject. In fact, in answer to the question ‘What do you think your parents/caregivers feel about history as a school subject?’ (question 24), history learners were divided in their answers. Some had been encouraged into taking history as a Matric subject, whilst others were in the process of trying to convince their parents that history was relevant and taught valuable skills. For example, in one interview, one history learner explained that she had picked up the subject only in her Matric year. This learner had originally chosen computers as her sixth Matric subject because her father thought it would help to better equip her for her career. However, her history teacher kept encouraging her and

she really wanted to take history, so she managed to make a deal with her father which allowed her to study history in her final year of schooling provided that she did computer studies as well. On the other hand, three history learners stated that their parents or caregivers advised them to take history and one said that their teacher had advised them to take history. One particularly enthusiastic learner said that she had chosen to study history to Matric level because 'history is my favourite subject' (Q71).

Why non-history learners chose not to study history

Non-history learners tended to favour the reason '*I like history*, but I think that the subjects which I chose will be more worthwhile'. Fifty-five percent of non-history learners chose this option, including 43% of those non-history learners who said that they didn't enjoy history. Thus 43% of the non-history learners who stated that they did not enjoy history in question 10a chose an option which included the phrase, '*I like history*'. Perhaps these learners chose this option because there was no option which *only* stated 'I think that the subjects which I chose will be more worthwhile'. The next most frequently chosen option was 'I will not use my knowledge of historical events in my future career' (51%). Thirty-four percent of non-history learners selected the options: 'history is boring' or 'I have no interest in the past'. Whilst 16% selected the option 'what happened in the past is over, I don't need to learn about the past'. These learners were a mix of non-history learners (both those who had enjoyed and those who had not enjoyed history) who found the past painful or found the content of the history syllabus irrelevant. Another popular choice was 'History was not on my subject line' (32%). In many cases, the subject choice seems to have been between history, geography and accountancy, and since geography and accountancy are subjects which are seen to have quite stable career prospects, it is not surprising that they were the preferred choice. Twenty-three percent of non-history learners felt that history requires too much studying, some were discouraged because they found the subject difficult or didn't do well. Sixteen percent of non-history learners 'do not see the value of the skills that history teaches'. Ten percent said that they had been discouraged from taking history as a subject to Matric by their parents/caregivers and seven percent said that they 'did not like the history teacher'.

Reasons why non-history learners chose not to study history



- I like history, but think that the subjects which I chose will be more worthwhile
- I will not use my knowledge of historical events in my future career
- History was not on my subject line
- I will not use the skills that history teaches in my future career
- History requires too much studying
- History is boring
- I don't see the value of the skills that history teaches
- What happened in the past is over, I don't need to learn about the past
- Other:

FIGURE 2

Answers to another question which tried to probe learners' perceptions of their parents'/caregivers' attitudes to school history (question 24) revealed that some parents of non-history learners tended not to talk to their children about history as a school subject. In other cases, the learners seemed to feel that although their parents think that history is a valuable subject and that children should learn about the past, they don't feel that it is a

subject that is going to be very helpful in getting their children a job. However, some of the non-history learners said that their parents had actually tried to encourage their children to take history, whereas other non-history learners thought that their parents felt that history was too painful and shouldn't be discussed at all. One boy wrote, 'I found History too emotional and it makes me wanna cry' (Q13).'

What did this section of the practical research reveal about learner attitudes to school history: A summary of the results

The study reveals that just over half of the participants have a favourable attitude towards school history. History learners seemed to enjoy their subject partly out of curiosity about ways of life different from their own, but also because they valued the skills that history taught them and they felt that an understanding of the past was necessary when trying to understand the present and 'make progress' in the future. One boy wrote, 'Because History helps me to think more critically it also helps me to look at thing in a wider basis. History also teaches me how to handle things in future and not repeat mistakes made in the past this is why I enjoy History' (Q27). One of the girls explained 'History helps us to understand were we came from and what we can do in order to better our lives to become better people in future' (Q76). History learners also liked history because it was about people.

Non-history learners who enjoyed history at school were also partly influenced by personal interest, but their responses also suggested that they enjoyed history because they liked comparing the past to the present, they liked the way it was taught and they tended to do relatively well, although some stated that they disliked the long essays and factual recall. Non-history learners who did not enjoy history tended to find it boring or frustrating (mostly white learners), painful or difficult (mostly black learners) or irrelevant (both black and white learners). They also preferred to look to the future. One girl wrote 'I can't stand learning about the past! It's to complicated. Why live in the past - rather look forward to the future' (Q58).

As far as previous experience is concerned, most learners were fairly complimentary of their

previous history teachers, but almost two-thirds of non-history learners thought that learning history was mostly about 'dates and facts' and a fair number of learners complained about the content of their syllabus. Although there was a high number of history learners who thought that school history was about 'analysis and investigation', it would be helpful to find out whether Grade 9 learners choosing to study history as a subject to Matric would answer the same way. Do history learners develop an understanding that history is about analysis and investigation during Grades 10, 11 and 12, or are they attracted into history because they have identified these characteristics by Grade 9? And are some non-history learners who enjoy history discouraged from taking the subject because they do not see history as a subject requiring investigation and analysis and they do not wish to spend three years cramming all these dates and facts into their heads? Since Kros and Greybe (1996) suggest that learners are quite capable and eager to engage in more critical thinking skills from quite an early age, it is possible that the fact that over half the participants think that learning history is mostly about dates and facts is a reflection of poor teaching practice which has not provided learners with a more comprehensive understanding of what the study of history involves. However, 58% of white learners chose the option 'dates and facts', and they come from schools where better teaching would be expected. Ability and good or poor marks in history does not seem to have played a significant role in influencing the attitudes of this group of learners' to school history.

Surprisingly, some non-history learners who did not enjoy history at school, still acknowledged that it had taught them valuable skills and recognised that it did impact on their own lives. One girl wrote 'Although [history] is interesting and good general knowledge and teaches one essay writing skills, I did not find it relevant to my life. I do not have a passion for learning/ memorising dates and names'(Q97) and another explained 'Although tedious, it does help me to empathise with others'(Q99). The fact that 89% of learners also thought that children should learn history at school also suggests that a clear majority of learners feel that school history is of some worth, even if they do not happen to enjoy it. However, it is also possible that such a high majority of learners think that children should study history at school simply because they had to study history. A 'that's the way it's done' type of attitude where learners simply 'go through the motions' to achieve an

education. Despite this possibility, a number of answers did indicate that learners saw some value in school history.

Non-history learners seemed to have chosen not to study history as a Matric subject largely because they wanted to take other subjects which they felt would be more useful for their careers, but also because there were other subjects that they found more interesting. Some were forced into the choice by the combinations of their subject packages, and history was discarded in favour of subjects more suitable to a particular vocation. History learners appear to have chosen history as a Matric subject because ‘we need to understand the past to understand the present’.

More girls can see how the history they learnt at school affects their lives, but more boys think that history has taught them more about ‘where they come from’ and prefer to learn historical skills. This suggests that girls might connect to history more emotionally than boys do, whereas boys prefer the more practical side of the subject and are perhaps more concerned about its relevance to the job market than girls. Further investigation would be required to verify these results.

More white learners seemed to find school history ‘too political’ and more black learners thought that school history had taught them more about ‘where they came from’ than white learners. It would seem that white learners were more disillusioned with school history than the black learners were (this theme will be picked up in Chapter Six). More black learners also preferred to learn historical skills, again suggesting that they have an eye on its relevance for their future careers. Black learners appeared to have a stronger emotional response to school history mostly, it would seem, because they have a strong emotional reaction to the immediate past (again, to be discussed in Chapter Six). The only clear socio-economic distinction that emerged from the study was that learners from School A, the township school, generally tended to have stronger, more poignant and more emotionally charged views and opinions than black learners from more privileged schools. However, a much more vigorous investigation would need to be conducted to verify these results.

The success of the questionnaire in eliciting learner attitudes to school history

In light of the results mentioned above, I would argue that the questionnaire was relatively successful in attaining what it set out to achieve with regards to investigating learners' attitudes to school history (see Chapter Four). There was some ambiguous wording, however, which hindered the interpretation of certain individual questions.

- 1) In question 12b, it was not clear how the questionnaire or the learners interpreted the term 'too political'. It was assumed, in the discussion above that if school history was 'too political', then too much of its content was devoted to discussing political events, parties and leaders. However, learners might also think that school history is too political because they believe that politicians are using it as a tool to condition them into a particular world view (as was discussed in Chapter One). This particular issue requires further investigation.

- 2) Similarly, question 15b ('Learning history at school has taught me useful thinking skills') did not make clear to the learners precisely what was meant by the phrase 'useful thinking skills'. Alternatively, learners were not asked to explain what they understood by 'useful thinking skills'. Consequently, when 56% of participants declared that they 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statement above, it was not clear precisely what they meant. Some of the learners stated that learning history helped them to 'think critically', 'express' themselves, 'look at life in a different way', 'empathise with others', keep 'precise in my statements' and 'broaden my views'. Perhaps these are what learners consider to be 'useful thinking skills'.

- 3) Question 15d ('Learning history at school will NOT help to get me a job') was badly phrased and did not yield any conclusive results. This is probably one of the most disappointing failings of the questionnaire as this is an issue which required greater clarity (see Chapter One). It would appear that those learners who were planning to be lawyers and journalists see history as a useful subject to take if they want to pursue these careers.

- 4) Question 20a, 'Do you think children should learn history at school?' was also unclear. Some learners understood the question to mean 'Should history be a compulsory Matric subject?'. Fortunately, the second part of question 20 which asked learners to explain their answer, helped to iron out some of the problems in interpretation. The question could have also implied that children should learn about history elsewhere, in a location other than 'the school'. Although I do not believe that any of the learners interpreted the question in this way, it would have been an interesting question to put to them. Do learners think that 'school' is an appropriate place to learn about history?

- 5) I thought that question 26 (reasons for choosing or not choosing history as a Matric subject) could have been designed more simply. I deliberately chose to make it a closed question because I wanted the learners to think carefully about their decision to take or not take history as a Matric subject and I was concerned that if learners were left to construct their own response, the answers would be too superficial. The question did have some success, but I think the results would have been more clear had learners been given fewer options to choose from.

- 6) The questionnaire did not do enough to establish learners' socio-economic backgrounds. I relied too strongly on the assumption that the socio-economic background of the schools would determine the socio-economic background of the learners themselves. This was not always the case and an individual profile of each learner would have been more useful.

The responses provided by learners to the questions discussed in this chapter were surprisingly helpful in exposing themes relevant to the second aim of the practical research component of this study: investigating learners' senses of the past. Chapter Six will discuss this study's findings on learners' senses of the past, drawing from information provided in the questionnaires and the interviews as well as elaborating on some of the findings raised in this chapter. The relevance, value and potential of these findings in the context of the aims of this study and in terms of their relevance to future research on learner attitudes to history will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

CHAPTER SIX

LEARNERS' SENSES OF THE PAST: FINDINGS AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

What do learners understand by the terms 'history', 'historian' and 'the past'?

One of the aims of the questionnaire was to try to establish learners' interpretations of three key terms upon which this study turns: 'history', 'historian' and 'the past'. The first and last terms will be discussed first. Four of the questions in the questionnaire tried to get a general understanding of how learners understand, think about and distinguish (if at all) between the concepts of 'history' and 'the past'.

When asked to respond to the question: What does history mean to you? (see question 4), most learners seemed to make a distinction between 'history' and 'the past'. The majority of participants seemed to work from the definition that history is 'studying the past' (Q48). Many used words or phrases such as 'study', 'learn', 'understand', 'reminds us', 'connects the present with the past', 'teaches', 'knowing about', 'look back'. Some of the learners also made mention of some of the particular skills such as 'analyse', 'learning to think deeply' or 'express our views', which they thought they had learnt whilst studying history. A few learners thought that history was 'events that have happened in the past' and some learners mentioned that history is about those events that are relevant to the present or 'help to predict the future'. Three participants said that history meant nothing to them and two said it that it meant a lot. The word 'important' was used quite liberally whether to explain that the study of history was important, or that history was about important people and events. A number of learners (particularly black learners) mentioned apartheid and one black, non-history learner wrote

It reminds me the way we as blacks use to live with no freedom. The people who fought for our country and it shows me that I must never give up. It also shows me that we are equal even if we are still treated unfairly by whites (Q17).

On the other hand, most learners seem to understand 'the past' as 'the events that happened before the present' (Q32). For some '[t]he past was horrible full of cruelty, killing of people. Leaders were cunning and ruthless. People lived with fear' (Q2), for others, '[t]he past is all about the struggle for freedom' (Q3). But interspersed with these comments about the more recent past (made particularly by black learners) was a tendency to talk about things that happened 'long ago' or 'in ancient times', times which seem distant and removed from their lives in the present. These comments were made by both black and white learners.

The answers provided to the two questions discussed above seem to indicate that the learners are very much conditioned into providing what they think is the 'correct' or accepted answer. Only a few (mostly black) participants deviated from what would appear to be school-taught definitions of 'history' and 'the past'. Essentially learners saw the past as something that has happened whereas history was seen as something that tells people about the past. However, as the previous paragraph indicates, some learners revealed a more personal, emotional connection to the past which clearly overrode any set 'definition' which they may have been taught.

Although, in their answers to the questions discussed above, some of the learners indicated that they thought that history was about great or important people and events, 87% of them also thought that they were a part of history (question 16). Some of the reasons for this were that the learners themselves might become great men, or women, or find themselves swept up in some important event (in fact, some of the learners thought that they had already been involved in important historical events - those of South Africa's recent past), but, on further consideration, many learners also wrote comments like 'History is also about ordinary people and our everyday lives I think everyone is a part of history' (Q63). Some argued that they are part of history because they have lived (or that they would become a part of history when they died), whilst others said that they are part of history because they study it. A few learners thought that they were a part of history because they followed a particular religion which had a rich history.

The small percentage of learners who felt that they were not a part of history made comments like 'because if I want to I have to do something painful first in order to be recognised' (Q4), '[b]ecause I haven't done anything of vital importance for anyone' (Q25), 'I'm part of the present. History deals with 'years' ago and I'm not that old' (Q83), 'because now every things goes well there is no Apartheid which was there past times'.(Q15). These learners were mostly non-history learners. Fifty percent of the 12 learners who did not think that they were a part of history were black girls but their explanations in question 16b do not reveal any clear trend as to why this might be the case. Two-thirds of the group who thought that they were not a part of history were female. Whether this is of any significance or not would have to be shown through further investigation.

A significant number of learners seemed to hold the stereotype that history is about famous people and important events, but many also recognise the role of ordinary men and women. Nevertheless, although the large majority of learners can see themselves as part of history, this did not necessarily mean that they can see how the history they were taught at school affects their lives (see Chapter Five). I got the impression that learners tended to associate 'history' with a more remote, clinical (and for some, rather inaccessible) study of the past (for some, the study of dead people and years ago), whereas 'the past', or the course of history, seemed to be viewed as more accessible, interesting and human (some learners, however, tended to use the two words interchangeably).

Question 6 in the questionnaire asked learners to select the option which they thought to be the most accurate description of the relationship between history and the past. Fifty-one percent of the learners selected the option 'History tells us the truth about the past' (see Table 7). Over half of the black learners who participated in the study and 71% of Indian participants thought that history tells us the truth about the past, compared to 39% of white participants (see Table 8). A further 23% of black learners chose the option 'History and the past are the same thing'. Ninety percent of the history learners who selected this first option were black, Indian or coloured. Forty-eight percent of the white participants thought that 'History is many opinions of the past'.

What do you consider to be the most accurate description of history and the past?	Number of learners to choose each option	% of history learners	% of Non-history learners
History tells us the truth about the past	51	37%	56%
History and the past are the same thing	17	15%	18%
History is an opinion of the past	6	4%	7%
History is many opinions of the past	26	44%	19%

Table 7

What do you consider to be the most accurate description of history and the past?	White	Black	Indian	Coloured
History tells us the truth about the past	39%	53%	71%	50%
History and the past are the same thing	13%	23%	7%	0
History is an opinion of the past	0	9%	7%	0
History is many opinions of the past	48%	15%	14%	50%

Table 8: Shows the percentage of each race group to choose each option

The results for this question suggest that the majority of black learners are far more trusting of ‘institutional’ history than white learners, who presented a more divided front. This is a surprising result when one considers the legacy of Bantu education. It is possible that with a black government in power, some black learners do not feel the need to be on their guard, but I would suggest that black learners tend to want to think that history tells the truth about the past because education is very much revered and respected by many of the black participants. I think if their opinions were probed more deeply, they might present a more critical view. The results may also be explained by the fact that black learners are more likely to have been subjected to a more authoritarian, ‘top-down’ education, whereas white learners at more privileged schools are more likely to have had the advantage of enquiry-based learning.

Question eight of the questionnaire asked learners to describe what they thought about when

they heard the word ‘historian’. The basic response was along the lines of ‘I think the historian is a person who know a lot about history’ (Q6). Some learners painted quite a positive picture. For example, a learner from School B explained ‘[w]ell I think of people who are adventurous, who like to understand things in more detail. They are not just interested in what is above the surface, they are also interested in what is below it’ (Q24). But others were more cynical. A white history learner from School D remarked that he thinks about ‘an old guy who walks around in a classroom trying to act like he knows everything’ (Q51). Another wrote ‘I think of a person who's clueless about he/ she wants in life’ (Q4). Many of the white learners seem to picture a boring old, bespectacled grey-haired man who spends his time reading dusty books. Black learners tended to stick to the explanation that an historian is very knowledgeable about the past and tended to show more respect. I would argue that the image which learners have of historians is consistent with their view of what future the study of history has to offer. It also helps to reinforce the notion that learners see history as ‘something out there’ which is quite distant from their everyday lives and individual pasts. Their views also reveal a strongly modernist top-down perception of history, as described in Chapter One, which sees historians as official authorities on the past in contrast to Heller’s suggestion that ‘in everyday life we are all historians’ (cited in Wright, 1985:14).

Are learners curious about the past?

It quickly became obvious from their half-amused expressions to the question ‘Do you ever try to find out about the past?’, that most interviewees (even the history learners), did not devote much extra time or energy to finding out what happened in the past outside their school obligations. Outside school time, learners were far more interested in playing sport, socialising, checking fashion, watching television or studying than to be concerning themselves with historical enquiry. This response was to be expected. I had not assumed that learners devote even small portions of their time to historical enquiry outside school. Not having been out of school very long myself, I was aware of how ridiculous this question must have seemed to the learners on the other end. But I wanted to observe learners reactions when the question was put to them. My impression was that consciously enquiring about the

past is, in the view of most learners, an activity still too closely tied to history at school and therefore not one looked upon favourably by young people learners who prefer to enjoy their free time. I also suspect that although learners appeared to have a stronger emotional connection to the phrase ‘the past’ rather than ‘history’, using ‘*the* past’ made my question too vague and unconnected with their lives. Which past, whose past, was I asking them about? I did receive one interesting answer, however. A rather quiet boy who lives in Stanger (and is a learner at School C) had visited all the historical sites around his home. He revealed that it feels ‘great’ when he visits them and explained, ‘I have to know about my past as a black man’ (I¹15).

When pressed, by the question ‘*If you wanted to find out about the past, how would you go about it?*’, interviewees indicated that the most popular sources in enquiring about the past were the internet, reading books and ‘talking to people’. One history learner from School A said ‘I like the media too much, I am just always in contact with the media... I read, I read so much’ (I2). The television and film were also popular choices amongst the interviewees, cited mostly for their convenience and presumably because they are more entertaining and possibly more accessible than written media (although this question was not asked).

Some learners thought quite carefully about why they had chosen or discarded a potential source. One boy from School D explained that ‘if you talk to people, they’ve always got a preconceived notion about things’ (I11). A history learner from School C saw this as an advantage. She argued that ‘textbooks are reliable, they give all sorts of information from both sides, from all different angles, but you’ll never...I think humans are very emotional, and so you’ll never know the true essence of an event if you don’t take in the emotional side’ (I16). Some of the learners seemed to feel that people who experienced the particular period or event first-hand would prove a reliable source, but I would argue that, apart from the emotional or ‘human’ connection, the reason most learners preferred to ‘talk to people’ was because, in the words of one learner, ‘it is always easier to ask people’ (I13). When asked who they would talk to, one boy said, ‘Ask those elders, they were there, witnessed all the

¹I denotes the word Interviewee and the number alongside is the number given to the particular interviewee. The general particulars of the relevant interviewee are provided in Appendix 7.

drama that was going on' (I1). A girl from School B said that she would 'talk to family or elders, friends' parents' (I5). One boy from School A said that he would 'go to the people that work for the government like maybe in parliament' (I3).

Most interviewees saw books and libraries as the most reliable source, but some recognised that all sources are written from a particular perspective and preferred to get their information from a number of different sources and 'formulate your own opinions, so you kind of like, believe yourself' (I17). Two of the interviewees were particularly inspired by their history teachers and cited them as their most reliable and favourite source. One learner, when describing her history teacher, said, 'He loves history, so it's like contagious or something...He makes history exciting' (I16). Many of the interviewees had been to a museum but they didn't seem to be particularly enamoured by the experience, although two boys said that it was interesting to imagine what it must have been like to kill an animal with a spear or wear animal skins. Some learners did not even see museums as places of history and explained that they were just full of stuffed animals in glass boxes. Learners perceptions and experiences of museums would be an interesting area of investigation for further study.

It would appear from the discussion above that if learners wanted to find out about the past, they would tend to favour the sources which they considered to be easily accessible and, I would argue, 'fun'. However, some of the interviewees were aware that all sources were constructed by someone with a particular purpose in mind and thus had to be examined critically. This area of investigation concerning learners' curiosity about the past stemmed from my early thinking on the study and has examined learners' attitudes to sources rather than taking me any closer to trying to understand learners' senses of the past. Nevertheless, it does show that learners were prepared to engage a wide range of sources.

Do learners talk to their parents, family and friends about the past?

Although most interviewees said that they did not actively investigate the past outside school time, they did talk informally to friends and family about the past. In the questionnaire,

learners were asked to indicate the frequency with which they talked to their parents/caregivers about history or the past (see question 23). Eighty-nine percent of the learners indicated that they did talk to their parents/caregivers about the past. Fifty-six percent selected 'sometimes' and 33% selected 'often'. Sixty-four percent of Indian learners stated that they often talked to their parents about the past compared to 23% of black learners and 39% of white learners. Since there were only 14 Indian learners involved in the study, one cannot conclude that Indian learners talk to their parents about the past more often than black or white learners. However, it is possible that black learners talk to their parents/caregivers about the past less than white or Indian learners do.

Two possible explanations suggest themselves. Many of the black learners who participated in the study came from poor backgrounds and lived with parents or grandparents who had little by way of a book education. Consequently, the learners did not see their family as an authority on the past, and tended not to ask them questions about it, preferring to go to their teacher or history textbook. One boy explained that he did not talk to his parents about the past because 'they are not educated. I think they didn't have a chance to study'(I15). Many of these black learners (and more, particularly their parents or caregivers), have had extremely difficult lives and have experienced much suffering and hurt. As a result, many of the parents of black learners find it too painful to talk about the past, or else the learners avoid the topic to avoid upsetting their parents. One boy, talking about his mother, said, 'She usually urges me not to stick on the past, but to go on with my life and just be a better person' (I1). Nevertheless, conversations about the past seem to have taken place even in these circumstances. 'Usually it's just the happy stuff,' said one learner. 'Sometimes the stuff she [her mother] does is so fascinating cause she's still *old* and she's still in her ways about doing stuff so sometimes I just pop a question and she doesn't mind really' (I14). Another girl explained

Ja, I talk to my family, especially my aunt, but my, like my aunt, she usually talks about like the things that they do, like they used to go and fetch water with their friends and it's like, she always says, like, the teenagers of today, they are so different from the past, like, we were always willing to work so hard, we didn't have everything so easy, and like, you always complaining, complaining about this and that, you should see the time we were young, you should come back, turn back the hands of time and actually experience the, the way we lived, you know, then you wouldn't be complaining now (I18).

Learners seem to enjoy hearing these family stories. One commented, 'It's quite interesting because it's very nice to hear from a person who was there, you know, who experienced every bit of it, so it makes me want to find out more' (I6).

White learners tended to talk less about the apartheid past than black learners and more about their settler ancestors. They also spoke about family traditions and quirky or rather dubious relations from the past who had some small claim to fame which their descendants were rather proud of. One boy from School E, who seems to spend a lot of time talking to his grandfather about the past, revealed that 'I enjoy listening to all those old stories and the sort of war stories and all that sort of stuff so it's actually interesting just to hear from a different point of view and see here how things have changed, just like in town or in like sort of Natal, how things have grown and sort of got bigger and better and all that sort of stuff' (I10).

White learners also tended to speak to their parents about English or British history in particular, and world history more generally. One girl explained, 'My parents are quite into, like, history, well they not full on historians, but they do know a certain amount and I speak to them...I 'spose mainly about English history' (I20). For both Indian and white learners these conversations about world history were often linked to ones involving current international affairs. A history learner commented that 'I argue with my father about like, with the war in Palestine and Israel, we have a lot of arguments about that, but he's not, he doesn't really like to get to understand why, he just knows the events and like, argues about the events. He doesn't like, see other people's point of view' (I11).

The interviewees do not see these conversations with their families as histories per se. This is possibly because they are seen as something more intimate and precious than the sorts of histories they learn at school. For the white learners in particular, these spontaneous conversations about the past seem to be closely linked with their own personal identities and those of their families. Conversations tended to turn around observed differences between the past and the present, understanding present circumstances and perpetuating and explaining traditions. Despite the painful experiences of many learners' families, conversations about the past also seem to be a source of much pleasure and comfort for the family members

involved. These family histories are also not the histories which readily present themselves when learners are asked to think about the past, as the next section will go on to show.

What do learners think about when they think about the past?

Once the interviewees had told me a bit about themselves and were feeling a little less inhibited, I asked each of them to describe the first thing that came into their minds when thinking about the past (in contrast to question 5 in the questionnaire which asked them to consider what they thought the past *was*). However, many of the responses to the question posed above better matched the question: What do you *feel* when you think about the past?

Although the interviewees did refer to past events or particular time periods, many of them also described their most prominent emotions when they think about the past. A rather shy history learner (quoted above) quietly explained, 'I really do not care about [the past]; it happened, it happened, it was meant to happen... We just have to go on with the future, let's just not focus on the past' (I1). One of his peers agreed, 'The more I think about history, I get sad every time, so I just think about the future now' (I3). One learner from School F exclaimed, 'I don't know whether it's just me, but I find it...frustrating mingling in the past and thinking about it too much' (I20). And a particularly dissatisfied non-history learner from School A who had experienced quite a difficult childhood put her irritation across more assertively, declaring that 'I think [the past] is total nonsense, a waste of time' (I4).

This intensity of emotion contrasted quite strongly with sentiments of other interviewees from School E and School D who explained in a rather non-committal way that when they thought about the past, they thought about 'events that have led up to the present' (I9). When asked to name some of these events, they mentioned things like the two World Wars, the Russian Revolution, the Anglo-Boer War, the coming of settlers to South Africa. However they also made reference to more ancient civilisations (like Egypt), as well as their own particular family histories.

This section of the interviews help to confirm the findings discussed in Chapter Five. Predictably, 'apartheid' featured prominently in their answers, particularly those of black or Indian learners. Black learners, particularly those in more difficult circumstances, seemed to feel the legacies of the past quite keenly, whilst learners who had had (and whose predecessors had had) an easier time of life tended to be less focussed and more uninterested. The fact that learners responded readily with their feelings and emotions about the past also helps to explain why many of them enjoyed talking to people rather than reading books, and suggests that one of the reasons why the history classroom may be so boring (particularly for some of the white learners) is because they are unable to find that emotional connection.

South Africa's Past

I had predicted that South Africa's past would be a prominent topic in answer to the question 'when you think about South Africa's past, what do you think about?'. I had also predicted that many learners would feel quite strongly about South Africa's past. I had therefore included some questions in the questionnaire which tried to establish learners attitudes to South Africa's past and the way it was being dealt with by South Africans in the present. The views of some of the learners were then probed more deeply during the interviews. Having a common point of discussion made it easier to see how different learners drew on the past to make sense of their lives in the present. It also helped to draw parallels between learners' attitudes to school history and their broader senses of the past.

In the questionnaire, learners were asked to describe (in one word) how they felt about South Africa's past. Fifty percent of the responses conveyed negative sentiments, using words like 'bad', 'sad', 'brutal', 'angry', 'bitter' and 'embarrassed'. However, twenty-one percent gave more objective answers, although they tended to describe the South African past, using words such as 'dramatic' or 'controversial' rather than describing their emotions. Twenty percent of the responses were more positive, using words such as 'proud' or 'fascinating', while nine percent of the responses were made up of blank or uninterested comments such as 'bored' or 'irritating'. Figure 3 gives a pictorial representation of the results.

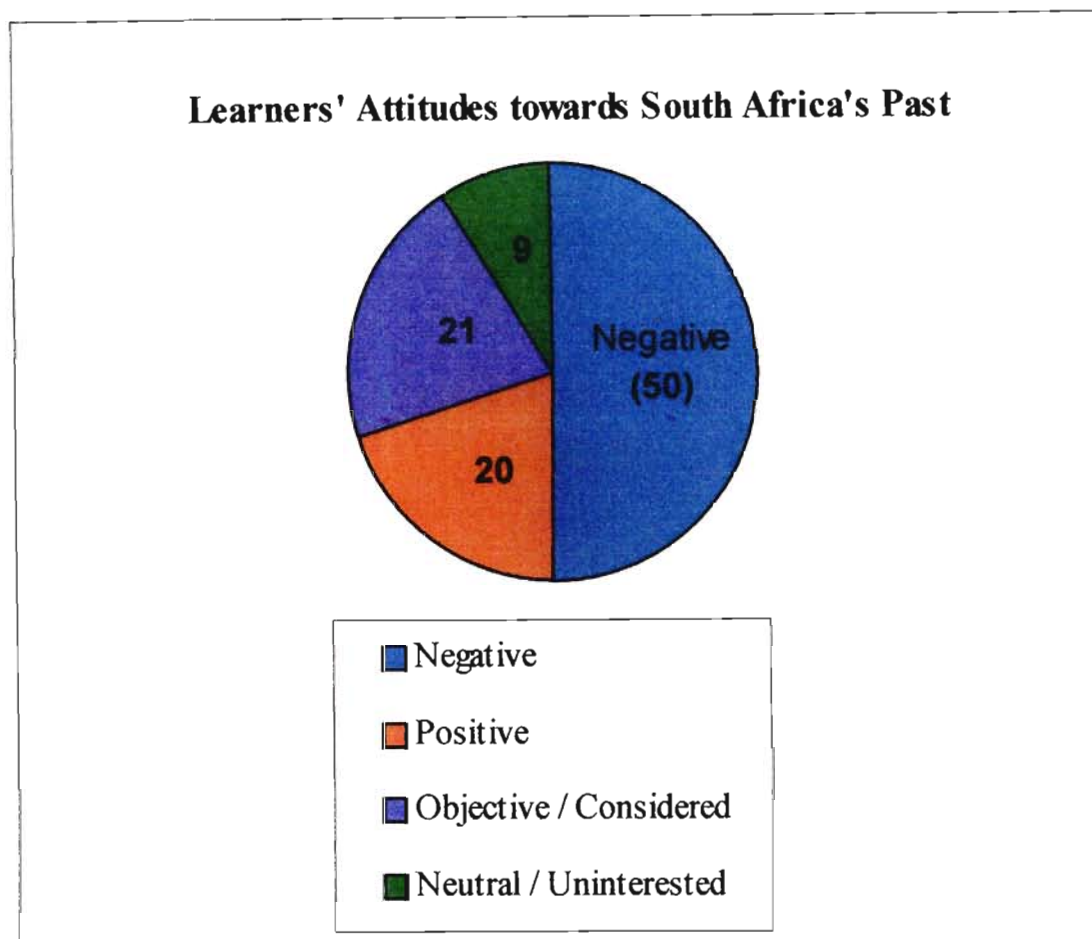


FIGURE 3

During the interviews when I asked the learners involved what they thought about 'South African history'. The question was deliberately kept vague, to try and avoid leading the answers which learners gave. For many of the black learners, their responses were synonymous with their feelings about the past, but for white learners, the same sense of frustration that was apparent in some of the responses provided in the questionnaires (see Chapter Five) revealed itself again. One history learner at School D said that South African history was the worst part about history (I12). Her view seemed to be consistent with that of

the boy who was interviewed just before her. He announced that 'I wasn't overly intrigued by the South African history' and described it as 'pretty boring' (I13). A non-history learner from School F revealed that

that is the main reason why I didn't want to take history, I didn't want to learn about South Africa, which is terrible, but listening, like, talking about apartheid over and over and over, it just drives me crazy, you know, absolutely crazy, 'cause like, people just keep going back to it and back to it. I know it's important, but it's just, let it go, you know... (I20).

Just a few minutes before this expression of exasperation, one of her peers (a black history learner at the same school) remarked, 'Everyone's talking about apartheid, but I feel that you, you need to talk about apartheid in order to get over it and, 'cause when you just like leave it, and just expect people to get over it in just ten years, that's just, I think it's silly' (I19). When asked who she thought was saying that we shouldn't be talking about apartheid all the time, she gave a surprising answer, 'Ja, ja, the white people are in the majority...but also there are like, some...black kids'. She explained that these 'kids' did not understand, or had not been exposed to the type of suffering that had been experienced by people living under apartheid, and therefore were unable to appreciate or understand the need to talk about what had happened in order to come to terms with it and reach a point where one was able to move on. This girl came from a family which seems to have been quite involved with Mkhonto we Sizwe and has clearly experienced first hand the extent to which talking helps to heal. These contradictory views held by two girls from School F (one history learner and one non-history learner) highlights what seems to be a main point of contention for South African learners when thinking about the past: Are South Africans placing too much emphasis on the past, and would it not be simpler if everyone just forgot about it? Question 29 of the questionnaire explored this issue.

Should South Africans simply forget about the past?

In the questionnaire, learners were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statements: 'South Africa puts too much focus on the past' and 'In South Africa it would be better simply to forget about the past'. The results were not particularly clear. Although

learners tended to agree that South Africa puts too much emphasis on the past, a large proportion chose the middle ground and selected the option 'partly agree/partly disagree'. However, 71% of white learners selected the options 'agree' or 'strongly agree' (See Table 9). This result is in keeping with their sense of frustration and disillusionment about the South African past discussed earlier.

29a)SA puts too much focus on the past	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Blank
Number of Participants	19	31	34	13	1	2
Black learners	8	17	15	11	0	2
White learners	10	12	8	1	0	0
Indian learners	1	2	9	1	1	0

Table 9

Learners tended to disagree that it would be better to forget about the past in South Africa, but on this question opinion was more evenly divided (see Table 10).

29b)In SA, it would be better simply to forget about the past	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Blank
Number of Participants	14	16	25	21	23	1
Black learners	10	10	6	10	16	1
White learners	3	4	12	9	3	0
Indian learners	1	2	6	2	3	0

Table 10

Those learners who said that it would be better simply to forget about the past tended to be black, non-history learners who did not enjoy history. The most common explanation given was that we need to forget the past in order to unite and move on with the future. One learner wrote, 'If we unite and concentrate on the future we could become a developed country but now some whites still hate black and blacks still hate white thus not giving each other an

opportunity to shine' (Q36). Other reasons were that we need to forgive and forget the atrocities of the past or that we need to forget the past because it fosters feelings of blame and resentment. One girl said that it would be better to forget the past 'cause we are busy pointing fingers on other people's damages and we are not moving on with our lives' (Q4). A male learner wrote, 'Because people find it hard to move on because they are still trapped in the past. I know it hard to forgive and forget but someday we will have to come to that. Where there will be no white, no black just South African people' (Q40). A couple of learners said that we needed to forget about the past because it was painful. One boy explained, 'If you could remember well our past is not that pretty good' (Q1).

Not surprisingly, it would seem that history learners make up a slight majority of learners who feel that it would *not* be better simply to forget about the past. However, there was also a fairly strong complement of non-history learners (both those who enjoyed history and those who did not) in this category. It might, therefore, be more accurate to say that the majority of learners in this category were those who indicated that they enjoyed history at school. Again, black learners were dominant in this group. The most common reason explaining why we need to remember the past was that we need to learn from the past. A boy from School E wrote, 'I think we need to remember the past to better build up our country. It will stop us making the same mistakes' (Q42). A black boy from School D suggested, 'We need to learn from the mistakes that we did on the past so that we can have a better place for everyone in the world' (Q64). Other explanations included the fact that the past makes us who we are and we need to understand the past to understand our lives in the present. One girl argued, 'It is our past that had made us into the strong nation that we are. Lots of blood was shed for people to live together as equals. Situations like that shall never be forgotten. Some of the black learners explained that we needed to 'remember the heroes of the struggle' (Q56).

A quarter of the learners were unsure about the value of simply forgetting about the past. This group tended to consist of non-history learners who had enjoyed history at school. This group had a white majority. A typical comment read, 'Events that took place in the past have a strong impact in the presence that we can relate to. On the other hand some events are to be forgotten because it creates tension among people which is unnecessary' (Q21).

How South Africa's past is being dealt with in the present

I asked the interviewees how they thought the South African past was being dealt with in the present and received a very mixed response. I afterwards regretted that I had not had enough time to set up a focus group amongst the interviewees because the responses were so varied and (in many cases) so opposed, yet so complementary, that it is possible to present them as if the learners themselves were having a discussion.

'That I feel is South Africa's problem,' announced one learner, 'we living in the past, we aren't forgetting it' (I12). Talking about people who think that we should simply forget about the past, a non-history learner from School B retaliated, 'I think they just running away from the truth...[t]he change won't come if we just push it away and ignore it. I think you have to face it, deal with it, and then, there's a change' (I8). But some learners thought that South Africa has already made great leaps towards progress and seemed almost blissful. One black, non-history learner wrote, 'The country is beautiful...Ah it is so nice to live, there are more opportunities, we are free, we can do what we want, we can learn where we want to learn, all we need to do is to make use of these, those opportunities' (I3).

A learner from School A happily explained that 'There is focussing in the past for South Africa, but not that they are holding that grudge, no...What they are holding up was the past, they are remembering the heroes of the past...there are no grudges now' (I2). But a white (history) boy from School D complained, 'My main problem with [the way the past is being dealt with in South Africa] is that they still using it as an excuse' (I11) and a black (non-history) girl from School A agreed: 'We as blacks are using [the past] to blame our mistakes on white people' (Q4). A history learner from School C reiterated this, 'People emphasise on it [the past] too much,' she said, 'I'm not saying we should forget about what happened, all I'm saying is people, they focus on it too much to the extent that they blaming the past for everything' (I16). But a black history boy from School C thought that '[t]oday...people are ignoring the past which is wrong because they have to know about the past to understand what happened' (I15). One interviewee tried to compromise: 'I think the past will help you

and will not help you...there should be more taking about it...talking would be the good stuff that happened, and, like the enjoyable stuff, but the ones that should be kept secret are the ones that will hurt other people' (I17).

However, others thought that the apartheid past was being dealt with quite well in present-day South Africa. Another white (non-history) boy from School D School wrote: 'I think the government is doing what it has to do to rectify the wounds of apartheid' (I13) and a black (non-history) girl at the same school said

I thought the TRC was very good. Ja, that was, that was, that took a lot, that took a lot for people to go there and to listen and to still forgive the other people. And, South Africa not forgetting it, and, and always bringing back, you know, around Youth Day, they always do the special programmes and stuff, I think that's, that's just nice (I14).

With such a division and diversity of opinion, the question of how learners use the past in the everyday to make sense of their lives in the present becomes ever more complex.

How successful were the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview as research tools designed to elicit a clearer understanding of learners' 'senses of the past'?

I found both the questionnaires and the transcribed interviews to be useful sources when trying to get a clearer understanding of learners' senses of the past. Nevertheless, there were some areas which could have been handled more effectively. The successes and failures of the questionnaires and interviews in their attempt to better understand learners' senses of the past will be discussed below:

- 1) I felt that the questions on South Africa's past were most effective in eliciting meaningful discussion from the learners involved. It was also useful to be able to compare the more detailed opinions of the South African past provided by the interviewees with the wider range of responses given in the questionnaire on the same topic. In this respect the responses of the interviewees helped me to identify the broader trends and opinions that were present in the sample.

- 2). Getting learners to explain what they understood by the words 'history' and 'the past' at the beginning of the questionnaire helped to establish a useful distinction. Since history is a school subject, learners tended to associate this word with the rather remote activity of studying the past, but tended to show a more emotional reaction to the term 'the past'. But even *the* past was still something quite removed from learners' own lives. They seemed to prefer to think about *their* past, their *family's* past, their *people's* past or *South Africa's* past. These distinctions suggest the need for more focused questions in the future which could probe more directly learners' 'compartmentalisation' of the past.
- 3) More imaginative questions could have been used when exploring the ways in which learners interact with the past in their everyday lives. I could have specifically asked learners to tell me, for example, one of the stories which a family member has told them about the past and asked them to try to explain why this story stood out in their minds. I tended to let learners volunteer their stories and I did not probe these stories too deeply once they had been told for fear of upsetting the interviewee in question. When analysing the interviews at a later stage, I realised that it would have been possible to enquire further into the private lives of the learners and still remained respectful of their sentiments and privacy had I had a more obvious strategy for dealing with the more sensitive issues and stories.
- 4) Semi-structured interviews were a useful research tool because they allowed me to ask specific questions. However, I feel that researchers who conduct investigations into learners' senses of the past in the future would have more success at trying to establish the more unconscious ways in which learners think about and experience the past if they also included a more ethnographic approach, living amongst the learners and conducting their investigation through observation and informal chats.

- 5) The willingness of learners to voice their opinions, specifically on the issue of South African history suggests that observations of discussions conducted with learners through the use of focus groups would also be an effective way of increasing a researcher's understanding of learners' senses of the past.

When examining the findings of the practical research component of this study, it is clear that learners obviously do not construct chronologically or factually accurate textbook histories when trying to reach their own understanding of the past (as the test study at the Edgewood Campus showed), however much their teachers may want them to. Instead, it would seem that learners' histories are blurred: a hazy mix of impressions and facts; fuzzy memories and experiences; quirky, funny or interesting stories that caught their attention in the classroom, over a meal, on holiday. They are glued together with half-formed concepts and impressionable opinions, and fade in and out of prominence, drawn on and discarded when and as the present requires. In the final chapter of this study, I will examine the implications which these findings have for school history education in South Africa.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FINAL ANALYSIS , SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In the opening chapter of his book, *Theatres of Memory* (1996), Raphael Samuel explores potential sources of 'unofficial [historical] knowledge'. He points out that professional historians, locked deep within the confines of their academic guild, have tended to work from 'the unspoken assumption that knowledge filters downwards' (Samuel, 1996:4). They have consequently tended to be dismissive of other forms of (less 'scientific') historical knowledge which abound in the everyday lives of many different people and are used by them in myriad ways. When I first began this study, I was working from a similar assumption to that identified here by Samuel. My concern, however, lay with the dissemination of historical knowledge in South African schools. My argument was that history education authorities needed to develop a greater understanding of learners' own senses of the past so that school history education could be adapted in ways which would make it better suited to encouraging learners to study history at school, and thereby helping them to develop an 'accurate' historical consciousness.

However, this thesis has argued that schools are not simply centres of teaching and learning history where history education authorities attempt to solve 'problems' facing school history education from the top down. Schools are also important sites where the learners themselves make and use their own histories which are inspired by and created from their own personal senses of the past. This understanding together with my original research findings have suggested that by developing a further understanding of learners' senses of the past, history educators could potentially reach a completely new way of understanding the nature of history as a 'subject' in schools. This chapter serves to provide a summary of my findings and to briefly outline the implications which these findings have for history education in schools.

The introduction and development of Curriculum 2005 in South Africa over the last decade has meant that history education authorities in South Africa have recently faced a number of challenges over the nature and purpose of school history education. These challenges stem from the strong colonial settler-dominated context out of which history education in South Africa first emerged. From the very beginning, school history content was used to try to condition southern African children into an unproblematic acceptance of a world view held by the dominant power-holding groups. The education policies of the apartheid state only served to strengthen this approach. But the deliberate attempt by the state to use school history education to indoctrinate the pupils in its care saw increasing displays of resistance to these attempts of indoctrination from more progressive white liberal history teachers (influenced by a new critical approach to history teaching that was emerging in the United Kingdom in the 1970s and Africanist and Marxist histories that had begun to emerge in other parts of the world since the 1960s) as well as large numbers of black learners themselves, who particularly after 1976, increasingly boycotted the Bantu Education system. Thus, South African history education has been a controversial subject since its first formal introduction to the Cape Colony in 1839.

Consequently, history educationists themselves have a history of ‘problematifying’ school history education, a history of trying to find ways of making history more palatable to the South African learner. More recent developments in history education under the outcomes-based curriculum have helped history education authorities to pay more attention to the skills which learners can potentially acquire through the study of school history. These skills will arguably help them to become more discerning adults and citizens, schooled in the art of critically engaging the world in which they live.

In a report to the South African Minister of Education in December 2000, the History and Archaeology Panel pointed to ‘The Values and Value of Historical Learning’ and argued that school history ‘encourages civic responsibility and critical thinking’, ‘fosters...mature judgement’, ‘is important in the construction of identity’, calls attention to ‘marginalised voices’, provides ‘rich examples of narratives of real-life situations’, promotes ‘the crucial

role of memory in society’ and ‘enables people to reflect on their existing and inherited historical consciousness, to examine it and, not least, to deconstruct it and observe its possible limits’ (Department of Education, 2000).

But this study has argued that in these attempts to improve school history education and make its outcomes more learner-centred, the views and attitudes of the learners themselves have got lost, and remain largely unexplored. As was pointed out in Chapter Two, the Panel does register its awareness of a ‘latent’ historical consciousness which learners acquire in their everyday lives and bring with them to their school history classes, but the report focuses its attention on the various ways in which school history education can develop this latent consciousness into a ‘conscious consciousness’ and neglects to examine how this latent consciousness is formed and developed in the first place.

Until recently western historians have also tended to approach historical knowledge with the view that it ‘filters downwards’. They have also tended to pay little attention to the ‘unofficial [historical] knowledge’ which is formed by ordinary people pursuing history making activities in their everyday lives and have instead attempted to teach these people ‘real’ history from the top down (Samuel, 1996). But for western academic historians, the ‘ferment’ of their discipline over the last three decades of the twentieth century saw an increased awareness amongst these historians of other ‘sites’ where pastness is made outside the academy. Thus the making of histories was not an activity confined to academic historians alone.

The implications of reading around this recently identified theme concerning the making and use of histories by ordinary people in their everyday lives were that I began to realise that the potential to see school history in a completely new way. The themes around history in the everyday which were discussed in Chapter Three suggested a colourful, vibrant, messy way of making histories (Lowenthal, 1985 and Samuel, 1996) which seemed very far removed from the factual, chronological narratives which I had encountered and studied at school. This reinforced my perception that history educators needed to pay more attention to the ways in which children experienced and used the past in their own lives and to establish the extent to

which these senses of the past related to the history which learners encountered as a subject at school.

Very few studies have been conducted in this area, but the studies of Bam, 2001; Dryden, 1999; Kros and Greybe, 1996 and Kros et al, 1998 suggest that some educators are beginning to explore the world of the learners themselves. However, whilst these studies are concerned with learners' historical consciousness (Bam, 2001) and do attempt to increase the researcher's understanding of the everyday world in which the learners live and interact (Bam, 2001; Kros and Greybe, 1996, Kros et al 1998;) they tend to leave the issue of learners' senses of the past playing in the background. No clear attempt is made to address and understand how learners *make* and *use* the past in their everyday lives. Instead, these researchers turn their attention to exploring the role of school history in nation-building and finding new ways to increase and develop learners' conscious historical consciousness.

Consequently, the practical research component of this study aimed to make a preliminary exploration of the attitudes which learners have towards school history as a subject (which promotes an official historical consciousness), and the senses of the past which learners themselves have developed as a result of the various encounters with and exposures to different forms of 'pastness' which children and adolescents experience as they grow up. Using this information, I had hoped be able to draw some preliminary conclusions about the extent to which learners' senses of the past and attitudes to history were shaped and influenced by the socialising forces of school history education. Its findings are explorative, but they do suggest that further investigations into learners' attitudes to school history and adolescent's 'senses of the past' would be of value for history education authorities contemplating the future of history in South African schools.

To what extent are learners' senses of the past and attitudes to history shaped and influenced by the socialising forces of school history education?

Learners' attitudes seemed to be less influenced by the approach used by history teachers than I first assumed would be the case after reading the report of the History and Archaeology Panel (2000) and the findings of van den Berg and Buckland (1983). A number of non-history learners hated having to memorise dry dates and facts and 'irrelevant content', many disliked writing long, complicated history essays, and some raised objections about boring or unenthusiastic history teachers, and yet a number of these learners enjoyed learning history. Thus these 'problem' factors which history education authorities have tended to view as needing to be 'solved' became less significant when the relationship between learners' attitudes to history and their own personal 'senses of the past' were further examined.

The second point is that the findings on learners' attitudes to history as a school subject suggest that the majority of learners did see some value in the formal study of history at school even if they did not necessarily enjoy the experience. In exploring the question of learners' enjoyment of history as a school subject, it would appear that the 'senses of the past' that learners had acquired through both their previous experience of school history as well as their experiences of the past in the everyday were specifically significant in determining the attitudes which learners had towards history as a school subject. In other words, learners' attitudes to school history in many cases were in some way representative of their own senses of the past.

For example, some learners enjoyed learning history at school because learning about the past gave them some sense of satisfaction or purpose in the present. For some of the black learners, the past was about learning about the African struggle for liberation against apartheid and remembering the courage and sacrifice of African freedom fighters. These learners felt empowered by black liberation and tended to be of the opinion that we must learn from the past and look to the future. They saw the past as a challenge to themselves to go out and make their mark on the world.

For other learners (of all races), particularly the history learners and the non-history learners

who enjoyed history, the past was a source of fascination because it was considered different, yet familiar to the present. These learners used the past to compare it with their lives in the present and to imagine how they would deal with similar situations to those faced or experienced by people in the past. They tended to see the past as a source of life lessons from which they could draw to guide their own lives. They enjoyed school history because it explained to them 'where they came from'. Thus, in these cases, the past served as a foundation, a safety net, a source from which learners could draw support to 'go forward into the future'.

However, for some participants, the South African past seemed to be a source of much irritation. A number of learners mentioned that in South Africa, the past was simply being used as an excuse to explain away problems in the present. This frustration is perhaps the sign of a younger generation who do not want to be saddled with the burden of the past. In this regard, white learners seemed to be the group who were most disgruntled with the past. By labeling the past as 'boring' or 'a waste of time', these white (predominantly English-speaking) learners suggested that they did not feel in any way connected with the way in which the South African past is being viewed in the public sphere and school system today, that is, as something which needs to be corrected, redressed, rewritten. These learners, in particular, seemed to feel that they were being punished for the legacy of a past which was not of their own creation. Some of these learners were more outspoken, arguing that school history placed what they considered to be 'too much emphasis on the South African past' which some of them seemed to think had 'very little to do with them really', they were 'not even there', and history thus became 'a pointless subject'.

A similar rejection of school history was observed amongst some of the black learners, particularly those from poorer backgrounds. For them the past was a source of oppression which had caused their parents and families much hardship and had resulted in much pain. For these learners, the end of apartheid offered new opportunities (particularly in education) which their parents and grandparents had not had the privilege of seeing. The past was sad, painful and over, the way to a better life was through hard work, good grades and a respectable profession. These learners also seemed to feel quite a lot of responsibility to

make use of the opportunities which had not been afforded their parents and to rescue their families from their difficult circumstances. So although they were fairly positive about their future, past struggles and events, and the opportunities which these had delivered, placed quite a lot of pressure on the lives of these learners in the present and they tended to feel indebted to the leaders of the African struggle against apartheid

Unconsciously, learners' 'senses of the past' and their subject positions in the present were obviously sometimes partly supported and sometimes partly contradicted by official historical consciousness which they were expected to learn at school. Thus Allen (2000) and Nuttall and Wright's (2000) assertions that learners may be avoiding school history partly because they see the subject in its current form as an 'establishment tool' (Allen, 2000) used by the state to mould the new nation into a particular historical consciousness, appears to be accurate. Although at a conscious level, non-history learners explained that they favoured the subjects which they considered to be more likely to help them to get a job (as suggested by Nuttall and Wright (2000) and Lowry (1995).

Histories as conversation

One particularly relevant observation when examining the implications of this study is the fact that many of the learners were perfectly willing, and sometimes quite enthusiastic to talk to me about the past. I would suggest that because they were in a position to speak authoritatively on their own views and opinions, some of the learners appreciated the opportunity that was afforded them by the interview to do just that. Furthermore, Chapter Six showed that when these various views and attitudes were examined, that it was possible to build a meaningful conversation which addressed and shared common concerns raised by the interviewees in their respective interviews.

Writing about British children's perceptions of public expressions of pastness, such as Steam Fairs, Raphael Samuel explains that

Children bring their own aesthetics to these spectacles, their own time horizons, their own memories, their own points of past-present comparison, in a word, their own sense of history. They will be making dramas and stories out of material that is apparently inert. They may wonder at the weight of the cannonballs they are invited to handle on board “HMS Victory” or the size of the giant waterwheels which confront them at the mill dam. They will invest labyrinths and caves with sinister properties (Samuel, 1996:283).

For the adolescents who participated in my own study, the colourful, imaginative spirit of childhood was not easy to behold. These participants were no longer children imagining what it would be like to carry a spear displayed in the museum, and ‘go on a real hunt’, these were young adults, struggling to make their own voices and opinions known, to have their own ‘senses of the past’ taken seriously, to be able, in the words of one learner, ‘to talk to adults’.

This readiness for conversation, together with many learners’ rejection of history as a Matric subject suggests that it is possible that the role and nature of history in schools could be understood in a completely different way. Alongside other investigations which try to find ways of developing a learners’ ‘latent historical consciousness into a conscious consciousness’ (Department of Education, 2000), this study suggests that history education authorities also need to be more aware than they are at present of the fact that

[o]ur sense of the historical past comes less from history books than from the everyday things we see and do from childhood on.... For all the expertise of historians and archaeologists, history remains, in Rosemary Harris’ phrase “something of an odd, semi-fictional subject, part fact, part myth, and guesswork” (cited in Lowenthal, 1985:211).

In other words, historians and history educators need to acknowledge that adolescents are just as much ‘producers’ of pasts as they are ‘learners’ of history and it would appear from the results of the practical research component of this study that, as adolescents, they need to be given the chance to express their own senses of the past, even if all they want to say is that it is ‘rubbish’ (I2). If your step-father kills your mother when you are still a child, ‘The past is rubbish!’ can be said with great anger, anger which needs to be expressed.

For those historians and history educators who recognise the role of ‘the past in service of the present’ (Chernis, 1990), learning more about adolescent’s senses of the past no longer shows us how little they know about the past, it tells us much about how they think and feel in the

present. Thus investigating learners' attitudes to school history and their 'senses of the past' not only becomes an area which historians can research when trying to learn more about histories that are made and used in the everyday, it also opens up a new line of enquiry for history educators and those concerned with the values and well-being of young people.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Candidates entered for the Senior Certificate Examination (Full time)				
Exam year	KwaZulu-Natal		National	
	Total entered	History entered	Total entered	History entered
2003	102,485	22,859	457,615	95,565
2002	102,830	24,002	466,170	101,871
2001	98,411	24,348	471,621	106,951
2000	103,563	28,781	521,517	128,391
1999	112,114	37,082	547,327	153,788
1998	116,569	45,181	585,745	189,256

Supplied by Willie Venter, Department of Education, National Examinations and Assessment.

APPENDIX 2

Sections included in the questionnaire: a comparison between my first draft and the final product:

FIRST DRAFT	FINAL VERSION
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. General Information 2. Attitude to History and Historians 3. Attitude to History as a school subject 4. Cultural Perceptions 5. Attitude to Time 6. Sense of the Past 7. Attitudes to sources 8. SA Past and National Unity 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. General Information 2. General understanding of History and the Past 3. Learner Attitudes to History as a school subject and factors influencing this. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ability - Effort - Experience of <i>learning</i> History - Future Career - Parents - Peers - Personal Interest - Relevance - School - Teachers 4. Attitude towards South Africa History

APPENDIX 3

Research Questionnaire

I am currently researching a Master's Degree in History which aims, in part, to investigate school learners' attitudes to History.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire and in doing so, helping me with my study.

Your participation is much appreciated.

Please feel free to ask as many questions as you need to.
There are no right answers.

Note: This is a voluntary exercise and all responses will be treated as confidential.

Unless otherwise indicated, please TICK ✓ only ONE box...

1) Please indicate your...

1a) Sex (Tick the appropriate box)

Male	female
------	--------

1b) Age (Tick the appropriate box)

15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----

1c) Race (Tick the appropriate box)

Black	White	Coloured	Indian	Other (Please indicate) _____
-------	-------	----------	--------	----------------------------------

2) Name your High School. _____

3) Does your school offer History as a Matric subject? (Tick the appropriate box)

Yes	No
-----	----

4) What does 'History' mean to you? _____

5) What do you think 'the past' is? _____

6) *Tick the box which you consider to be the most accurate description of History and the past*
(Tick only ONE box).

History tells us the truth about the past.	History and the past are the same thing.	History is an opinion of the past.	History is many opinions of the past.
--	--	------------------------------------	---------------------------------------

7) *Tick the box that most accurately reflects your response to the following statement:*

We need to understand the past to understand the present.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partly Agree/ Partly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
---	----------------	-------	----------------------------------	----------	-------------------

8) What do you think of when you hear the word ‘historian’? _____

9) What Grade were you in when you last studied History? *(Tick the appropriate box)*

Grade 9	I am currently studying History (Grade 12)	Other (Please indicate) _____
---------	--	----------------------------------

10a) Did/ do you enjoy (like) studying History ? *(Tick the most appropriate box)*

Yes	No
-----	----

b) Why/ Why not? _____

11) If you had to choose, which do you prefer
(Tick the most appropriate box)

Learning historical content. Eg: learning what happened in the past.	or	Learning historical skills. Eg: learning <u>how</u> to <u>find out</u> what happened in the past.	?
--	----	---	---

12) *In each case, tick the box that most accurately reflects your response to the following statements:*

12a)	School History only tells one side of the story.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partly Agree/ Partly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
12b)	School History is too Political.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partly Agree/ Partly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

13) *Tick the box which you feel best explains your experience of learning History.*

Learning History is mostly about...	Dates and Facts	Stories	Analysis and Investigation
-------------------------------------	-----------------	---------	----------------------------

14a) Can you see how the History you were/ are taught at school affects your life?

(Tick the most appropriate box)

Yes	No
-----	----

b) Explain your answer above _____

15) *Tick the box which most accurately expresses your response to the following statements:*

15a)	Learning History at school has taught me more about who I am and where I come from.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partly Agree/ Partly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15b)	Learning History at school has taught me useful thinking skills.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partly Agree/ Partly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15c)	Learning History at school has given me a useful general knowledge.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partly Agree/ Partly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15d)	Learning History at school will NOT help to get me a job.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partly Agree/ Partly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

16a) Do you think that you are a part of History? *(Tick the most appropriate box)*

Yes	No
-----	----

b) Explain your answer above _____

17a) On average, what marks did/ do you get for History? *Indicate the symbol, Eg: B* _____

b) If you take History as a Matric subject, indicate whether you are studying History on Higher (HG) or Standard Grade (SG) _____.

18) How much effort would you say you put into your History classes? *(Tick the most appropriate box).*

I work(ed) hard and do (did) more than is (was) required of me	I am (was) attentive and do (did) what is (was) required of me.	I do (did) just enough to pass.	I hardly do (did) any work at all.
--	---	---------------------------------	------------------------------------

19) How much effort would you say you put into your school work in general? *(Tick the most appropriate box).*

I work hard and do more than is required of me	I am attentive and do what is required of me.	I do just enough to pass.	I hardly do any work at all.
--	---	---------------------------	------------------------------

20a) Do you think children should learn History at school?

(Tick the appropriate box)

Yes	No
-----	----

b) Why/ why not? _____

21) Tick the box that most accurately reflects your response to the following statements:

My History teachers really like/d teaching History.	All of them	Most of them	Some of them	None of them
---	-------------	--------------	--------------	--------------

22) In each case, tick the box which best describes your **last** History teacher.

22a)	My <i>last</i> History teacher was mostly...	Fun	Ok	Boring
22b)	My <i>last</i> History teacher was mostly...	Helpful	Ok	Unhelpful
22c)	I was scared of my <i>last</i> History teacher...	Yes	No	Sometimes

23) Do (did) your parents/ caregivers talk to you about History or the past?
(Tick the appropriate box)

Often	Sometimes	Never
-------	-----------	-------

24) How do you think your parents/ caregivers feel about History as a school subject?_____

25) Is History one of your Matric subjects? (Tick the appropriate box)

History IS one of my Matric subjects.

Box A



If you ticked box A, you **MUST** answer column A.



History is NOT one of my Matric subjects.

Box B



If you ticked box B, you **MUST** answer column B.



26)

(If you ticked box A, go to column A)



(If you ticked box B, go to column B)



DO NOT answer both columns

COLUMN A

Put a tick next to the reasons that BEST describe why you **chose** **History** as a Matric subject (*Do NOT tick more than THREE options*).

I chose to study History because...

a	History was the only other subject I could take on my subject line.	
b	My friends were all taking History .	
c	My parents/ caregivers advised me to take History.	
d	I don't really like History, but I couldn't find another subject to take.	
e	I feel that the skills which History teaches are very valuable.	
f	I will use my knowledge of historical events in my future career.	
g	I will use the skills that History teaches in my future career.	
h	I find History easy.	
i	I do well in History.	
j	I enjoy the challenge of History .	
k	We need to understand the past to understand the present.	
l	I like learning about what happened in the past.	
m	I like the History teacher.	
n	History is fun.	
o	Other (please indicate) _____ _____ _____	

COLUMN B

Put a tick next to the reasons that BEST describe why you **did NOT choose** **History** as a Matric subject (*Do NOT tick more than THREE options*).

I chose NOT to study History because...

a	History was not on my subject line.	
b	My friends were not taking History.	
c	My parents/ caregivers advised me not to take History.	
d	I like History, but think that the subjects which I chose will be more worthwhile.	
e	I don't see the value of the skills History teaches.	
f	I will not use my knowledge of historical events in my future career.	
g	I will use not use the skills that History teaches in my future career.	
h	I find History difficult.	
i	I did not do well in History.	
j	History requires too much studying.	
k	What happened in the past is over, I don't need to learn about the past.	
l	I have no interest in the past.	
m	I did not like the History teacher.	
n	History is boring.	
o	Other (please indicate) _____ _____ _____	

27a) Do you intend to study further after school? *(Tick the appropriate box)*

Yes	No
-----	----

b) If you ticked [yes], say what do you intend to study_____

28) In ONE word, describe how you feel about South Africa's past_____

29) *Tick the box which most accurately expresses your response to the following statements:*

29a)	South Africa puts too much focus on the past.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partly Agree/ Partly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
29b)	In South Africa it would be better simply to forget about the past.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partly Agree/ Partly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

29c) Explain your answer to 29b._____

THANK YOU

***** The End *****

APPENDIX 4

A breakdown of the types of questions included in the questionnaire:

- 8 questions dealt with administrative issues such as background information about the learner.
- 5 questions asked for a yes or no response, but they then asked learners to explain their answer further.
- 9 questions provided a set of what were thought to be common statements about History and asked learners to respond to these statements using the options: Strongly Agree, Agree, Partly Agree/Partly Disagree, Disagree or Strongly Disagree.
- 12 questions presented learners with a choice of statements and they were asked to choose the statement which best reflected the way they felt about the selected topic.
- 11 questions were deliberately left as open ended questions, allowing room for individual response.

APPENDIX 5

12-03-04

Interview Schedule

1. Introduction

- Thank you for filling in the questionnaire and now making yourself available for this interview.
- Do you take History as a Matric subject?
- The questionnaire was designed to investigate learners' attitudes to learning History at school, but in this interview, I am more interested to see how you think about History and the past in a broader sense, rather than simply as a school subject.
- How do you feel about doing this interview?
- Any questions?

2. Learning about who they are:

- Would you like to tell me a bit about yourself.
 - Likes, dislikes, hobbies
 - What you do in your spare time
 - Family, Parents education and occupation

- Do you read the newspaper?
- Do you watch the news on TV?
- Listen to the radio?
- What you would like to do after school?

3. Understanding of the past:

- When you think about the past, what do you think about? Why?
 - Near/ distant past?
 - Anything that has already happened?
 - Your personal, family, ethnic, national past?
- Is the past (or any aspect of it) important to you?

4. Interest in the past:

- Do you ever try to find out what things were like in the past?
- Could you explain why you want/don't want to find out what happened in the past?
- What sorts of things do you want to find out about?

5. Investigating the past:

- If you wanted to find out what happened in the past, how would you go about it?
- Where would you go to find out about the past (sources?)? Why?
 - Museum/historical site
 - books
 - films
 - television/ radio/ newspaper
 - teacher
 - library

- elders/ family

- How do you feel about these sources (Easy, reliable, accessible)?
- Do you think that when we learn about the past, we learn the correct version of events?
- What would be your best way of learning about the past?
- Do you ever feel close to the past? Explain (which past?)

6. Their past?

- Do you think that the past belongs to anyone? Explain
- What would you consider to be your past? (distinction between theirs & others)
- Could you tell me a bit about your past?
 - Personal past, things that have happened to you
 - Family background
- How do you feel about your past?

7. Family and the past:

- Do you talk to your family about the past? Explain
 - Who do you talk to?
 - Do you ask your family about the past, or do they just tell you?
 - What sorts of things do you talk about?
 - Whose past do you talk about?
- How do you feel when you talk (or don't talk) about the past with your family?
- Do you want to talk to your family about the past? Explain. (What other sources?)

8. Understanding of the South African past:

- When you think about South African History, what do you think about? Why?
 - Do you think South African History has a beginning? Why?

- Why do you think that Apartheid happened in South Africa?
 - What do you know about Apartheid?
 - Where do you get your information?
 - Do you ever talk about Apartheid? Why/ why not?
- What do you think South Africa was like before Apartheid?
- How do you feel about South Africa's Past?
- How do you think your parents feel about South Africa's Past?

9. Using the past to understand South Africa today and in the future:

- Do you think that the past (or any aspect of it) affects your life today? Explain
- How do you feel about South Africa today? Why?
- How do you feel about the coming elections? Why?
- How do you see the future of South Africa and why?

10. Conclusion

- Sum up
- Have you got anything further you'd like to add?
- How do you feel that went?
- Thank you for your time (contact number)

[30 mins]

APPENDIX 6**ATTENTION THE PRINCIPAL**

From: E-L Mackie

17 Mnini Road

Tel / Fax: 031-7644478

Kloof
3610

February 2004

The Headteacher
School

Sir/ Ma'am,

REQUESTING PERMISSION FOR SCHOOLS' PARTICIPATION IN HISTORY MASTERS

I am currently a Masters student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and my research aims to investigate Matric learners' attitudes to History and how these attitudes affect the way that learners think about the past. I am aware that this is a very important year for the Matrics, but I would be much obliged if your school would consider participating in my research.

I have tried to ensure as little disruption as possible so that the commitment of the school would be as follows: I would need to conduct a questionnaire amongst 20 Matric learners (this will take no longer than 45 minutes) and I would then need to meet four of these learners for individual interviews (each interview will last about half an hour). My study includes both History and non-History students, so it would be preferable if I could liaise with the Matric English teacher. Finally I would require some information and statistics about the school's history, size and population.

I hope that you will consider this a worthwhile experience for both the Matric learners and your High School.

Sincerely

Emma-Louise Mackie

APPENDIX 7

Particulars of the Participants in the Study

Q No.	Sex	Race	Age	High School	History as a Matric Subject?	Enjoy History?	Interviewee
1	male	black	19	School A	Yes	Yes	Yes (11)
2	female	black	17	School A	Yes	Yes	Yes (12)
3	male	black	17	School A	No	No	Yes (13)
4	female	black	17	School A	No	No	Yes (14)
5	male	black	19	School A	No	No	
6	female	black	16	School A	No	Yes	
7	male	black	16	School A	No	Yes	
8	male	black	18	School A	No	No	
9	male	black	18	School A	No	No	
10	female	black	19	School A	No	No	
11	female	black	16	School A	No	No	
12	male	black	18	School A	Yes	Yes	
13	male	black	17	School A	No	No	
14	male	black	18	School A	Yes	Yes	
15	female	black	18	School A	Yes	Yes	
16	male	black	20	School A	Yes	Yes	
17	male	black	18	School A	No	No	
18	male	black	17	School A	No	No	
19	female	black	17	School A	No	No	
20	male	black	18	School A	No	No	
21	male	black	17	School B	Yes	Yes	Yes (15)
22	female	black	17	School B	Yes	Yes	Yes (16)
23	male	black	16	School B	No	Yes	Yes (17)
24	female	black	18	School B	No	Yes	Yes (18)
25	male	black	19	School B	Yes	Yes	
26	female	black	16	School B	Yes	Yes	
27	male	black	18	School B	Yes	Yes	
28	female	black	18	School B	No	Yes	
29	female	black	17	School B	No	Yes	
30	female	black	18	School B	No	No	
31	female	black	18	School B	No	No	
32	female	black	17	School B	No	Yes	
33	female	black	17	School B	No	Yes	

Q No.	Sex	Race	Age	High School	History as a Matric Subject?	Enjoy History?	Interviewee
34	male	black	18	School B	No	Yes	
35	male	black	19	School B	No	No	
36	male	black	18	School B	No	No	
37	male	black	18	School B	No	No	
38	male	black	17	School B	No	No	
39	male	black	20	School B	No	Yes	
40	male	black	17	School B	No	No	
41	male	white	18	School E	Yes	Yes	Yes (I9)
42	male	white	18	School E	Yes	Yes	
43	male	white	18	School E	No	Yes	Yes (I10)
44	male	white	17	School E	No	Yes	
45	male	white	17	School E	Yes	Yes	
46	male	white	18	School E	No	No	
47	male	white	17	School E	No	Yes	
48	male	white	18	School E	No	No	
49	male	white	18	School E	No	No	
50	male	white	17	School E	No	Yes	
51	male	white	17	School D	Yes	Yes	Yes (I11)
52	female	white	17	School D	Yes	Yes	Yes (I12)
53	male	white	17	School D	No	Yes	Yes (I13)
54	female	black	18	School D	No	Yes	Yes (I14)
55	female	white	16	School D	Yes	Yes	
56	female	black	18	School D	Yes	Yes	
57	male	black	17	School D	Yes	Yes	
58	female	white	17	School D	No	No	
59	female	white	17	School D	No	No	
60	male	white	17	School D	No	No	
61	male	black	17	School D	No	No	
62	female	white	16	School D	No	No	
63	male	indian	16	School D	No	No	
64	male	black	17	School D	No	Yes	
65	female	white	17	School D	No	No	
66	male	white	17	School D	No	Yes	
67	female	white	17	School D	No	No	
68	female	white	17	School D	No	Yes	
69	female	white	17	School D	No	No	
70	female	black	19	School D	No	No	
71	male	black	17	School C	Yes	Yes	Yes (I15)

Q No.	Sex	Race	Age	High School	History as a Matric Subject?	Enjoy History?	Interviewee
72	female	indian	17	School C	Yes	Yes	Yes (I16)
73	male	indian	17	School C	No	Yes	Yes (I17)
74	female	indian	16	School C	No	Yes	Yes (I18)
75	female	indian	16	School C	Yes	Yes	
76	female	coloured	16	School C	Yes	Yes	
77	female	indian	16	School C	Yes	Yes	
78	male	indian	17	School C	No	Yes	
79	female	indian	16	School C	No	No	
80	female	indian	17	School C	No	Yes	
81	male	indian	16	School C	No	Yes	
82	female	indian	16	School C	No	Yes	
83	female	indian	17	School C	No	No	
84	male	black	18	School C	No	Yes	
85	female	black	17	School C	No	Yes	
86	female	black	17	School C	No	No	
87	male	black	17	School C	No	Yes	
88	male	black	18	School C	No	No	
89	male	indian	16	School C	No	Yes	
90	male	indian	16	School C	No	Yes	
91	female	white	17	School F	Yes	Yes	
92	female	black	18	School F	Yes	Yes	Yes (I19)
93	female	white	17	School F	No	No	
94	female	white	17	School F	No	No	
95	female	coloured	16	School F	Yes	Yes	
96	female	white	17	School F	No	No	
97	female	white	17	School F	No	No	
98	female	white	17	School F	No	No	
99	female	white	17	School F	No	No	Yes (I20)
100	female	white	17	School F	No	Yes	

LIST OF SOURCES

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1. Questionnaires

One hundred questionnaires completed in March 2004 by a sample of Grade 12 learners at six selected schools in the Durban area (for further details on schools see Table 1, p.72; for further detail on learners see Appendix 7, p. 144).

The completed questionnaires are available from the researcher:

Ms E-L Mackie
17 Mnini Road
Kloof
3610
Durban

2. Interviews

Twenty transcribed interviews. The interviews were transcribed between March and June of 2004. Twenty learners from a sample of Grade 12 learners at six selected schools in the Durban area were interviewed in March 2004. (For further details on schools see Table 1, p.72; for further detail on learners see Appendix 7, p. 144).

The transcribed interviews and the original tapes from which they were transcribed are available from the researcher:

Ms E-L Mackie
17 Mnini Road
Kloof
3610
Durban

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