

HISTORIES THAT CREEP IN SIDWAYS: A STUDY OF LEARNERS' ATTITUDES TO HISTORY AND THEIR SENSES OF THE PAST

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In all communities, all over the world, children are being 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 which have been founded in times gone by; 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 (Furedi, 1992:19) 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

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. 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, particularly through the use of school history, in an unproblematic and uncritical way. Chernis (1990:30) 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

With the power to select which sections of history were 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. It is only really over the last two decades that the unproblematised and uncritical approach – the “how to” - of history education in South Africa has begun to be meaningfully addressed both at a curriculum level and in some classroom practice.

Moreover, 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, in a heterogeneous or multi-cultural society, 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 paper refers to a pilot study (conducted by the writer) that set out to explore the points at

which these two 'forces' overlap. The research investigated the value of further exploring the question: to what extent are learners' attitudes and perceptions of school history informed and shaped by their experiences and encounters with the past in their everyday lives and what 'senses of the past' these individuals 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? The argument put forward here is that it may well be worth our while to pause in our ongoing attempts to identify and solve the problems of history teaching in South Africa and take a moment to listen to the histories that are being produced both inside and outside of our classrooms by the learners themselves.

In explaining this position, it is necessary to make two detours: the first will provide a brief overview of the history of teaching practice in South Africa; the second will outline a few key developments in the thinking surrounding academic history over the last few decades.

History as taught and learnt in schools: a question of practice

School history education in South Africa has been a contentious issue since its 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 their own children, and those of other population groups, into their particular world view, and excluded or ignored the content matter which contradicted or stood in opposition to this. The introduction of the apartheid state and its centralised policies of Christian Nationalist and Bantu Education simply served to fuel the already historically charged issue of state history education, and brought the matter of content to the forefront of discussion. This fixation over content had the added disadvantage of hindering the growth of discussions around the methodology and practice of history teaching, and tightly controlled syllabuses, coupled with the close monitoring of teachers under the National Education Policy Act of 1967, made it especially difficult for teachers to deviate from the official syllabus.

Despite this, some South African history teachers did begin to pay increased attention to the practice of history education in South Africa.

Kallaway (1995), for example, shows that during the 1970s, small groups of teachers and historians 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.

This shift towards the questioning of history teaching practice amongst some South African history teachers was 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). Kallaway (Kallaway, 1995:13) 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

History teacher, 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 focuses 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).

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 because they did not help to equip learners for the heavy emphasis on content evaluation in their final examinations (Gunn, 1990:ix). He describes 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.

In 1983, prompted, by 'the growing crisis over the teaching of history in South African schools' during the 1970s, Owen van den Berg and Peter Buckland, 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), conducted a study into the possible reasons for 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).

This initial questioning and challenging of state history education

amongst a small group of South African history teachers took place within the broader political context of the 1976 Soweto uprising; a protest against the use of Afrikaans in African schools that only served to increase the intensity of African resistance towards the Bantu education policy of the apartheid state. That uprising gave birth to a larger movement which came to be known as People's Education. 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 sums this period up neatly by saying that (1994:234):

[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

In memory of the 1976 Soweto uprising, black students throughout the country planned 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. 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 (1995:15) 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.

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 into account 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 1990. 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 emerged from the context of much political excitement brought about by 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 1990 (Shillington, 1995:431). The investigation 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 Report 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 which had been raised earlier by Mulholland (1981:1). He wrote:

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

The NEPI report (cited in Kallaway, 1995:15) 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

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 include consideration of the context out of which these sorts of debates arise.

As negotiations towards political transformation 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 his-

tory 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 to ensure that any changes to the history curriculum should reflect the changes happening in the rest of society' (1995:112). 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, in anticipation of the political change and transition to democracy, 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 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 foundation of the new curriculum was to be outcomes-based. 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.

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 areas' 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. There was concern that at the GET (General Education and Training) level, History was lumped in with Geography under the general heading of Human and Social Sciences with very little time allocated to either subject in the overall structure of the curriculum. In addition 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 perspective (1998:202) argued that it was:

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

Cynthia Kros (2000, 88) 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

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 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).

This buzz of activity surrounding the development of history teaching at the turn of the century is perhaps an expression of a debate that has been evolving for over thirty years. It certainly highlights some of radical transformations which school history education has undergone since its unproblematised beginnings in the nineteenth century. But on the other hand, these debates have encouraged curriculum planners and history educators to view history as a subject with problems that need to be solved and, more specifically, problems that we have generally attempted to address from the top down.

There has been 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. As history educators and academics, we have focussed our attention on ways to improve history text-

books, history pedagogy, and the history curricula and syllabi, assuming that by addressing these factors, we would be improving the quality of school history education and thereby bettering the lot of the history learner. But all the while, the views and attitudes held by the learners towards history and the past appear to have remained largely unexplored. 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 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. This observation is particularly relevant when considered in the light of my own preliminary findings (discussed below) which suggest that the practice of history education actually seems to have very little to do with how children understand, feel and learn about the past.

History as taught and learnt in schools: a question of attitude

In 1987, Nomathamsanqa Margaret Vena (1987:1) 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 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 found with school history as 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 (1992:109-110). 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

- The observations of Vena and Atuahene-Sarpong were born out in the results of my own research. This took the form of a pilot study with two practical research components: a survey questionnaire that mainly explored learners' attitudes to and experiences of history as a subject at school and a set of semi-structured interviews that explored adolescents' senses of the past as formed and used in the everyday. The questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 100 Grade 12 learners from a selection of local schools in the greater Durban area. The schools were of five different types and were purposely selected on the basis of their socio-economic orientation. They included:
 - one township school (school A): 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 (school B): 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-collar workers.
 - one ex-House of Delegates school (school C): 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.

- one ex-model C school (school D): an historically white middle-class school. Now a racially mixed school but still predominantly middle-class.
- two private schools (schools E and F): historically, these two single-sex schools were largely attended by children of the white South African elite.

Of the 100 learners who answered the questionnaire, 271 stated that they currently took history as a subject to Matric. Seventy-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 2003, so my figure is slightly inflated. 49 girls and 51 boys participated in the study.

Twenty participants were also asked to participate in a semi-structured interview. 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. The analysis and findings were largely qualitative and exploratory in nature.

The findings of my research revealed that a number of learners, who had chosen not to take history as a subject to Matric, 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, when asked if they enjoyed learning history, these learners responded positively. For example, one learner wrote: '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). Another learner explained that 'I enjoyed learning South Africa's history and enjoyed the knowledge that I obtained' (Q47).

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). Perhaps the most telling comments were from a non-history learner who revealed: '[I] 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) and a history learner who explained that 'history...displays basic human characteristics that [a student] can relate [to] and [try to] understand the thoughts and opinions of the time' (Q41).

The findings presented here seem to suggest that the 'problems' of history as a school subject, as identified by academics and history educators, do not necessarily number among the most significant forces that determine how learners think and feel about the past. In some cases, a natural curiosity about human nature and the past can override poor teaching practice, and even where learners display an outright rejection of history, this rejection is often coupled with a disaffection with or rejection of their own personal pasts. This point will be developed in due course, but first, it is necessary to take a detour into the realms of academic history.

Developments in the academy: History in the everyday

Running parallel to, and informing the growing awareness of, practice of history teaching in the 1970s, 80' and 90s, was a growing crisis and an increased awareness around, and questioning of, the practice of 'professional' history in the academy. In the words of Furedi (1992:152):

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

As the 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.

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. Furedi (1992:18) again wrote that:

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

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 (1991:35) 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

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 Dening (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 (1992:18) 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.

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 apartheid.²

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 (1994:6) 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 (sic)

He (1994:12) also suggests that:

[w]ithin the school syllabus it might turn out that the significant history which children learn 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

This paper 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 outside 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 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. This 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.

Senses of the past: a window on the present

The findings of my research revealed a sharp disconnection between history as learnt at school and the blurred, hazy mix of impressions and facts; fuzzy memories and experiences; quirky, funny or interesting stories that constitute history in the everyday. For example, when asked to respond to the question: 'What does history mean to you?', 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 is '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'. The word 'important' was used quite liberally either to explain that the study of history is important, or that history is about important people and events.

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 (sic). 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 responses discussed above seem to indicate that the learners are very much conditioned into providing what

they think is the 'correct' or acceptable answer. Only a few (mostly black) participants deviated from what would appear to be school-taught definitions of 'history' and 'the past'. Their views also reveal a strongly modernist top-down perception of history, 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).

My analysis of the distinction between history and the past became even more interesting when I asked some of the participants to describe the first thing that came into their minds when thinking about the past. Instead of citing events and time periods, many of the responses better matched the question: What do you feel when you 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'. One of his peers agreed, 'The more I think about history, I get sad every time, so I just think about the future now'. One learner from School F exclaimed, 'I don't know whether it's just me, but I find it... frustrating minging in the past and thinking about it too much'. 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'.

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'. 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. They also made reference to more ancient civilisations (like Egypt), as well as their own particular family histories.

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'. Many of these black learners (and more, particularly their parents or caregivers), have had extremely difficult lives and have experienced much suffering and hurt. Perhaps 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'. 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'. Another girl explained:

Ja, I talk to my family, especially 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 way we lived, you know, then you wouldn't be complaining now

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'.

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, of which their descendants were rather proud. 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 Na-

tal, how things have grown and sort of got bigger and better and all that sort of stuff'. 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'. 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'.

These conversations with family did not appear to be seen by participants as histories per se; they were more intimate, more precious than the hard, establishment histories that the participants encountered 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.

It is important to observe that, in many cases, learners' attitudes to school history were in some way representative and reflective of where they were in their own lives in the present. 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 own lives 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 res-

cue 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. It would appear that, 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. This finding helps to support 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.

But whatever their attitudes to history and the past, I was struck by 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.

This readiness for conversation about the past amongst learners who have chosen to reject history as a useful subject for Matric suggests that it is possible that the role and nature of history in schools could be understood in a completely different way. 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. In other words, it would be valuable for historians and history educators 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 the past is 'rubbish' (I2).

Schools as sites where histories are made

In a report that outlined their findings on the quality of history education in South Africa, the History and Archaeology Panel wrote (Department of Education, 2000):

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

But the argument put forward in this paper is that it is necessary to look beyond the 'problem' of how to develop a "latent historical consciousness into a conscious consciousness". It is equally important, I would suggest, 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 formed and used (if at all) by learners in the first place? What unofficial histories and senses of the past are being produced everyday by the learners within our schools?

In the future, it is possible that institutional history as we have known it may not even exist, out-manoeuvred by new ways of thinking about history. Running parallel to our search 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 to mould the nation, or 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 his-

tory they learn at school but are valid histories in themselves, nevertheless.

Looking back over the history of history education in South Africa, I would argue that too often it has been dominated by the tyranny of the extreme. The wisdom of the idiom: "everything in moderation" rings true for me here: content should not be taught at the exclusion of skills and methodology; methodology should not be hammered at the exclusion of content; the importance of individual discovery and investigation should not be emphasised at the expense of teaching and formal instruction; and the "how to" of history teaching should not be explored without investigating how children and adolescents make their own histories; how they make sense of the past in their everyday lives.

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One hundred questionnaires completed in March 2004 by a sample of Grade 12 learners at six selected schools in the Durban area. 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. The completed questionnaires, the transcribed interviews and the original tapes from which they were transcribed are available from the researcher.

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