Passive receivers or constructive readers?

Pupils' experiences of an encounter with academic history

Rachel Foster reports here on research that she conducted into how students engage with academic texts. Unhappy with the usual range of texts that students encounter, often truncated and 'simplified' in the name of accessibility, she designed a scheme of work which sought to find out how her students responded to academic texts, and how these responses might best be characterised. Existing attempts to explain the difficulties that students face in understanding academic texts have, Foster found, tended to focus either on students' literacy or their conceptual understanding. Foster decided instead that students' understandings of the discipline of history directly affected how they approached the text, as well as the text affecting their understanding of disciplinary history. This symbiotic relationship, Foster argues, may ask history teachers to rethink the way in which historical argument is approached in the classroom.

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'I didn't know that history was about argument.'

Sometimes it is snatched conversations between pupil and teacher that prove the most illuminating and challenging. Danny, despite being an able historian, was adamant that history wasn't for him. Disappointed, I had asked him why. His comment unsettled me: how could a student study history without realising that argument is central to the discipline? I thought my lessons were *full* of argument: in the quick paired discussions arguing about the status of evidence or validity of a particular claim, in the whole-class plenaries spent debating the relative importance of causes and in extended analytical writing, arguing claims in response to causal questions. But it seemed that Danny didn't *see* history in the same way that I did. It left me wondering how exactly pupils do experience the discipline of history. If they don't seem to perceive it in the same way as I do, how do they make sense of their encounters with history in the classroom?

It was from this concern that my desire to experiment with the use of academic history in the classroom originated. My instinctive response as an historian was that a crucial way of helping Danny to see the argument inherent in history would be to expose him to a genuine historical argument. But how can this be done at Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14)? In order to understand how pupils experience historical argument, they would need to encounter one, but that would mean introducing a Key Stage 3 class to academic history texts, a daunting prospect for me as a teacher, and for a class that had never read extended extracts of academic history before.

Should pupils engage with academic history?

Can younger pupils read academic history? Is it even a desirable goal? Apparently, the picture is not an encouraging one. Hibbert's doctoral research in 2006 revealed a sense of gloom among some history teachers.[1] They despair at the reluctance to read that is evident even among A-level students, who seemingly lack the vocabulary to comprehend the text, let alone engage with its substantive and conceptual ideas in a meaningful way. As a former educational publisher, I had been disheartened by the seemingly relentless trend towards shorter and shorter lengths of prose within some textbooks, all done in the name of 'access', and apparently based on an assumption that pupils couldn't or didn't want to engage in extended reading. Lee and Shemilt's concern that getting pupils to imitate either the structure or style of historians too soon could hinder the development of their historical understanding further fuelled my doubts.[2] Although their curricular goals are primarily concerned with pupils' perception of the discipline rather than their practice of it, their critique seemed to apply to using academic texts.

My initial enthusiasm slightly dimmed, I nevertheless found grounds for hope. An increasing number of history teachers and researchers remain convinced of the value of engaging pupils with the work of academic historians, offering powerful justifications for doing so. Extrinsic justifications are underpinned by notions about progression and an underlying belief that exposure to academic history will in some way help pupils to get better at 'doing' history, understanding it as a discipline, or communicating historical

knowledge, whereas intrinsic justifications rest on a faith in the transformative power of reading.

How does reading help pupils get better at 'doing' history?

Educators who justify the use of academic history by appealing to extrinsic purposes do so under different banners, including substantive (evidence or source-based), conceptual (interpretations), disciplinary and communicative. While often having different curricular goals, these justifications share a common notion of an academic text as being some kind of model.

The justifications offered by Kitson, Bellinger and Jones could be described as substantive.[3] They selected texts that provided intriguing case studies, using them to build or deepen pupils' substantive knowledge and develop a rich sense of period. For them, the value of an academic text seems to lie in *what* it says, although Kitson went beyond knowledge-building to explore the text as a source of evidence that pupils used to compare and evaluate historical interpretations.

Other practice explicitly seeks to develop pupils' thinking about interpretations as a second-order concept. Cunningham and Shoham and Shiloah develop pupils' awareness that there are competing interpretations of the past.[4] Howells and Mastin and Wallace go beyond straightforward identification of interpretations, exploring how interpretations are constructed. Fordham is more concerned with how reading works of history might help pupils to construct their *own* interpretations.[5] Ward's work could be deemed to sit within both camps; going further than simply exposing pupils to an interpretation, she helped them to analyse its construction through the use of evidence and the historian's choice of language.[6] The text was then used as a model to develop pupils' communication of their own ideas.

McAleavy, Howells, Mastin and Wallace and Hammond, who also use academic texts to develop pupils' conceptual understandings, seem to have an implicit goal of *integrating* disciplinary concepts.[7] For example, Hammond used *Time on the Cross* to integrate pupils' conceptual thinking about evidence and interpretations by examining historical methodologies.[8] Although they do not explicitly state it, the way in which they use historical texts implies an assumed goal of using them in order to piece the disciplinary strands back together.

Developing historical consciousness

The justification offered by Lee and Shemilt for the use of what they call 'historical accounts' is based on a different curricular goal, that of developing pupils' historical consciousness.[9] Because their concern is with the ideas pupils hold about history as a discipline, how those ideas can be changed and therefore how progression in ideas can be defined, characterised and assessed, the value of introducing pupils to historical accounts seems to be as a tool for changing pupils' ideas about the discipline, rather than as a source of substantive knowledge or as a model of second-order concepts in action.

The transformative power of texts

While many educators and researchers seem to want to pin down the benefits of using academic works of history in the classroom, others operate with a less tangible motivation – the belief in the transformative power of a text. Bellinger and Jones both justify their use of academic texts by appealing to their quality as compelling narratives.[10] Counsell also appeals to the power of historians' prose, but goes further by asserting the power of academic texts to take pupils more directly into the heart of the discipline.[11] For Counsell, a text's power is not simply motivational but transformational, holding the possibility of changing pupils' thinking and writing (even their world view). In doing so she draws on the work of educational researchers such as Crismore and Wineburg, both of whom criticised textbook authors for stripping their prose of any kind of disciplinary distinctiveness.[12] This sense of faith in the power of texts appears under numerous guises among other educators; sometimes it is expressed as a longing to transform pupils into independent learners, sometimes as a desire to share and impart a deeply-held love of reading, to bring them closer to the heart of the discipline to expose them to a book's power 'to make us stand in a different place'.[13] All these appeals have the qualities of a *cri de coeur* – they are impassioned and rely on faith born of personal experience. This is not to say that their appeal is not well supported by empirical research attesting to the value of texts for developing pupils' knowledge, conceptual thinking and capacity to communicate, but it is their implicit faith in the *transformative* power of a text that sets the justifications they offer apart from those offered by other practitioners and researchers.

How are academic texts used in the classroom?

Interestingly, particularly when working with pupils in Key Stage 3 and 4, much practice, while introducing pupils to the works of historians, does not actually expose them to the texts themselves. When pupils are exposed to texts, what they are asked to do with them depends in part on how the text itself is construed. Construal of the text as information results in its treatment as unproblematic information. The kind of reading pupils engage in is primarily information extraction, whether substantive content (e.g. Kitson, Bellinger and Jones), or identifying arguments (Harris, Cunningham, Shoham and Shiloh). In other cases the nature of the text as a construct, or the process of its construction is explicitly problematised in some way. Guvyer and Mastin and Wallace encourage their pupils to problematise texts by examining their context, provenance, influences and audiences.[14] Hammond and Howells are more interested in the process by which historical texts are constructed, especially the choice of evidential material and theories influencing the historian. They want to help pupils reach their own judgements about validity. While Counsell, Ward and Fordham are also interested in uncovering the disciplinary processes by which academic works of history are constructed, the focus of their interest is in works as constructed texts, particularly the meaning of words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs.[15] Extended reading therefore lies at the heart of their work. Counsell and

Figure 1: Planning strategies

Planning strategies

1) Use the interplay between overview and depth that already exists in academic texts

Overviews set events in their broader historical context, yet risk de-personalising the past, robbing it of colour and human interest. Depth studies fascinate pupils with details and develop a rich period understanding, but can result in a fragmented picture of the past. How to solve the problem? Use the interweaving of outline and depth within the books themselves (Figure 2).

2) Scaffolding

The approach I took to scaffolding history had less to do with equipping students with vocabulary and more to do with giving them the confidence and desire to read. This was cumulatively built across the lesson sequence. Scaffolding strategies had three key variables:

a) **the nature of the text used.** Extracts must fascinate pupils, either through story-telling, argument or language (Figure 2). The complexity and length of the text was gradually increased during the enquiry in order slowly to build familiarity with the genre and therefore confidence. Some pupils were initially offered differentiated versions of the texts that were simplified in terms of vocabulary and sentence structure (Figure 3).

b) **the form in which pupils encountered it.** If pupils are to encounter historians in any kind of meaningful sense, they have to engage with them by 'hearing' the voice of the author and caring about what they have to say. For most of the enquiry this therefore meant me reading the text aloud to the pupils before they did anything with it. The power of reading to pupils in this way is that it allows them to catch the flow and tone of the text, while helping them pass over 'sticky' vocabulary that could otherwise defeat them if left to plough through it on their own. Only when pupils had read several shorter extracts in this way did I give them the longest extracts to read independently.

c) **what pupils were asked to *do* with the text.** Limiting what pupils are asked to read for and supporting them in doing so can overcome the apparent difficulty of the text by helping pupils to see that they didn't need to understand every word in order to read it (Figure 3). As pupils move towards independent reading, scaffolding strategies need to evolve; for example rather than showing pupils the challenge and helping them overcome it, disguise it behind a 'fun' or 'easy' activity (Figure 4).

Ward both explore disciplinary style through word-level and sentence-level deconstruction; Fordham is more concerned with the overall structure of the text.

Theorising pupils' difficulties when encountering academic texts

While clearly there are difficulties involved in getting pupils to read academic works of history, many practitioners' understanding of the problems pupils face goes much deeper than a concern with perceived relevance or vocabulary. There is a common consensus that pupils' difficulties are often manifested in what Hibbert has characterised as interpretive reading. Instead, pupils apparently read for information – what Haas and Flower term 'knowledge-getting'.[16] 'Knowledge-getting' seems to be characterised by an inability to transform reading into useable historical knowledge, to make inferences or distinguish between the statuses of different kinds of text, or to read for subtext. But why do pupils find interpretive reading so difficult? Is it simply that they are not exposed to disciplinary texts early enough in their historical education? Or do their difficulties go beyond exposure, as Wineburg, McAleavy and Fines theorise, being rooted in their failure to understand history as a discipline?[17]

Rationale

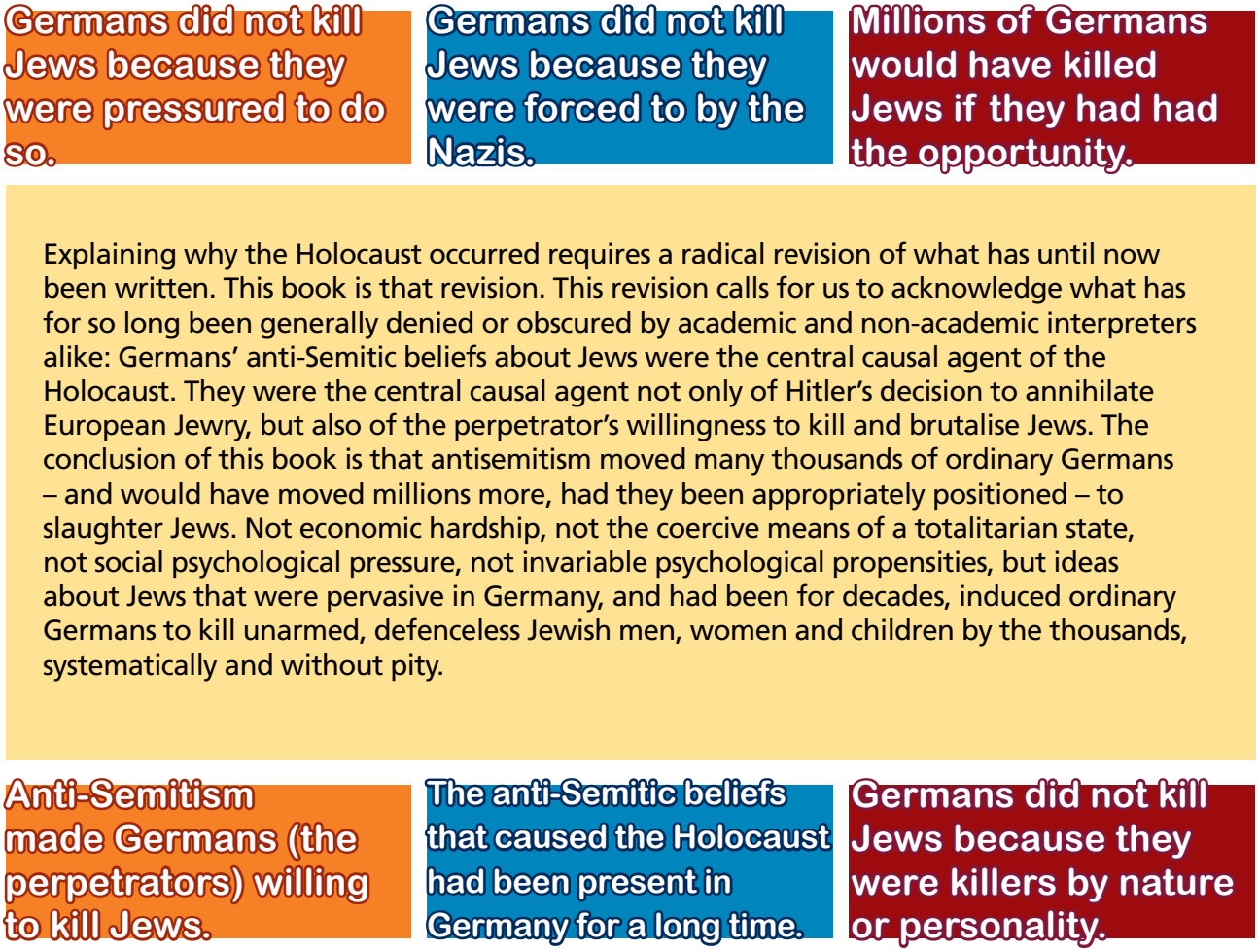
While instinctively believing there is a justifiable purpose and value in using academic texts in the classroom, I could not adequately theorise for myself what those purposes and values were, or what learning outcomes might be possible. There is little in the literature about the qualities of pupils' experiences when they encounter academic texts or about the characteristics of the learning outcomes of such an encounter. It was in order to better understand these that I embarked on my research. I decided to develop a lesson sequence for a Year 9 class to use as the basis for an empirical study that I could draw upon in an effort to research Key Stage 3 pupils' experiences of engaging with an academic

Figure 2: Outline of the enquiry sequence

Enquiry question: Is there such a thing as a 'bad' history book?

Lesson question	Aims and objectives	Content /activities
When and where was it most dangerous to be a European Jew?	• To identify patterns of change and continuity in the nature and degree of persecution of European antisemitism. • To characterise the nature and extent of European antisemitism at the end of the nineteenth century.	• Content: overview of European antisemitism • Activity suggestion: washing line
Was German antisemitism 'pregnant with murder'?	• To Identify Goldhagen's key arguments. • To analyse and critique the relationship between Goldhagen's claims and his evidence.	• Content: German antisemitism before 1933. • Activity: matching claims and supporting evidence
Were the Nazis' policies just 'common sense' to Germans?	• To analyse the evidence and counter-evidence used to support and attack Goldhagen's claims. • To critically evaluate the language of Goldhagen's claims.	• Content: Nazi antisemitism policies after 1933 • Activities: living graph; matching evidence and counter-evidence; editing an extract to modify language
Was there ever a master plan to kill the Jews?	• To identify and characterise changes in the direction, degree and goals of Nazi policy from 1939 to 1942. • To evaluate the functionalist / intentionalist debate.	• Content: Nazi antisemitism policies 1939-1942 • Activities: Stepping stones diagram showing the size and direction of the 'steps' taken towards genocide.
In what ways were the killers of Police Battalion 101 'ordinary men'?	• To characterise key features of a typical policeman in Reserve Police Battalion 101.	• Content: Reserve Police Battalions • Creation of a picture of a typical policeman using an extract from *Ordinary Men*.
How far were the men of Police Battalion 101 really 'willing executioners'?	• To identify and compare similarities and differences between two historical accounts of the same event.	• Content: Jozefow massacre • Activities: extended reading and comparison of *Ordinary Men* and *Hitler's Willing Executioners*
How can we find the argument lurking in the story?	• To identify persuasive techniques used by historians.	• Content: Jozefow massacre • Activities: extended reading, persuasive techniques bingo
Why did ordinary men kill?	• To explain why policemen voluntarily participated in the Holocaust. • To evaluate the competing claims made by Goldhagen and Browning.	• Content: depth studies of individual perpetrators • Activities: extended reading
What makes a bad history book?	• To evaluate the criticisms and merits of *Hitler's Willing Executioners* and *Ordinary Men*	• Activities: Pupils write a book review of *Hitler's Willing Executioners* and *Ordinary Men*

Figure 3a: version one of an activity. Pupils were offered an unedited text extract and had to identify Goldhagen's claims in the text.



work of history. With this purpose in mind, I developed the following research questions:

1) How did pupils respond to academic texts?
2) What counts as engagement with academic texts in history?
3) In what different ways is it possible to characterise the nature of pupils' achievement at the end of the teaching episode?

Planning the teaching episode

To engage Key Stage 3 pupils with the work of an academic historian in a meaningful way I needed to find a book that had a compelling subject matter and a clear line of argument couched in an argumentative style. *Hitler's Willing Executioners,* by Daniel Goldhagen, certainly met these criteria.[18] Addressing the causes of the Holocaust, Goldhagen's book interweaves powerful narrative and strong argument in a style that is provocative and engaging. It also directly responds to the work of another historian, Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men*, criticising his thesis in what Birn has described as 'unusually strong language'.[19] Browning had responded in turn, making their arguments obviously dialogic. Both historians had researched the same case study, yet had drawn very different conclusions from the evidence, making it possible to examine both the claims made and their evidential basis.

The planning challenge

Planning any scheme of work involves walking a pedagogical tightrope between access and challenge, fun and rigour. Developing a scheme of work that engaged younger pupils directly with academic texts sharpened this challenge. The tension between building motivation and accessibility while maintaining the integrity of the historians' work as far as possible was fundamental to the planning process. I based my planning on the principle that the books themselves should determine the substance and conceptual focus of the enquiry. Although I did not attempt to get students to read the books in their entirety, by keeping close to the texts I hoped to give pupils an authentic experience of their argument.

The selection of substantive content posed a considerable challenge given the sheer size and scope of Goldhagen's thesis: *Hitler's Willing Executioners* ranges over a significant time period, from the evolution of German antisemitism in the nineteenth century to the end of the Second World War. To understand the main tenet of Goldhagen's thesis – that the unique nature of German antisemitism meant that German perpetrators were willing executioners who 'kill[ed] willingly and often eagerly' and led the 'vast majority of German people to understand, assent to, and to when possible, do their part to further the extermination, root of the branch, of the Jewish people.' – pupils also needed to understand his related claims about the unique nature and evolutionary path of German antisemitism and the nature of Germans' support

for and participation in the Nazis' policies during the 1930s.[20] Pupils would also need to understand Browning's claims in sufficient detail to identify the ways in which they differed from Goldhagen's. Avoiding the challenge by focusing on a single aspect of the debate would defeat the purpose of the enquiry – to expose pupils to the processes and products of a historical argument. Although tempting as a means of ensuring accessibility, over-simplifying the material would gut it of its power, which lay in its size and complexity. Limiting the scope of the enquiry while preserving the complexity of the debate became critical to the success of my planning. While the main conceptual focus of the enquiry was historical interpretations, evidential thinking was also inherent. To compare and evaluate competing claims requires an understanding of their evidential basis; how the nature, selection and interpretation of the available sources inform a claim. Again there was a tension between ensuring accessibility by limiting the conceptual challenge and preserving the integrity of the historians' argument.

Findings: How did pupils respond to academic texts?

Pupils' responses to the texts were shaped by the different ways in which they conceptualised the texts: as a **mode of discourse** (an argument or as a narrative), as **a mode of learning** and as a **product of the author's personality**. Pupils who responded to the texts as arguments also had the strongest sense of the books as being products of the authors' personalities. Ed was particularly fascinated by the authors and their argument ('it's sort of a little world behind the books, between themselves, which I find quite interesting'). Faheem on the other hand attacked what he saw as the authors' immaturity, describing them as 'petty' and 'vain'. Pupils who were primarily concerned with the texts as a mode of learning, such as Dee and Isaac, were pre-occupied with the texts' testing of their literacy skills, alluded to in their concerns with 'long' or 'technical' words, the length of the text, and with the particular reading skills required. Beth was also interested in the texts as a mode of learning, but in a different way:

> *I found it a really, like, interesting way to learn about the Holocaust, actually, not just sitting there and being told how horrific it was, but actually looking at how other people in the outside world have thought about it and recorded what they think about it and to use that to inform us, I found a lot more helpful than, almost, if we just, sort of watched a film or something.*

There was also a strong emotional dimension to pupils' responses, which was predicated on pupils' experience of the texts as some kind of conceptual or literacy challenge. Some responded to the challenge in a positive way: they experienced **the text as a curiosity to be explored**. For example, the texts seemed to challenge Beth's existing belief that history isn't just about facts:

> *I think… well before we did this, I kind of, it was the thought that all history writers were going to be like a textbook, completely factual… but it makes you think history isn't just about facts, it's writing about opinion and debating and discussing completely different ideas about one event.*

Figure 3b: Version 4 (the most heavily edited version) of the same activity.

> Explaining why the Holocaust occurred requires a big rethink. Germans' antisemitic beliefs about Jews were the main cause of the Holocaust. They were the main cause of the perpetrators' willingness to kill Jews. The conclusion of this book is that antisemitism moved thousands of ordinary Germans to slaughter Jews. Not poverty, not being forced by a dictator, not social pressure, not personality, but ideas about Jews that were common in Germany, and had been for many years, made ordinary Germans kill thousands of unarmed Jewish men, women and children, systematically and without pity.

Her response to this new idea was to positively embrace it:

> *It's made history a lot more interesting for me – I found history interesting before – but it's opened my mind up to what the potential of history actually is.*

In contrast, Faheem responded negatively to the conceptual challenge. At first this seemed to reflect a dislike of disputes: 'I just found it petty.' However, his discomfort ultimately seemed rooted in his beliefs about how history should operate: he seemed to dislike the very idea that historians engage in arguments because it challenged his existing beliefs about the existence of objective truth in history:

> *Oh, they should put opinion in, but not so much that it becomes an opinion book and not a factual book, because you're recreating, in a book of the past you're recreating exactly what happened, you're not there to go my opinion was, you're there to say this is what happened. As a historian, you should say what happened.*

Pupils also experienced the texts as a challenge to their literacy skills. Several pupils *anticipated* that the literacy challenge posed by the texts might be a potentially insurmountable barrier to their understanding (Ed described the prospect of reading the extracts as 'daunting'). Yet none indicated that the challenge had *in fact* proved insurmountable, and their written work and interviews supported this. Observation notes showed that they used a range of strategies to help them overcome the literacy challenges they faced: for example reading with another pupil, asking clarifying questions to other pupils or a teacher, and adopting their own approaches to reading such as reading the whole text through before reading line by line, or reading paragraph by paragraph.

Figure 4: Pupils were given extracts from Goldhagen and Browning, both concerning the same event. Pupils were asked to draw a picture showing the expression and demeanour of Major Trapp as he issued the order. They were then asked to consider why the historians had chosen to include or ignore particular details from the story.

Goldhagen's account of Major Trapp's order:

Major Trapp assembled his battalion. The men formed three sides of a square around Trapp in order to hear his address. *'He announced that in the locality before us we were to carry out a mass shooting and he brought out clearly that those whom we were supposed to shoot were Jews. During his address he bid us to think of our women and children in our homeland who had to endure aerial bombardments. In particular, we were to bear in mind that many women and children lose their lives in these attacks. Thinking of these facts would make it easier for us to carry out the order during the upcoming action. Major Trapp remarked that the action was entirely not in his spirit, but he had received this order from higher authority.'*

Some of the men testify that Trapp justified the killing with the transparently weak argument that the Jews were supporting the partisans. …
Trapp also seemed to be expressing his genuine emotions. He was shaken by the order. Trapp was later heard to have exclaimed, upon seeing the battalion's doctor: 'My God, why must I do this.'

Browning's account of Major Trapp's order:

The time had come for Trapp to address the men and inform them of the assignment the battalion had received.
Pale and nervous, with choking voice and tears in his eyes, Trapp visibly fought to control himself as he spoke. The battalion, he said plaintively, had to perform a frightfully unpleasant task. This assignment was not to his liking, indeed, it was highly regrettable, but the orders came from the highest authorities. If it would make their task any easier, the men should remember that in Germany the bombs were falling on women and children.

What counts as engagement with an academic text?

How do we know that pupils are genuinely engaging with new knowledge? To evaluate this, I looked for evidence that there was some kind of interaction between pupils' existing knowledge and the new knowledge they were encountering in the texts. The most obvious evidence of engagement was in all pupils' use of pre-existing conceptual language when talking about the new ideas they had encountered. Although I had deliberately used the language of the texts themselves (such as 'argument', 'claim', 'evidence') when pupils talked about these ideas they expressed them through the language of 'point', 'examples', 'fact', 'opinion' and even 'biased'. Some pupils did adopt this new language, but often in quite a muddled way, as shown in Hannah's book review:

> *I think that some of the claims he makes may be true. However, there may be some claims that he uses to back up his opinion or his point, with no evidence to back up his claim.*

The weakest form of engagement was the deployment of new knowledge **in addition** to existing knowledge, without any interaction between them. This was often indicated by a repetition of the phrasing used during the enquiry, or by identifying criticisms of Goldhagen's and Browning's arguments without being able to explain them. A stronger form of engagement was evident in pupils' critical evaluation and **rejection** of new knowledge. This was evident in Genna's interview transcript:

(75) RF: *But how do we decide who we agree with?*

[pause]

(76) RF: *Can we? Should we?*

(77) Isaac: *I think in our opinion we can, but…*

(79) Genna: *You can't really say they're right, because it's just an opinion.*

(80) RF: *Can't you? What about the way they use evidence in their conclusions? Can you trust the conclusions they're coming to?*

(81) Genna: *Not really, but it's like their opinion.*

Figure 5:

After examining the evidence used by Goldhagen and other historians to substantiate their claims regarding the level of popular support for the Nazis' policies during the 1930s, pupils were given an extract from Goldhagen's book. They were put in role as editors and asked to consider how far the language in which he expressed his claims was warranted by the nature of the evidence base. Pupils were then asked to edit the extract so that it reflected the strength of claims they thought could be supported by the evidence.

> Hitler was adored by the vast majority of the German people… Whatever else the Germans thought about Hitler and the Nazi movement, however much they might have detested aspects of Nazism, the vast majority of them subscribed to the underlying Nazi model of Jews…There can be no doubt that the German people understood the purpose and radicality of the anti-Jewish measures unfolding before their eyes in the 1930s.

Her existing idea (that all claims are valid because they are just opinions) is restated immediately after seemingly acknowledging that some claims may be less trustworthy than others based on the evidence used to support them. Although Genna engages with the new idea, she seems to reject its implications in order to retain her existing idea.

An equally strong form of engagement was when pupils seemed to consciously **substitute** new ideas for existing ideas they now found inadequate:

> ***Adam***: *...that, I think I've learned that, people have different views on different subjects so some people, have different views than one another, and like, maybe in 1066 people have different views about what happened earlier in time.*

Adam's reference to a topic he had previously studied (1066) seems to allude to a sense that what he thought he knew about it might need to be revised in light of his learning during the enquiry.

Other pupils' response to apparent conflicts between existing and new knowledge was not to reject or substitute it, but to try and incorporate it into their existing frameworks of knowledge. Their attempts to mesh them together indicated that engagement is manifested through attempts to **synthesise** new and existing forms of knowledge. This was evident in expressions of new ideas using pre-existing language. For example, Chris attempted to explain a 'new' idea (criticism of Goldhagen's use of 'strong descriptive language') in terms of his existing understanding of what made 'good' and 'bad' history (good history is 'factual', bad history is 'biased'): 'The book is littered with strong descriptive language and strong, visceral, graphic horror. How can the reader appreciate this book as a factual historical text if it is biased?'

However, other pupils seemed unable to locate their new knowledge within existing conceptual frameworks. Rather than substituting new ideas for old, or trying to integrate them, they used new ideas *alongside* existing ideas, even when they contradicted them. Their engagement was manifested through the **parallel deployment** of existing and new forms of knowledge**.** Beth seemed to do this when she critiqued Goldhagen's use of evidence based on both her pre-existing view of what constitutes 'good' evidence ('strong, factual evidence') versus Goldhagen's 'bad' evidence ('tendentiously selected snippets of biased information.')

What was the nature of pupils' achievement?

The very process of engagement that emerged from my analysis of RQ2 could be said to constitute a significant achievement. But what kind of historical thinking did this engagement engender? There was certainly a difference between the kind of thinking processes pupils were engaged in during the course of the enquiry (procedural reasoning) and the kind of thinking manifested in their reflections on those activities (retrospective reflection). At first I was disappointed because my initial perception of this difference was that there was a deficiency in their reflective thinking in comparison to their procedural thinking. Pupils seemed to be either unconscious of or unable to articulate the principles that underpinned the thinking they had been doing during lesson activities. When they did use conceptual ideas introduced during the enquiry, they seemed to do so in a superficial way, being unable to explain them or make connections between them. However, a closer reading of the data suggested that in their retrospective reflections pupils *were* engaged in historical thinking:

1) **reflection upon the nature and status of historical *claims***
2) **reflection upon the nature of the historical *evidence base***
3) **reflection on the *relationship* between historical claims and their evidential basis.**

Although pupils did explicitly reflect upon the nature and status of historical claims, they were doing so implicitly. This

reflection most commonly manifested itself in refutations of historians' claims using substantive evidence. It was also manifested in comparisons of competing claims, evaluation of the language claims were expressed in, and identifications of 'big' or 'exaggerated' claims. This is apparent in Adam's response, where he implicitly recognises the constructed and contestable nature of historical claims:

> *The language that Goldhagen uses is hugely different to Christopher Browning's language. Wheras Goldhagen's is Big and loud, describing the men as killers and the killings as slaughters, Browning's language is calm and doesn't go over the top or exaggerate. And none of the evidence he has supports his language because its all distorted.*

Pupils were also explicitly and implicitly engaged in reflection about the *nature* of the historical evidence base. Reflection tended to be implicit, evident in criticisms of historians' use of evidence and in their own use of evidence to support their own claims or to adjudicate between competing claims. Conscious reflection on historians' use of evidence was mostly limited to crude criticisms of the quantity or type of evidence used to support a claim. Pupils' critiques were based on pre-existing understandings of what constitutes historical evidence (facts and quotes) and how evidence should be deployed to support a claim (more evidence means a stronger claim). Most pupils also made references to Goldhagen's emotive language and use of horror as a means of supporting his claims. While only Beth and Chris explicitly recognised that their criticisms were evidential in nature, nevertheless other pupils were implicitly evaluating evidence not just in terms of its quantity but also in terms of its nature and the nature of its use.

Connecting both these themes was a third: explicit and implicit reflection on the *relationship* between historical claims and their evidential basis. Most pupils had at best a patchy, ill-defined sense of the relationship between historical claims and their evidential basis. Few explicitly acknowledged the existence of a relationship. When they did, pupils often simply identified the existence of a relationship, without being able to exemplify or explain it.

Conclusions

My findings had a number of implications for my own practice. Pupils' response to academic texts and the nature of their engagement with them was constructive. They approached the texts with emotional and conceptual pre-conceptions, which shaped their perception of the nature of the challenge posed by the texts and the strategies they used to manage the challenge. The meanings and forms of knowledge pupils made were also constructive in the sense that they were constructed through an interaction between existing and new forms of knowledge and were multi-faceted.

However, while amongst many teachers and researchers there is an awareness of what Barthes calls the 'writerly' nature of historical texts (that the process of reading them is constructive), this awareness doesn't always seem to be reflected in teaching pedagogy.[21] Indeed, there is a notable absence of attention to the *process* by which pupils make meaning out of texts. Teachers' concern seems primarily with the *products* rather than the *processes* of pupils' reading. This seems to indicate an underlying model of reading that could be characterised as 'learning by exposure'; provided pupils are given suitable guidance and scaffolding they will come away with the meanings the teacher is desirous of pupils developing. This belief in turn seems to rest on an assumption that pupils are passive receivers of text, rather than co-constructors of meaning. Yet the findings for RQ1 and RQ2 suggest that pupils were not passive receivers but constructive readers of texts.

This suggests there is a need to do more research into the process by which children move from being immature or naïve readers into mature, disciplined readers who make meaning out of texts within the context of a subject discipline. Current research emphasises the naivety with which pupils conceptualise historical texts as being informative rather than interpretive, and their approach to meaning-making as being one of 'knowledge-getting' rather than 'knowledge-transforming'.

However, this model, while certainly not untrue, might not be entirely adequate as a starting point for addressing pupils' difficulties in reading academic texts, because in light of my findings it seems too simplistic to characterise pupils' conceptualisation of texts as being solely informative and their approach to meaning-making as 'knowledge-getting'. Pupils *did* seem to conceptualise the texts as being interpretive and engaged in knowledge-transformation in their efforts to construct meaning. However, it is also clear that the meanings pupils ascribed to the texts were not the same meanings as those ascribed by more mature readers, indicating an immaturity in their historical thinking.

The implications of assuming pupils start from a point of seeing texts as informative can be seen in the pedagogy that has been developed around reading historical texts. If pupils simply don't 'see' the argument within the text, then it follows that the teacher's role is to help them to 'see' it, whether that be by highlighting its form or its stylistic conventions. However, this seems to overlook the *way* in which pupils 'see' the argument and make meaning out of it. It assumes that pupils will 'see' and make meaning out of the argument in the text in the same way as mature readers of academic texts do. My findings suggest that most pupils had few problems 'seeing' the argument within academic texts. However, the ways in which they 'saw' the argument and its meaning were complex, and not necessarily the same ways that I, a relatively mature reader of historical texts, 'saw' the argument.

This indicates that there is a symbiotic relationship between the *processes and products* of pupils' reading and their understanding of history as a discipline. This connection has already been recognised by Counsell, who posited a link between '*ways of reading and ways of knowing*'.[22] The importance of pupils' existing disciplinary ideas in informing their responses to the texts, their engagement with them and the kinds of historical thinking they were doing, was apparent in my findings for all three research questions. How pupils responded to the conceptual challenge posed by the texts, whether they rejected it or adopted it, was closely connected to their understanding of history as a discipline.

While a few pupils seemed willing to have their existing disciplinary assumptions overturned, most were reluctant to entirely abandon their existing understandings. Some pupils resolved this by explicitly rejecting new knowledge, others tried to force it into their existing mental frameworks through a process of attempted synthesis, whilst others apparently adopted new ideas without jettisoning old ideas, even if they were incompatible.

Yet much existing pedagogy treats the relationship between academic texts and pupils' historical consciousness as being one-way; whereby the text shapes pupils' historical consciousness. My findings suggest a two-way relationship: an encounter with historical texts seemed to shape pupils' historical consciousness, yet their historical consciousness also shaped their construction of the text. While pupils do not seem to read academic texts in the same way as mature readers do, it is perhaps too simplistic to suppose that the *reason* they read them differently is that they are unable to 'see' the argument within them. This pedagogy locates the source of pupils' difficulties primarily within the realms of literacy (pupils are unaware of the literary conventions of argument and are therefore unable to identify it) or within the realms of conceptual understanding (pupils do not recognise that history is about argument and are therefore unable to identify it). This is manifested in the approaches deployed to develop pupils reading, which frequently focus on identifying the *existence* of argument or its stylistic expression.

My research findings indicate that the issue is perhaps more complicated. Most pupils *could* 'see' the argument within the texts. However, their understanding of the meaning of 'argument', being grounded in their existing disciplinary understandings, seemed to differ markedly to the meaning of argument mature historical readers operate with. This suggests that pupils operate not only with a different 'epistemology of text' (Wineburg) in their reading of historical sources, but with a different epistemology of text in their reading of historical arguments.[23] This is illustrated in Faheem's conceptualisation of argument as being something akin to a personal squabble, and therefore easily resolvable. Although able to identify different forms and expressions of argument in the texts, he construed 'argument' as a falling out, in part because his conceptual understanding of the discipline and practice of history did not admit of the possibility of argument. His disciplinary beliefs – that history is a set of discoverable, objective 'facts' that the historian faithfully reports (what Shemilt calls the historian as 'memory-man') – meant he conflated claim with opinion and therefore reduced competing claims to mere 'petty' differences of opinion.[24] This suggests that activities targeted at helping pupils 'see' argument by identifying 'fact' and 'opinion' within a text or structural models such as PEE and PEGEX may be counter-productive if they reinforce pupils' misconceptions about the *nature* of historical argument. By offering an over-simplistic model of argument, perhaps teachers unwittingly make it harder for pupils to read academic texts, because making meaning out of them as arguments requires the abandonment of beliefs about the historical discipline that prior teaching has embedded. It also indicates that the relationship between reading academic texts and the development of historical consciousness (an appreciation of the discipline) is not a straightforward one. Yet pedagogy often seems to focus more on pupils' *understanding* of texts than on their *beliefs about* them, or assumes that if pupils' understand a text, their beliefs about it will necessarily change. Within this model, historical consciousness develops as a natural by-product of reading. Instead, my findings suggest that the process of engagement with academic texts can be characterised as messy, comprised of multiple overlapping responses and meanings. If, as Straub argues, historical consciousness means thinking and arguing historically, then my research findings suggest that if we want pupils to think and argue historically, greater attention needs to be paid to the process by which historical consciousness is developed. Wineburg summarises this neatly by quoting Tertillus: 'I believe in order to understand'.[25]

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