

Journal of Trainee Teacher Education Research

'The concept that dares not speak its name': Can 'empathy' be rehabilitated as a disciplinary concept by re-theorising its curricular goals and value to pupils in light of the 'cultural turn' in history? A theory-seeking case study with a Year 9 class exploring the experience of a soldier in the First World War

Alexander Bengner

(PGCE Secondary History, 2018-2019)

email: ajbenger@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper explores a theory-seeking case study that aimed to investigate the potential for rehabilitating the troubled concept of empathy as a curricular construct by re-theorising it in close relation to the cultural turn in academic history. The case study centred on an eight-lesson enquiry in which Year 9 pupils engaged with an extended historical source in a manner inspired by cultural history, using the concept of 'historical perspective' – a re-theorisation of the concept of empathy developed throughout the enquiry. Findings suggest that empathy re-theorised as 'historical perspective' can provide a rigorous means of rehabilitating the aims of empathy and translating the complementary aims and approaches of cultural history into school history. Ultimately, the paper argues for the value of rehabilitating empathy in such a way and concludes with recommendations for further development of 'historical perspective' as a concept and for the wider inclusion of cultural history within school history.

© Alexander Bengner, 2020

'The concept that dares not speak its name': Can 'empathy' be rehabilitated as a disciplinary concept by re-theorising its curricular goals and value to pupils in light of the 'cultural turn' in history? A theory-seeking case study with a Year 9 class exploring the experience of a soldier in the First World War

Alexander Benger

Introduction

In a previous research assignment undertaken during my teacher training year, I attempted to tackle the issue of combatting condescension when teaching a lesson to a Year 10 class entitled: 'Why did London fail to control the Great Plague of 1665?'. Whilst I still see merits in my approach, I was nevertheless left dissatisfied with the historical assumptions that my lesson encouraged. Indeed, the lesson question itself implies that pupils should view history as the explanation of deficits in the past. This approach to history reinforces problematic trends identified by Peter Lee (2005) regarding pupils' historical consciousness: that "two of the most common ideas likely to be encountered among students are the notion that everything gets better and that the past can be viewed in terms of deficits" (p.44). I concluded my essay with the argument of historian Vanessa Harding (2015): that "it is easy for the modern reader to condescend to the apparently muddled thinking of seventeenth-century Londoners"; but that "the important question is ... how [the plague] impacted on contemporaries – what it meant for them" (p.7).

Harding's search for meaning and perspective reflects the cultural turn in academic history, which, in Miri Rubin's words, "asks not only 'How it really was' but rather 'How was it for him, or her, or them?'" (Rubin, 2002, p.81). However, this approach to history is one that, whilst prevalent in academic history, is largely absent from school history. Indeed, the editorial to Teaching History 172 (TH172) comments that "few history teachers would accept EH Carr's famous dictum that 'the study of history is the study of causes'"; but in spite of this, "causality is such a mainstay of school

history” that “a radical shift seems unlikely to occur in school history in the near future” (Foster, Burn, Counsell & McConnell, 2018, p.2). Part of the problem here, I suspect, is that (as I hope to make clear through my literature review) the concept within school history that has the potential to most closely reflect the cultural turn in academic history “from causes to meanings” is also the most troubled and discredited – empathy (Reynolds, 2006, p.88). Lee and Shemilt (2011) posed the question of whether empathy should “come out of the closet”, concluding that “persistence [in re-establishing empathy as a concept] depends ultimately on the value we place on empathetic explanation” (p.48).

Given the opportunity to plan and teach an enquiry to a Year 9 class based upon my great-grandfather’s letters home spanning four years of service as a soldier during the First World War, I wanted pupils to take an approach to this extended source inspired by cultural history – not to make generalised inferences about war-time conditions (“How it really was”), but rather to construct a complex, multifaceted and rigorous history of the meanings that Theo Reid assigned to his experiences in the war (“How was it for him?”). Feeling that this could not be fully achieved through currently-established second-order concepts, I saw potential in the troubled concept of empathy as a means of translating the approach of cultural history into curricular constructs, and thus into the classroom. Through this theory-seeking case study, I aim to start to define the curricular goals and value to pupils of rehabilitating empathy, in exploring my attempt to re-theorise it as a rigorous curricular concept drawing from cultural history.

Literature review

I will begin by exploring empathy’s troubled past within school history and the professional history teaching community. Key themes about how the concept of empathy has been theorised arise from Ann Low-Beer’s (1989) article, written during the height of the empathy debates. The version of empathy that Low-Beer described and criticised was one theorised as a transferable and applicable skill, which involved “‘feeling into’ the ... milieu of a past historical period”, and ultimately “trying to examine feelings” (pp.8-9). This was a “skill” often associated with pupils’ own imaginations and feelings, to the point where history teaching arrived at the “curious perversion” of insisting “that pupils must invent the feelings of fictitious characters” (p.9).

Ian Luff's article (2000) in TH100 is indicative of the trend of conflating empathy with affective engagement. He argued that "empathy is an attempt to recreate the feelings and experiences of people in the past" and that this required pupils "at times to adopt the perspectives and experiences of that past" (p.9). Luff advocated the use of role-plays in which pupils "simulated experience", the "point" of empathy appearing to be to share the feelings and experiences of past people in the present as a route to historical understanding (p.17).

However, Christine Counsell's editorial of the same edition demonstrates the extent to which empathy was a deeply troubled concept by 2000. Empathy had faced a "legacy of derision", to the point that "if the word empathy found its way into the National Curriculum there would be tabloid-inspired protests at the gates of QCA". Counsell (2000) argued that such derision was to some extent unfair, the result (at least in part) of misinformed practice as opposed to a fundamentally flawed concept: rather than being theorised as a concept to "invent feelings", empathetic explanation had been promoted as "a way of *stopping* the natural tendencies of pupils to project modern ideas and assumptions onto people in the past ... to construct more complex models of past beliefs". Counsell concluded by suggesting that "we should take a fresh look at empathy" (p.2).

Far from being refreshed, empathy went from a concept that in 2000 one might "whisper who dares" to one that "dares not speak its name" at all by 2011 (Counsell, 2000, p.2; Lee and Shemilt, 2011, p.39). Identifying the roots of the problem in the 1970s and 1980s, Lee and Shemilt argued that the decline of empathy "stemmed from two basic errors". Firstly, "empathy was linked with ... the unfettered exercise of historical imagination ... and literary invention ... [Empathy was] often regarded as a skill which students could develop through practice and teachers coach by sparking excitement and fanning the embers of youthful creativity" (ibid., p.39). Secondly, "the choice of label – 'empathy' – led many people to mistake the nature of the concept ... for affective engagement with predecessors ... [which] displaced the need to understand and explain how people in the past thought and reasoned" (ibid., p.40).

As well as identifying what they saw as common problems with interpretations of empathy, Lee and Shemilt defined what they believed the concept should and should not mean:

“Empathy is not a mysterious way of getting into past people’s heads. It is where we get when, on the basis of evidence, we reconstruct people’s beliefs and values in ways that make actions and social practices intelligible. (It is an ‘achievement’ not a ‘process’.) **Empathy is not sharing people’s feelings.** But we *can* know what feelings people had and what they meant. **Empathy is not a ‘skill’ that can be practiced.** It is a way of *explaining* past forms of life that were different from ours, and a *disposition* to recognise the possibility and importance of making them intelligible.”

(Lee & Shemilt, 2011, p.48)

It is among educational researchers like Lee and Shemilt that the most direct and coherent attempts to define the nature and value of historical empathy can be found. Barton and Levstik (2004), writing in a different context to Lee and Shemilt (the US context, with a specific focus on historical education as a means to promote citizenship in a democratic society), theorised that empathy “might best be thought of as two distinct cultural tools” (p.207). The first is empathy as “perspective recognition”, which resembles Lee and Shemilt’s theorisation: empathy as an “intellectual achievement resting on evidential construction of other people’s beliefs, values, goals and circumstances” (ibid.).

However, they also argued from a citizenship angle that “limiting empathy to a purely cognitive endeavour limits its contribution to pluralist democracy”: that “to engage in meaningful deliberation with those whose ideas differ from our own, we must do more than understand them – we must care about them and about their perspectives” (ibid.). This “affective engagement” is a “skill” distinct from “perspective recognition”: empathy as “caring” (ibid., p.242). Notably, this “affective engagement” does not involve the pretence of sharing emotions, but rather is predicated upon a conviction that “caring” in history can act as a powerful motivating force with “‘rational’ or cognitive pay-offs”; and that the practice and value of history depends upon its power to engage and inform us in the present. They summarised the dangers of abandoning empathy as either “perspective recognition” or “caring” thus: “just as ignoring perspective leaves historical inquiries open to misplaced sympathy, ignoring care leaves them vulnerable to indifference” (ibid., p.241).

Sam Wineburg’s (2001) theorisation of “historical thinking” closely resembles theorisations of empathy as constructing historical perspectives. Contrasting the historical thinking of student Derek with academic historian Bob Alston, Wineburg theorised the nature and value of “mature historical cognition”. Derek “attempted a reconstruction of [past] world views” in a manner which imposed his own beliefs upon people in the past (p.9). As a result, the historical sources “did not spur Derek to ... consider new dimensions of human experience ... he learned little from them”. By contrast, “Alston’s reading shows a humility before the narrowness of our contemporary experience and an

openness before the expanse of the history of the species ... Others read these documents to confirm their prior beliefs. They encountered the past here and labelled it. Alston encountered the past and learned from it” (p.22). The difference here lay in what Wineburg has termed “the weaving of context” – “an active process of connecting things in a pattern” from which Alston “made something new” by “confront[ing] his ignorance” and mobilising his knowledge. His ability to do so was partly due to “skill, technique and a great deal of know-how. But mature historical cognition is more: It is an act that engages the heart”. Rather than “rush to judgement” at Abraham Lincoln’s seemingly racist remarks, Alston wrestled with the question: ‘What could Lincoln’s words mean in *that* world?’ (p.22).

For Wineburg, therefore, the act of constructing a historical perspective inherently *is* caring. Whilst appearing to support Barton and Levstik’s view that both perspective recognition and caring are central to history, Wineburg argues that caring is not a “tool” that renders intellectual pursuits meaningful, but is rather inextricably intertwined with “historical thinking”.

What Wineburg has termed “historical thinking” is not a neutral term, but one which appears to align with a particular type of history. It is notable that he cited Robert Darnton and Carlo Ginzburg – cultural historians – when conceptualising “historical thinking”, and it is cultural history that appears best to reflect the concept of empathy (theorised by Barton and Levstik as “perspective recognition” and “caring”; and by Wineburg as “historical thinking”). Indeed, Richard Evans’s interpretation of the value invested in cultural history by its proponents resembles that of some theorists of empathy (or similar ideas) outlined above:

“If there is one thing that the various exponents of this kind of cultural history share, it is evidently the belief that historical writing can enhance our appreciation of the human condition by bringing to life and explaining beliefs and cultures that are very different from our own, and so perhaps adding to the richness of human experience and understanding, and fostering tolerance of different cultures and belief systems in our own time.”

(Evans, 2002, p.9)

Similarly, prominent cultural historian Peter Burke (2008) conceived the value of cultural history in its potential “to bring peoples together” and open “ways of understanding and communication between them” (p.143).

With what methods does cultural history aim to achieve these lofty aims? Miri Rubin conceptualised the process of the cultural historian as such:

“Thus the Bildung of the historian is achieved not only by way of an anointment with the dust of the archives, but through the mobilization of an informed subjectivity, human and intellectual capacities for categorization, system building and empathy.”

(Rubin, 2002, p.81)

It is notable that “empathy” is not treated as an achievement nor an end, but rather one part of a historical methodology that leads towards a historical product. Rubin stated that: “Like all good ideas the basic point is simple. The cultural turn asks not only ‘How it really was’ but rather ‘How was it for him, or her, or them?’” (p.81). Cultural history, therefore, is about a sensitivity to, care for, and constructing of, particular perspectives – historical perspectives which have massively diversified as objects of study. As Evans (2002) has described, “the collapse of grand narratives and large teleological theories in history assisted the reinstatement of individual human beings in the historical record. Historians began writing about people again, and above all about humble, ordinary people” (p.9). Thus, the aim is “to work on historical traces towards the remaking of past worlds”, but crucially worlds in which all people (as individuals or collectives), as opposed to abstract historical processes, have agency, significance and meaning (Rubin, 2002, p.86). Cultural history conceives of individuals “caught in webs of significance which have been inherited, but from which he makes new meanings, she forges new ways” (p.89). In its quest to construct these “meanings”, cultural history is conversational with past people as opposed to interrogatory of the ‘facts’: “historians in this key fruitfully pretend to be entering into a conversation with the people of the past” (p.86).

These developments in historical methodology have been heavily influenced by cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Jim Sharpe (2001) has identified the influence of Geertz in the development of microhistory (as practiced by pioneering cultural historians, such as Carlo Ginzburg), and in particular the influence of ‘thick description’: “placing a social event within its full cultural context, so that it can be studied on an analytical rather than merely a descriptive level” (p.36). Microhistorian Giovanni Levi (2001) has nevertheless theorised the limitations of equating microhistory with interpretive anthropology, arguing that microhistory places more value upon how individuals negotiated their way through cultural structures, as opposed to constructing homogeneous cultural meanings (p.109).

Sharpe (2001) has likewise suggested that historians need not adopt wholesale Geertz’s semiotic concept of culture, but nevertheless that drawing upon Geertz is one way in which historians have faced the challenge of how to “translate social reality” into “scholarly constructs” (p.36).

Constructing histories from new perspectives has required historians to show how “historical imagination can be applied not only to forming new conceptualisations of the subject matter of history, but also to asking new questions of the documents and doing different things with them” (ibid., p.37). Thus to Sharpe, historical imagination is not literary invention, but the innovative use of sources, an imagination grounded in the bedrock of the discipline. Furthermore, such history is deeper than showing historians can be “imaginative and innovatory” – “it also provides the means for restoring their history to social groups who may have thought that they had lost it, or who were unaware that their history existed” (p.37). Thus, Geertz’s words resonate with cultural history on more than one level:

“Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.”

(Geertz, 1973, p.3)

Cultural historians strive to construct the “webs” of past meanings from past perspectives; in doing so they have contributed to our culture, transforming webs of significance within the discipline of history itself by imagining new meanings for history as a discipline for constructing the past. Where Carr (1961) famously saw the historian in dialogue with his facts, cultural historians see themselves in dialogue with people. Where Carr construed history within narrow criteria of significance as the search for applicable causal law, cultural historians interpret sources to construct diverse perspectives and meanings sensitive to varied and particular contexts.

Rationale

The concept of empathy has had a problematic past, which has consigned it to the “closet” in the present (Lee & Shemilt, 2011). One potential problem with empathy is that it appears primarily to have been theorised in England as a concept designed to address a problem in pupils’ historical consciousness; but not adequately theorised with regards to the discipline of history. The difficulty in defining the concept and what constituted progression in practice (thus resulting in ahistorical activities) perhaps resulted from the association of empathy primarily with ways of thinking, as opposed to the improvement of a historical product that could draw from a disciplinary gold standard. This may stem from the fact that many manifestations and theorisations of the now-prominent cultural turn in academic history (including most of the texts cited in my literature review) had either not yet been written, or at least had not been adequately theorised in academic

history in the 1970s and 1980s. We are now in a better place to “take a fresh look at empathy” (Counsell, 2000, p.2).

If we agree with the argument of Michael Young that knowledge produced within specialist disciplinary communities constitutes “the most reliable tools we have for enabling students to acquire knowledge and make sense of the world” (as cited in Beck, 2018, p.45), it seems wrong that the cultural turn, which has had a transformative impact on the discipline of history over the last few decades, is conspicuous by its absence in school history. Rachel Foster has argued that the place of cultural history within school history is currently “marginal” and that when it does appear it is “at a curricular level ... defined as a category of substantive content” rather than a methodology or approach to history (Foster, 2014, p.11). This perhaps stems from the difficulty in locating the approach of cultural history within our current curricular constructs of the second-order concepts – shaping devices designed to enable pupils (and teachers) to “frame historically-valid questions” and provide rigour and structure to their historical analyses – listed in the National Curriculum as “continuity and change, cause and consequence, similarity, difference and significance” (DfE, 2013). These concepts as currently theorised, I would argue, do not easily accommodate the kinds of historical questions explored by cultural historians. However, the “common features” of cultural history described by Foster (2014) – “namely a preoccupation with meaning, perception and their forms of expression, studied through language, actions, artefacts and the way in which people in the past gave these meaning” – appear to resemble some of the original aims of empathy as a concept to “reconstruct beliefs and values” from past perspectives (p.8; Lee & Shemilt, 2011, p.48). As such, much like the “romance of history and anthropology ... nourished the cultural turn” in academic history, so a “romance” of cultural history and empathy might nourish a cultural turn in school history – with cultural history providing a rigorous and rich source from which to re-theorise ideas associated with empathy; and a re-theorised empathy providing a natural and grounded ‘home’ for cultural history within curricular constructs (Rubin, 2002, p.86).

Research design

Research questions (RQ)	Data
RQ1: What counts as empathy? [Becoming] What counts as historical perspective?	Lesson plans and evaluations Mentor observation feedback Pupils' verbal responses Group interview
RQ2: What qualities in pupils' writing might help us to theorise progression in historical perspective?	Pupils' final outcome tasks
RQ3: What did pupils say they valued about this historical perspective enquiry?	Questionnaire Group interview

Table 1: Overview of research design

The research questions in Table 1 form the basis of a theory-seeking case study aimed at contributing to a process of curriculum construction (Bassey, 1999). This follows in the tradition of teacher research envisioned by Lawrence Stenhouse, but which, as Michael Fordham has described, has largely departed from this original purpose:

“The teacher research movement, advocated most famously in the UK by Lawrence Stenhouse, took as its original purpose to involve teachers in a process of curriculum construction ... [However] Stenhouse’s original vision of teacher research as involving a process of curriculum construction, interpretation and evaluation has tended to be eclipsed by one that emphasises the development of pedagogy.”

(Fordham, 2016, p.135)

Indeed, it is notable that much of the literature on research methodology concerns ‘action research’, whose purpose is commonly defined as to improve practice, usually with regards to pedagogical or organisational efficacy (Koshy, 2005; Altrichter, Feldman, Posch & Somekh, 2008). By contrast, my research is not intended to refine or develop the efficacy of a practical aspect of teacher practice. Rather, it can be situated within a tradition of teacher research that Fordham and Counsell argue has flourished most strongly within history-teacher publication:

“Counsell argued that a tradition of curriculum research — as envisaged by Stenhouse — has been a central feature of history-teacher publication in England. Counsell argued that history teachers have, since the early 1990s, developed a sustained and coherent research tradition predicated on a process of ‘curriculum theorising’ that can be seen as one realisation of Stenhouse’s construal of teacher research.”

(Fordham, 2016, p.136)

I have thus defined my research as a theory-seeking case study: a “particular study of a general issue” in which “the focus is the issue rather than the case as such” (Bassey, 1999, p.62). Data collected (see Table 1 above) was analysed in relation to the above research questions, which were

designed as a basis upon which to theorise from this case broader potential curriculum development. I have tried, as far as possible, to collect data to enable triangulation – “combining different methods of data collection and/or data provided by someone else ... [in order that] we can better “locate” the meaning of our data” (Altrichter, 2008, p.145).

On reflection, one of my forms of augmented data – a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) – was too restrictive, asking what Koshy (2005) has termed “leading questions” (p.88). I thus only analysed this data in combination with the data arising from my group interview with four pupils. In contrast to my potentially restrictive questionnaire, the group interview (see Appendix 2) was relatively unstructured, aiming to utilise its potential to gather “richer and more informative” data (ibid., p.92). As with a semi-structured interview, I started with “a set of pre-formulated questions”, but made liberal use of the opportunity to “stray from protocol”, “ask follow-up questions that probe what the interviewee was saying”, and “paraphrase what [I] thought the interviewee meant by a comment”. Moreover, as a group interview I hoped that pupils might “stimulate comments from the others”, and thus generate a more organic conversation in which the value they themselves had assigned to the enquiry (RQ3) would be reflected in the route that the interview took, and thus the data collected (Altrichter, 2008, p.127).

I have analysed my data using Bassey’s method of “generating and testing analytical statements”. Thus, I have generated analytical statements to give “concise answers to the research questions”, and tested and refined them against the data, until reaching the “outcome [of] analytical statements which are in accord with the data”. In response to RQ2 and RQ3, I have “systematically coded” the data in relation to my analytical statements (Bassey, 1999, p.70). In relation to RQ2, I have formulated a “fuzzy proposition” to tentatively propose my conclusions of “what may be the case elsewhere” (i.e. tentative ideas about what my case study might suggest more generally).

I conducted my research within the context of teaching a sequence of eight hour-long lessons to a mixed-ability and mixed-gender Year 9 class of 27 pupils at a comprehensive state secondary school of 1033 pupils. In designing and conducting my research, I have adhered to BERA’s ethical guidelines, informing participating pupils of the nature of the research and obtaining consent from my mentor (the pupils’ normal class teacher) and professional tutor as gatekeepers (2018). In all instances where pupils are referred to, assumed names have been used. In addition to “doing the right thing” (“acting with honesty and integrity, acting within the law”), I have also put effort into

“doing things right” (being “transparent” about my research decisions, “reporting evidence accurately”, and “being open” about the limitations of my conclusions) (Stutchbury, 2017, pp.82-83).

Overview

Enquiry question: What did the Great War mean to Theo Reid?	
Lesson	Objectives
What made the First World War ‘The Great War’?	Describe the MAIN causes of the Great War Explain how these causes contributed to making the war ‘great’. Explain a number of ways in which the war would have seemed ‘great’ to people at the time (significant, extraordinary, remarkable).
What did the Great War mean to the people who experienced it?	Describe some of the widespread beliefs and attitudes towards WW1, and in society generally at that time. Describe details and aspects of the conditions and experience of fighting in WW1. Analyse what the war might have meant to soldiers, with reference to culture (beliefs and attitudes) at the time.
‘I do feel a poor soldier’: The Gallipoli Campaign, 1915-1916	Describe the Gallipoli Campaign. Describe the conditions and lifestyle that Theo experienced in Egypt during the Gallipoli Campaign Construct Theo’s experience and perspective in Egypt – feelings, beliefs, what was important to him?
What is historical perspective?	Describe and identify the concept of historical perspective. Analyse Theo’s Reid’s letters to make points about his perspective on his experience in Egypt during the Gallipoli Campaign. Construct an explanation of Theo’s ‘sense of duty’ whilst in Egypt during the Gallipoli Campaign.
H.M.S. Royal Oak, 1916-1917	Make inferences about Theo’s perspective on his time serving on HMS Royal Oak Analyse the extent to which Theo Reid’s perspective differs from the generalisations made in the documentary
The Western Front, 1917-1918	Analyse what constitutes good writing on the concept of historical perspective. Analyse Theo’s perspective during the Battle of Passchendaele. Analyse Theo’s perspective during the Hundred Days Offensive.
Theo Reid’s War	Pupils plan final outcome task
Theo Reid’s War: What did the Great War mean to Theo Reid?	Pupils write final outcome task

Table 2: Overview of enquiry

Within the context of the enquiry outlined in Table 2, pupils worked with the extended primary source of my great-grandfather Theo Reid’s letters home across four years of service in the First World War. In using an extended primary source, pupils had the opportunity to engage with history

in the manner of a cultural historian by “entering into a conversation with the people of the past” (Rubin, 2002, p.86). In framing the enquiry question, I thus drew upon cultural history. The key word in the enquiry question is ‘mean’, driving the focus of the enquiry as one of constructing meaning, deriving from Geertz’s influential characterisation of anthropology as an interpretive search for meaning. The particular wording ‘mean to Theo Reid’ draws inspiration from Rubin’s contention that “the cultural turn asks not only ‘How it really was’ but rather ‘How was it for him, or her, or them?’” Thus, the focus of the enquiry was not describing conditions in the First World War generally, but rather thickly describing what the experience of the war meant from a particular perspective. With that particular perspective being that of Theo Reid (one individual), pupils would be engaged in a microhistory. As such, the design of the enquiry also reflects the principles of microhistory proposed by Levi: not seeking to generalise homogeneous meaning from Theo’s perspective, but rather constructing his perspective – how he constructed his own identity and defined his own experiences – in negotiation with his broader context (Levi, 2001, p.109).

I thus spent the first two lessons establishing a broader context. The rest of the enquiry focussed on Theo’s letters and his more specific contexts to construct his particular perspective, as well as developing and embedding the conceptual focus. Lesson 3 followed a structure that I repeated in Lessons 5 and 6 of starting with establishing specific contextual knowledge regarding Theo’s particular situation, before analysing extracts from his letters in order to make inferences about his perspective and the meanings that he assigned to the war in dialogue with those contexts. However, in Lesson 3 my tasks for pupils to explore Theo’s letters were too open-ended and lacked a clear conceptual focus. Thus, I dedicated Lesson 4 to establishing a clear conceptual focus. This involved renaming and re-theorising ‘empathy’ as ‘historical perspective’ (I will explore this further in my findings). When pupils then returned to Theo’s letters in this lesson, I provided more structure to direct pupils’ analysis, guiding them to look in particular for evidence that could be used to construct and explain Theo’s sense of guilt at not fighting during the Gallipoli Campaign. From this, pupils wrote paragraphs, which I analysed in order to form initial theories as to what writing on historical perspective should look like within the school context, and provide feedback to pupils on progression. In Lesson 5, analytical structure was provided by tasks in which pupils compared and contrasted Theo’s perspective with generalisations of soldiers’ attitudes and beliefs put forward by a popular interpretation (TV documentary). This drew upon the principle that microhistory can be used to reveal the complexity and individual agency that underlies sweeping (but often necessary) historical generalisations. In Lesson 6, I experimented with the use of challenge

questions to encourage pupils to consider more complex inferences about perspective and meaning: the main task asked pupils to consider Theo’s reactions to the hardship and horror of the Battle of Passchendaele; whilst the challenge question asked them to analyse further the extent to which such horror became normalised to Theo.

I wanted my enquiry to build towards a rigorous outcome task that reflected its conceptual focus in a historical product clearly rooted in the discipline of history. I drew upon a chapter by Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau (1996) entitled ‘The French Soldier in the Trenches’ as a model from which to theorise a gold standard. In marking pupils’ essays, I firstly ranked impressionistically the pupils’ outcome tasks from 1-25, writing comments about the qualities that each possessed, in relation to emerging themes of progression that arose from my reading of their work with the gold standard in mind. From this, I developed a task-specific mark scheme to help theorise progression in this task and assign ‘grades’ to pupils’ work (presented in Table 3 below).

Task-specific Mark Scheme	
Grade	Description
Gold Standard	Numerous quotations selected to substantiate a thick picture of soldiers’ experience. Perspective (‘frame of mind’) strongly contextualised – constructions of meanings that soldiers assigned to the war closely linked and interwoven with descriptions of their particular context.
Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau, ‘The French Soldier in the Trenches’	Construction of perspective always grounded in well-selected evidence – lines from soldiers’ newspapers/letters to substantiate patterns of meaning identified; sometimes particularly revealing specific words/language are closely analysed. Complexities, nuances and apparent contradictions in meanings of the war to soldiers explored. Thick web of meaning created but also sense of what the overriding/most pervasive/ strongest patterns of meaning were.
7 Superb	Sophisticated inferences grounded in particularly insightful close analysis of numerous well-selected quotations, interwoven throughout with internal and external context to produce thick and complex constructions of meaning and describe coherent patterns of meaning.
6 Sophisticated	Sophisticated inferences grounded in close analysis of numerous well-selected quotations, substantiated with sometimes interwoven internal and external context to thicken more complex constructions of meaning.
5 Substantiated	Good inferences grounded in close analysis of well-selected quotations, substantiated with some use of internal and external context to thicken constructions of meaning. Generally sustained quality.
4 Solid	Generally good inferences related to selected quotations, with some limited use of internal and external context to thicken constructions of meaning. Might be inconsistent.
3 Simplistic	Simple, but generally sensible, inferences related to selected quotations about Theo’s perspective and the meanings he assigned to the war. May give some implicit sense of an awareness of Theo’s context, but little to no explicit contextualisation of inferences.
1-2	Some simple inferences drawn from selected quotations. May not give an implicit sense of awareness of context. May not be complete. Little to no contextual information used.

Table 3: Task-specific mark for outcome task developed from analysis of a work of academic history and pupils’ work

Findings

RQ1: What counts as historical empathy? – What counts as historical perspective?

I will start by briefly outlining why I discarded the term ‘historical empathy’ in favour of ‘historical perspective’. My mentor’s report for Lesson 3 of the enquiry commented that both he and (he suspected) pupils were unclear upon the conceptual focus of the enquiry and its direction; my evaluation of the lesson raised similar themes. Reflecting upon early lessons in the enquiry, I discerned that my problems with centring the enquiry upon historical empathy seemed to derive from my difficulty in including, and thus defining and clarifying for pupils, the word ‘empathy’ in concrete and rigorous historical activities. I speculated that this was because ‘empathy’ did not directly link to the historical product that pupils were engaged in creating. Indeed, in using other second-order concepts, a teacher can ask: ‘what caused X?’; ‘what was the consequence of Y?’; ‘to what extent did Z change?’ etc. The word empathy cannot be used in the same way. The word that I found myself using in tasks in Lesson 3 was ‘perspective’. The historical task pupils were engaged in was the construction of a historical perspective.

Having re-defined its conceptual focus as ‘historical perspective’ in Lesson 4, the direction of the enquiry became far clearer for myself, pupils and my mentor. Lessons from Lesson 4 onwards featured frequent use of the word ‘perspective’ embedded in concrete activities, giving the enquiry a clearer sense of conceptual and historical purpose. I therefore modified RQ1 in order to investigate my attempts throughout the enquiry to define and develop the concept of historical perspective in dialogue with its manifestations in pupils’ thinking. In Analytical Statement (AS) 1 and AS2, I outline two broad defining features of historical perspective that have emerged from my analysis of this dialogue.

AS1: Historical perspective is an approach towards reading the sources that forefronts inferring meanings from the perspectives of people in the past

In Lesson 4, I defined historical perspective to pupils as: ‘Attempting to construct the perspectives of people (individuals or groups) from the past. This involves analysing historical sources to try to work out what their world meant to them’. Defined as such, Ron’s reading of Theo’s letter in Lesson 3 did not have a conceptual focus on historical perspective: “*He’s talking about it like it’s a holiday or at least not typical of the First World War, such as going to Church. It seems nicer than*

you would expect”. He made valid inferences from the source, but his approach was to draw conclusions about what it meant from his own perspective – his view on what Theo’s experience resembled, what he judged typical of the First World War, and what he deemed as ‘nicer’. I noted this as a general theme among pupils in my evaluation of Lesson 3: ‘Pupils appeared more comfortable making inferences about the conditions that Theo faced or general comments about the nature of the lifestyle that he was living at this time, as opposed to making inferences about his perspective on those experiences’. Responses from Harry (“*He seems to believe everybody should do their part*”) and Charlie (“*He seems to feel he has a duty to himself*”) in Lesson 4 better reflect the cultural turn’s approach to sources (“the cultural turn asks not only ‘How it really was’ but rather ‘How was it for him, or her, or them?’”) and thus my theorisation of historical perspective. Embedding this approach to the sources formed a central part of subsequent lessons.

In the group interview at the end of the enquiry, Harry defined historical perspective as “*analysing the opinions and thoughts of people who were actually there*”. Meanwhile Poppy said that “*you split it into like two parts. You said what he actually thinks and what actually is happening*”. Thus pupils grasped that there was a distinction between using the sources to describe what happened or what it was like, compared with seeking to construct the meanings of an action/event/experience from a particular historical perspective. In sum, a theme emerges across the data: that with historical perspective, inferences are made from sources not primarily for the purposes of description, but thick description to construct webs of meaning from past perspectives; nor is this a homogeneous thick description as envisaged by Geertz (1973), but a differentiated thick description sensitive to particular perspectives as theorised by Levi (2001) and Rubin (2002).

AS2: Historical perspective is the application of contextual knowledge to ‘thicken’ inferences of meaning drawn from the sources

However, approaching the sources in this way is not by itself enough to produce thick description of a historical perspective. Doing so also involves the application of knowledge, for what Wineburg (2001) has termed the “weaving of context” (p.17). I identified that pupils’ paragraphs written in Lesson 4 felt ‘thin’ as few had attempted to contextualise their inferences about Theo’s perspective. This was reflected in the feedback and exemplar paragraphs given to pupils in Lesson 6. Without weaving inferences with contextual knowledge, the meanings inferred could be from any period in history – they need to be set in their particular context for historical thick description to be

constructed (Sharpe, 2001, p.36). Some pupils did display awareness of this, with Harry describing part of the task of historical perspective as “*constructing a world*”; and Sarah realising the importance of “*context outside of [the letters]*” for constructing historical perspectives “*because it was a very different time*”. However, this was only reflected to a limited extent in the outcome tasks of many pupils. It was whilst analysing these outcome tasks in relation to RQ2 that I started to pin down more precisely the nature of knowledge application required to support the construction of historical perspectives, as I explore below.

RQ2: What qualities in pupils' writing might help us to theorise progression in historical perspective?

As outlined in my research design, for RQ2 I systematically coded the data (pupils' outcome tasks) in relation to my analytical statements (AS). The figures in this section make visible this coding. The colours and underlining used to code pupils' outcome tasks correspond to my analytical statements thus:

AS3 – inferences drawn from the source

AS4 – internal context

AS5 – external context

AS6 – dense interweaving of context

AS3: All pupils approached the source to make inferences about Theo's perspective and the meanings that he assigned to his experience in the war

As per AS1, all pupils were able to approach the sources in such a way as to make inferences about Theo's particular perspective on his experience in the war. Even in what I deemed lower level responses, some pupils were able to make insightful inferences, such as Quentin's inference that Theo's description of those not fighting feeling like “*babies*” suggests that he was concerned with his reputation as a proper man (see Figure 1). Indeed, the initial inferences made in higher level responses often were not greatly different from those made by many others in the class, with Matilda, for example, inferring a similar link in Theo's mind between fighting and reputation (see Figure 2). The differentiating factor was primarily the “weaving of context” to substantiate,

elucidate and extend initial inferences from selected quotations – to make their analyses about *historical* perspective.

Whilst in Egypt during the Gallipoli Campaign (1915-1916), Theo appears to have felt guilt for not fighting and taking part in the war. On 10th June 1915 Theo wrote 'how sick we all are at staying here like babies'. The fact that he wrote 'babies' shows how that he think that other men will see them as cowards and not proper men. Also it shows how he wanted to fight and do his part, be a part of the action. Furthermore in the letter he writes 'The sand and flies and heat make you go mad almost'. This shows how he was sick of being here and was going mad, so fighting was probably the only way to put his mind off.

Figure 1: Lower-level response extract (Quentin)

Whilst in Egypt during the Gallipoli Campaign (1915-1916) Theo appears to have felt a sense of guilt about not fighting. In a letter to his mother, Theo wrote on 10th June 1915, 'We shall look like fools when we get back and say we saw the fighting but did nothing.' The fact that he saw himself as a 'fool' suggests he cares about his reputation and would feel bad when he gets back home, as he feels he didn't do his duty as a soldier. He further emphasises this by writing 'I do feel a poor soldier.' He may have felt this primarily because he was based in Egypt at the time where his main job was to look after mules, whereas his fellow soldiers and his friend Toby, were involved in the heavy fighting in Gallipoli. This included brutal trench warfare and a beach assault, which claimed the lives of 100,000 Allied soldiers. Also on 10th June, he wrote that him and other soldiers 'hanging back' 'should like to do our share'. This suggests he feels he would be letting down his fellow soldiers and his country by not fighting, but also feels he would be letting himself down. This may be because of widespread recruitment propaganda like posters etc that were encouraging primarily men (as society believed men were meant to live up to their role by fighting) to sign up to fight by inspiring feelings of guilt in them. Theo (and many others) had obviously fallen for this and therefore didn't want to look like 'cowards', 'fools', or 'babies' when they returned evident of his letter on 10th June.

Figure 2: Higher-level response extract (Matilda)

AS4: Some pupils 'thickened' constructions of meaning by using internal context

I use the term internal context to mean contextualisation within the particular source base: in this case when pupils contextualised inferences drawn from specific quotations of Theo's letters within a wider knowledge of his experience gained from other letters. Contextualising in this way allowed some pupils to substantiate their inferences from specific quotations by setting them within Theo's particular personal context: we can, for example, better understand Theo's feelings of inadequacy and cowardice at not fighting in the Gallipoli Campaign if we are told that his job was to "hang back" looking after mules, whilst being aware that his friend Toby was involved in heavy fighting (see Figure 3).

Whilst in Egypt during the Gallipoli Campaign (1915-1916), Theo appears to have felt a sense of guilt about not fighting. On 27th May 1915 he wrote in a letter to his mother: 'We all feel very sick about having to hang back like cowards'. The use of the word 'coward' suggests that Theo felt he was not doing his duty as a soldier. At this time, Theo and many other "Saturday Sailors" were based in Egypt during the Gallipoli Campaign, where their duties were mainly to look after the mules there. This is clearly not as advanced as the comparison of fighting on the front line like many other soldiers including Theo's friend Toby were. Theo was aware that Toby and others were enduring a lot of heavy fighting in Gallipoli, which also involved a beach assault which overall claimed 250,000 lives of Allied soldiers. As a result of this knowledge, Theo felt very guilty that he was not able to help properly in the war.

Figure 3: Molly uses internal context to substantiate and extend initial inferences drawn from the source

Internal contextualisation also allowed some pupils to explicitly trace patterns of meaning across Theo's experience of the war: when did the war mean wanting to fight to fulfil a sense of duty?; at what point did peace come to mean freedom?; in what ways did the overriding meanings that Theo appeared to assign to his experience in the war change?; what meanings continued throughout the war? Arnold's work (see Figure 4) provides an example of this. This reflects Rubin's assertion that cultural history involves "describing the trails of meaning ... to understand why and how and wherefore the meanings have attached, and thus to appreciate and spot those instances when the meaning is newly articulated, questioned, revealed or reinvested with meaning" (Rubin, 2002, p.90).

during the 100 days offensive (1918) ~~Thei~~ he believed the end of the war was near and was excited by it. On the 8th November 1918 (3 days before the end of the war) Theo wrote 'It hardly seems possible that we are once more to be free'. 'It hardly seems possible' shows how long and hard the war had been as if Theo cannot remember a time before the war. 'Free' gives the idea that he is in a prison and cannot escape or that the war seemed ~~neverending~~. Contrast that with 'we shall look like fools when get back and say we saw the fighting but did nothing' at the beginning of the war on the 10th of June 1915 and it shows how much Theo's opinion of the war has changed. In the space of just over three years he has gone from begging to fight to wish the war to be over and for the fighting to stop.

Figure 4: Arnold uses internal context to trace patterns of meaning across time

AS5: Some pupils 'thickened' constructions of meaning by using external context

Some pupils drew upon contextual knowledge not made explicit internally within Theo's letters. Such knowledge is crucial to situating Theo's perspective *historically*, enabling constructions of meaning to be rooted in his particular time and place: that, for example, Theo's guilt at not fulfilling

his ‘duty’ in the Gallipoli Campaign was situated within a context of massive-scale commitment of fellow compatriots and other Allied troops who endured brutal fighting and lost 250,000 men; and within a cultural context in which the concept of ‘duty’ was pervasive (see Figures 2 & 3).

Some pupils used external context to illuminate Theo’s perspective by attempting to situate the meanings he assigned to the war within broader generalisations of the attitudes of British soldiers (which pupils encountered through a subsequent popular history interpretation – a TV documentary) (see Figure 5). This reflects the potential of microhistory to interact with larger historical structures through revealing the ways in which individuals forged their own meanings or negotiated their own way through cultural contexts.

However, whilst Theo was on board the HMS Royal Oak in 1916-17, his feelings of guilt seem to have vanished, instead replaced with feelings of pride and purpose. In his letter on 8th June 1916, he wrote ‘We are now allowed to be much more explicit about the wonderful May 31st’. May 31st was the Battle of Jutland, a naval battle which resulted in a loss of 14 ships and 6000 men for the British, but one that Theo felt was a success for his ship, and not a shocking defeat even though the losses were greater than the Germans. This is clear through his letter on 8th June, in which he writes ‘I may say that the Royal Oak was in action and came out without a scratch’. This suggests he felt, 2 years into the war, that he has finally found his purpose and is proud that he has done his bit instead of feeling guilty that he hasn’t. However, his views on the Battle were different to what is subsequently generalised of soldiers at the time. Through his letters we realise that actually he is not overwhelmed by a desire to blow ships out the water, or that he has a duty to do for the King, or indeed that he felt the battle was a shocking defeat for the British.

Figure 5: Matilda situates Theo within broader generalisations

The strongest use of external context appeared to show awareness of what Lee and Shemilt (2011) have termed “forms of life”, the highest level in their empathy progression model, at which stage pupils “assume the existence of self-sustaining and perpetuating *forms of life* in which the products of social praxis, material culture and symbolic culture interpenetrate and interlock” (p.43). More simply, this appears to constitute an awareness that past societies were different worlds to today, with their own distinct cultural contexts (interlocking webs of significance and meaning). Pupils’ treatment of propaganda posters is particularly illuminating of the extent to which they grasped this: whereas most pupils who used the posters as external context attempted to judge their impact on Theo’s perspective as an isolated factor, despite not actually knowing if Theo had ever seen one (see Figure 2), Charlie used the posters as one symbolic cultural expression of the wider *mentalité* of the world in which Theo was a part, and appeared to have been shaped by (see Figure 6).

Theo Reid was involved in the Gallipoli Campaign; lasting from February 1915 to January 1916. The aim of the campaign was to capture the Dardanelles Strait, and brutal trench warfare and beach assaults meant heavy death tolls on both sides. Despite this, Theo was stationed in Alexandria, Egypt. He was not involved in the fighting and his role mainly entailed looking after animals. This meant that he felt guilt about not fighting. He wrote in June 1915: 'None of us are silly enough to say we want to fight, but still should like to do our share'. Theo is aware of the danger of fighting, however feels that he is not contributing to the war effort. Amongst those involved in the beach assaults was Theo's friend Toby and Theo was acutely aware of this. It was common ideology that soldiers had a duty to their country, their family and even their reputation; a belief heavily expressed in the propaganda posters. Perhaps Theo felt he would not be welcomed home as much as those involved in bloody battles, indeed, he writes 'we shall look like babies when we come home and say we saw the fighting but did nothing'. This suggests that Theo felt obliged to be able to retell stories of the war, rather than say he just saw fighting. Despite feeling regret, Theo is still suffering. Theo feels shamed at not fighting and enduring hardships, but is still enduring separate hardships, notably the heat, sand and tedium of his job. Theo is still contributing hugely to the war effort, arguably as much as soldiers in the thick of battle. He is also having a hard time; he says that life is 'hardly worth living'. He longs for peace, but remains pessimistic about the rumours of a treaty. Maybe the reason Theo wants to fight is because he thinks people at home will not admire him for looking after the mules.

**Figure 6: Charlie's sophisticated use of WW1 propaganda posters;
and dense interweaving of layers of context**

AS6: The strongest sections of responses densely interweaved inferences from close analysis with context

Weaving context with specific and grounded inferences of meaning produced descriptions of meaning that felt 'thick', substantial and historical, in which meanings initially inferred from and evidenced by individual quotations were given substance beyond isolated linguistic/content analysis and constructed as strands of larger historical webs of significance and meaning. Only a few pupils were able to do this, either in part or throughout their essays. Figures 2, 3 and 6 are examples of sections that densely and effectively weave context.

Fuzzy proposition

Progression involves thicker description: the weaving of layers of contextual knowledge to set meaning within a fuller context. Doing so involves knowledge of the particular source and relevant wider context; skill in interpreting and articulating the close (but appropriately tentative) links between different layers of context; and a disposition to recognise that meanings arise particular to their historical contexts, and thus need to be constructed inextricably in reference to them. My task-specific mark scheme (see Table 3 earlier) shows in rough terms how I construed progression in this task, and may contain themes relevant to progression in enquiries of a similar nature. However, as a

task specific mark scheme, it is not meant to be a generic progression model for all historical perspective enquiries, nor all enquiries centred upon the methods of cultural history. Indeed, the history attempted here is just one construal of microhistory, which is itself one facet of the diverse field of cultural history.

RQ3: What did pupils say they valued about this historical perspective enquiry?

AS7: Pupils said that they valued working with an authentic primary source, and implied that they felt the nature of the enquiry allowed them to interact with and construct history for themselves

Some pupils said in the questionnaire that they valued working “*firsthand*” with “*actual*”, “*real letters*” “*directly from*” “*a person who was actually there*”. In the interview, Harry expanded that he felt he was “*shown more than told, cos usually you’re told what they’re like, but this you can see what they’re like through what they write and what they say about their experiences*”. Sarah likewise appreciated seeing the source for herself, whereas she felt in other enquiries “*it’s usually us being told what other people said*”. Poppy went further and said that she felt like she was often told “*what to think*”; by contrast she said that this enquiry “*gave us like time*” to zoom in on the source and explore Theo’s experience. There appears to be a sense here that pupils felt more involved in the historical process: like they were constructing history for themselves as opposed to being ‘told’ history.

AS8: Some pupils said that they valued the personal nature of the enquiry because it gave them a sense of closeness to the experience

Some pupils said that they valued the personal nature of the enquiry and the source material. One theme sitting behind this (emerging from some pupils’ questionnaire responses) appears to be a sense of closeness to experiences in the past: that looking at a “*personal diary*”, staying “*connected to one person throughout*”, “*helped bring the experience of the war closer*” and helped pupils to “*really know what it feels*”. In the interview, the word ‘personal’ was used by pupils numerous times. Priya expanded that through this historical perspective enquiry “*you really get to put yourself into the shoes of Theo Reid and like really know how he actually feels like cos like rather than actually being told like Poppy said, we kind of, you can almost imagine or think what it feels like to be in his world*”. This appears at first sight to be somewhat ahistorical – closer to the empathy of

Luff (2000) focused on sharing feelings, than the empathy of Lee and Shemilt (2011) that explicitly rejected this as an aim of the concept. However, probed further to consider the question “to what extent do you think it’s possible to really know what it felt like?”, Priya responded that *“it’s quite impossible because like we don’t actually know how it felt being in his shoes but like you get an idea ... if someone wrote to you, ‘the trenches are muddy’ you would have an idea but you wouldn’t actually know how it feels like or what you would have done there”*. Sarah added: *“I think that even if we kind of simulated it with kind of the sound and the flashing, I think that we still couldn’t know what it felt like cos we’re not in danger ... also because we’re in a different century”*. Thus, this sense of closeness does not appear to be a blind ahistorical sense that we can genuinely share the feelings and experiences of people from the past. It is perhaps evidence that these pupils recognised (to use terms that Wineburg (2001) has employed to characterise “mature historical cognition”) both the “familiar” and the “strange” in the past: that Theo Reid was a person just like us; but one who lived in a different world and experienced things that we can seek to construct, but not experience for ourselves.

AS9: Pupils said that they valued analysing Theo’s perspective as a window into the complexity of an experience of war and the wider world of the time

Thus, as well as valuing historical perspective as closeness to the past, pupils also said that they valued it as a means of constructing understanding about the past. Responding to the questionnaire, a number of pupils said that they valued constructing Theo’s *“changing perspective”*, and how he had *“lots of different perspectives”*. Some pupils expanded that this helped them to *“understand the war”* and how people *“felt and lived at a time so different to ours”*, within the *“perspective and civilisation of the letters”*. Sarah expanded at interview that constructing a particular perspective in depth from the sources allowed her to see *“another side to the war”* beyond the stereotypes that had previously dominated her conceptions. Harry likewise valued the micro-historical approach for its insight in complicating the generalisation in the *“documentary we watched”* that *“all soldiers want to fight for king and country and that’s all they cared about”*. Sarah furthermore valued the weaving of *“context outside of [the letters]”* as an insight into a *“very different time”*, *“like the posters that we think might be a bit sexist today or quite shocking gave him an idea of what he wanted to do and things like that, but we wouldn’t know that”*.

Discussion

Drawing from a singular case, my propositions regarding the potential nature of historical perspective as a re-theorisation of empathy and a reflection of the approach of cultural history are necessarily tentative. Nevertheless, I hope I have demonstrated through this research that a concept resembling the empathy envisaged by Lee and Shemilt (2011), Wineburg (2001), and Barton and Levstik (2004), has the potential to be re-theorised rigorously when drawing upon rationales and methodologies from cultural history. In doing so, what I have termed ‘historical perspective’ could potentially provide a home for cultural history within school history. I would argue furthermore that empathy not only has the potential to be re-theorised, but that its intrinsic value is such that it merits re-theorisation (particularly in light of the cultural turn in academic history) as a distinct concept representing a mode of history with a unique approach and methodology. As argued earlier, the **disciplinary argument** for doing so is a strong one. This is not to suggest that cultural history is unproblematic or uncontested (see Mandler, 2004). Nevertheless, even Richard Evans, a staunch critic of the more radical postmodernist philosophy that cultural history is predicated upon, has praised cultural history itself for invigorating the discipline (Evans, 2000, p.248). Furthermore, Evans has argued that cultural history is not just distinct and innovative, but pervasive in current historical practice:

For the majority of younger historians, above all, the turn to cultural history has been decisive. This does not necessarily mean that they have completely rejected the theories, methods and objects of study favoured by political or social historians, but it does mean that they are viewing them and using them in a different way.

(Evans, 2002, p.9)

This leads into a **curricular argument**, for which I will outline two main components. First, that by drawing upon the discipline of history in combination with educational theorisation, disciplinary rigour can be translated into a clear conceptual focus for pupils in the classroom, as my ‘overview’ and my findings in relation to RQ1 seem to indicate. My findings in relation to RQ2 further suggest what rigorous engagement with the concept of historical perspective might look like. Nevertheless, what is also clear is that more work needs to be done in terms of theorising and developing practical approaches to pupils’ weaving of contextual knowledge in constructions of historical perspective. Indeed, whilst AS3 indicates that all pupils analysed the sources with a clear conceptual focus, AS4, AS5 and AS6 suggest that pupils grasped to significantly varying extents the relationship between inferences from the source and the wider historical context when attempting to construct past

perspectives. As a result, only a few pupils were able to construct in places what I would deem truly historical ‘thick descriptions’ of meaning from Theo’s historical perspective (AS6).

Second, that such history is currently underrepresented within school history. Interpreting the ideas of R.G. Collingwood, Chris Husbands has argued that:

in modern historical thinking, [Collingwood’s] dichotomy [between ‘propositional logic’ and ‘question and answer logic’] translates into two types of historical reconstruction: history ‘from the outside’ and ‘history from the inside’. The former is concerned with the analysis of, for example, demographic and social structures, or with political and constitutional events and their consequences. The latter is concerned with cultural, social and intellectual history, with the ways in which people in the past believed and thought.

(Husbands, 1996, p.60).

Analysed in these terms, the current second-order concepts focus overwhelmingly on history ‘from the outside’ – on, for example, the abstract processes of causation or change; or the similarities and differences between people, usually concerned with analysis of social structure or descriptions of conditions and experience, as opposed to the thick descriptions of perspective and meaning that characterise cultural history. Indeed, Mary Partridge’s unpublished case study identified that many ideas associated with cultural history, empathy, and ‘history from the inside’ currently appear to be located nebulously within the under-theorised and cross-conceptual idea of ‘sense of period’. As a result, she decided to theorise the extrinsic value of ‘sense of period’ in relation to the far more established concept of causation. Cultural history appears inherently to forefront ideas associated with ‘sense of period’, involving the “remaking of past worlds” (Rubin, 2002, p.86). Rather than being theorised disparately as a nebulous add-on to well-established concepts, my research has further convinced me that historical perspective (drawing from cultural history) deserves, and has the potential, to be theorised rigorously and coherently as a distinct curricular concept in its own right. If this is done, its extrinsic value could then be theorised in relation to a substantial and rigorously-defined intrinsic value and nature.

The potential extrinsic value of a rigorously-theorised concept of historical perspective leads me to the **wider historical consciousness argument**. AS8 and AS9 indicate that some pupils displayed aspects of “mature historical cognition” in their awareness of both the “familiar” and the “strange” in the past; that they had the disposition to question generalisations and stereotypes of the past; and that they viewed Theo as a person in a different world that needed to be constructed on its own terms, as opposed to a person to be judged in relation to a deficit model of the past (Wineburg 2001; Lee & Shemilt, 2011). Whilst I cannot say that these qualities in their thinking were formed as a

direct result of this enquiry, my findings suggest that pupils were at the very least challenged to engage strongly with these ideas. This could imply that historical perspective has the potential to challenge pupils to *explicitly* confront and wrestle with these issues of historical consciousness, as they strive to construct historical perspectives within past worlds.

Lastly, there is a **citizenship argument**, deriving from Barton and Levstik (2004), that pupils should care about the past in the present. RQ3 appears to suggest that pupils in this enquiry did care not only about the topic of study, but also the historical process that they were engaged in: that enabling pupils to approach an extended primary source in a manner inspired by the approach of cultural history generated “caring” within pupils – but crucially through rigorous engagement with the discipline of history.

Recommendations

There are multitudes of possible avenues for further work on the concept of historical perspective and the expansion of cultural history within school history. Indeed, even if in disagreement to my particular re-theorisation of empathy as historical perspective, I hope that the general lines of enquiry in terms of theorising a more prominent, coherent and rigorous curricular inclusion of the cultural turn within school history continue to be pursued.

I would be very interested to see more historical topics tackled from a cultural history perspective. Pupils in this enquiry were involved in a microhistory; however, microhistory is only one approach inspired by the cultural turn. On potentially a very different scale, historian Peter Mandler (2004) has identified, for example, the study of collective identities – those of race, nation, modernity – as an area in which the cultural turn has transformed the study of cultural and intellectual history. In drawing upon works of historical scholarship as guides, there exist a multitude of opportunities to expand the horizons of school history by exploring facets of history associated with cultural history (in its broadest sense) and influenced by the cultural turn – the material turn, the linguistic turn, gender history, the history of identity. What links these fields shaped by the cultural turn is their focus on the construction of the perspectives of past actors, and their assigning of meaning in dialogue with webs of culture and ideas, and their own lived experiences. Given the flourishing of such a rich and (within school history) relatively untapped historiography, perhaps the concept of historical perspective can provide a coherent means and an impetus to translate for the purposes of

curricular theorising and curricular inclusion the innovative approaches and diverse objects of study associated with the cultural turn. As a result, ideas shared by many proponents of empathy and cultural history – ideas which educational theorists and academic historians alike have deemed so valuable (a theme that I hope arises from my literature review) – could return to school history in a coherent, substantial and rigorous form to enrich pupils' historical educations.

Further research could be carried out on any aspect of historical perspective, for example: further defining its nature and theorising progression in light of pupil thinking in different contexts, and drawing from varied works of cultural history; or developing practical teaching methods that could help pupils to construct worlds and meanings and to interweave context. In particular, weaving context was the main weakness in a number of pupils' outcome tasks in this case study.

Seeing empathy as a somewhat slippery concept, Lee and Shemilt ended their 2011 article with the words of a Russian peasant proverb, characterising as treacherous the road to rehabilitating empathy: "The church is near; but the road is icy. The tavern is far; and I shall walk very carefully" (p.48). In turning to the discipline of history, however, we may find that there exists far firmer footing than Lee and Shemilt had envisaged.

References

- Altrichter, H., Feldman, A., Posch, P., & Somekh, B. (2008). *Teachers investigate their work: An introduction to action research across the professions* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Audoin-Rouzeau, S. (1996). The French soldier in the trenches. In H. Cecil & P. Liddle (Eds.), *Facing Armageddon: The First World War experienced* (pp.221-229). London: Leo Cooper.
- Barton, K., & Levstik, L. (2004). *Teaching history for the common good*. Mahwah, N.J.; London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Bassey, M. (1999). *Case study research in educational settings*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

- Beck, J. (2018). Beyond the present and the particular: Similarities and differences between Michael Young's and Charles Bailey's arguments for the public provision of liberating forms of education for all. In D. Guile, D. Lambert and M. Reiss (Eds.) *Sociology, Curriculum Studies and Professional Knowledge: New perspectives on the work of Michael Young* (pp.43-55). London: Routledge.
- British Educational Research Association [BERA] (2018). *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*, fourth edition. London. <https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018>
- Burke, P. (2008). *What is cultural history?* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Polity.
- Carr, E. (1961). *What is history?*. London: Macmillan & Co.; New York: St Martin's Press.
- Counsell, C. (2000). Editorial. *Teaching History*, 100, 2.
- Department for Education (DfE). (2013). *National curriculum in England: history programme of study – key stage 3*. Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/239075/SECONDARY_national_curriculum_-_History.pdf
- Evans, R. (2000). *In defence of history*. London: Granta Books.
- Evans, R. (2002). Prologue: What is history? – Now. In D. Cannadine (Ed.), *What is history now?* (pp.1-18). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fordham, M. (2016). Realising and extending Stenhouse's vision of teacher research: the case of English history teachers. *British Educational Research Journal*, 42(1), 135-150. DOI: 10.1002/berj.3192
- Foster, R. (2014). A world turned molten: helping Year 9 to explore the cultural legacies of the First World War. *Teaching History*, 155, 8-19.
- Foster, R., Burn, K., Counsell, C., & McConnell, C. (2018). Editorial. *Teaching History*, 172, 2.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays*. New York: Basic Books.
- Harding, V. (2015). *1665: London's Last Great Plague Transcript*. Retrieved from <https://www.gresham.ac.uk/lectures-and-events/1665-londons-last-great-plague>

- Husbands, C. (1996). *What is history teaching?: Language, ideas and meaning in learning about the past*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Koshy, V. (2005). *Action research for improving practice: A practical guide*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Lee, P. (2005). Putting principles into practice: understanding history. In M. Donovan & J. Bransford (Eds.), *How students learn: history in the classroom*. (pp.43-46). Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
- Lee, P. & Shemilt, D. (2011). The concept that dares not speak its name: Should empathy come out of the closet? *Teaching History*, 143, 39-49.
- Levi, G. (2001). On microhistory. In P. Burke (Ed.), *New perspectives on historical writing*. (2nd ed.) (pp.97-119). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Low-Bear, A. (1989). Empathy and History. *Teaching History*, 55, 8-12.
- Luff, I. (2000). 'I've been in the Reichstag': rethinking roleplay. *Teaching History*, 100, 8-17.
- Rubin, M. (2002). What is cultural history now? In D. Cannadine (Ed.), *What is history now?* (pp.80-94). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mandler, P. (2004). The Problem with Cultural History. *Cultural and Social History*, 1(1), 94-117.
- Reynolds, D. (2006). International History, the Cultural Turn and the Diplomatic Twitch. *Cultural and Social History*, 3(1), 75-91. DOI: 10.1191/1478003806cs053xx
- Sharpe, J. (2001). History from below. In P. Burke (Ed.), *New perspectives on historical writing*. (2nd ed.) (pp.25-42). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Stutchbury, K. (2017). Ethics in educational research. In E. Wilson (Ed.), *School-based research: A guide for educational students*. (3rd ed.) (pp.82-95). London: SAGE.
- Wineburg, S. (2001). *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Appendix 1

Questionnaire

1. What have you valued about the opportunity to work over a number of lessons with the primary source of Theo Reid's letters?
2. In particular, what have you found valuable or interesting about using historical perspective to explore Theo Reid's **perspective** of the Great War?
3. What about this enquiry have you found **most** valuable or **most** interesting? (This could be a particular lesson, an idea, an aspect of Theo's perspective, a certain approach to exploring history etc.). Please explain why.

Appendix 2

Pre-formulated questions to guide interview

- What struck you the most, or did you find most interesting, about Theo's experience of the Great War?
- Do you feel like the approach to history taken in this enquiry was any different from how you have studied history previously in school? If so, in what way?
- How have you found engaging with an extended primary source (Theo's letters)?
- What do you understand 'historical perspective' to be?