

RESTORING HISTORY

History's return to curriculum favour was a result of a combination of factors. There is some evidence to suggest that after the scathing indictment of history teaching, which emerged from Mary Price's 1966 research, history teachers had gone some way towards putting their house in order. By 1983 the percentages of pupils finding the study of history useful and interesting had risen substantially. At the same time as the quiet revolution which was taking place in some (but not all) history lessons, politicians of all parties were becoming increasingly interested in the potential of history for socialisation. It was as if they had belatedly realised that the way in which children were taught history could have an important bearing on the sort of citizens who would emerge from schools. Left-wing education authorities saw the opportunity to use history to instill 'politically correct' attitudes to cultural diversity, sexism, racism and equal opportunities; Baker, Naismith, Hiskett and others on the right

condemned the 'politicising' of history, whilst advocating a history which would inform pupils of the benefits and virtues of the British heritage of parliamentary democracy and "the spread of Britain's influence, for good, throughout the Empire, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries."

A very different view of the function of school history emerged in the early 1970s. In history, as in other subjects, increasing attention was paid to what Coreli Barnett has termed "education for capability", with more emphasis on active pupil involvement in learning, oracy and problem-solving skills, and on skills which might contribute to the employability of pupils on leaving school. Coltham and Fines "Educational Objectives for the Study of History" was one of the first moves in this direction, with its stress on "the participation of the pupil in learning history". The Schools Council History Project was the first major

curriculum initiative to put into effect this philosophy. It was accepted by an increasing number of those in the world of education that (as most of life's problems did not have a "provably right answer") history could be taught in a way that could equip pupils with skills for life and for work. Most of the teaching professing and those involved in education, whether supporters of Schools Council History or not, accepted that history, like other subjects, should help to equip pupils for employment and for life in general. Her Majesty's Inspectorate for history unequivocally supported this rationale for history;

A subject that insists on the critical evaluation of evidence - written,

pictorial and statistical - and encourages the analysis of problems and the communication of ideas, not only contributes to pupils' general education but develops skills and perceptions that increase the employability of young people.

Day-to-day contact with pupils and a sense of responsibility for their future inclines teachers intuitively to practical agendas; in general they have resented and attempted to resist the politicising of history, they have been suspicious of ideologues and see their function as trying to maximise pupils' chances of employment and a reasonable quality of life.

Extract from T.A. Haydn: HISTORY AND EMPLOYMENT: A FORGOTTEN AGENDA. Communications. International Society for History Didactics, Vol 15/1, 1994, pp. 48-58.

SOME ENCOURAGEMENT FOR HISTORY TEACHERS FROM THE BRITISH EXPERIENCE

Table 1		
Percentages of children taking the subject saying it was useful.		
	1968	1983
History	29%	53%
Foreign languages	41-45%	68%
Science	40-60%	72%

Table 2		
Percentages of children taking the subject saying it was interesting.		
	1968	1983
History	40%	61%
Foreign languages	27-34%	40%
Social studies	47-48%	57%

Fig. 1 Statistics taken from "Interesting and useful?", Aldrich R.E., (1987), in *Teaching History*, No. 47, Feb. 1987.