

**“It’s rote learning, but it gets the mark”: Exploring Scottish history teachers’ (dis)engagements with social justice education**

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## COVID-19 Impact Statement

I embarked on this journey in January of 2020, when reports of COVID-19 felt distant and the thought of a global pandemic had never crossed my mind as something that could even be possible. As the following weeks unfolded, I shifted to remote working, and, as I did not have a desk at home at the time, wrote the first draft of the literature review of this thesis while sitting on my living room floor. While the ways in which I worked changed drastically in those first few months, I acknowledge that my research plan benefited from lockdown restrictions. My original plan was streamlined through an online process of recruitment and data collection, allowing for easier access to participants in more remote areas of Scotland. This process also allowed for participants to schedule and reschedule their interviews at the last minute. For example, one participant emailed me to see if I was available “in fifteen minutes”. Knowing the nature of remote teaching and the increased personal and professional demands many people experienced during lockdown, I feel grateful that this participant utilised an unexpected opening in their schedule to participate in this study, at a time when they could have disconnected, logged off, or done absolutely anything else instead of yet another Zoom call. I found there to be practical and logistical benefits to shifting to an online process of recruitment and data collection, and this is not something I would have considered without the pandemic restrictions in place.

While the COVID-19 pandemic did not work against my research plan, it severely impacted on my health and my ability to work on this thesis at my usual level of energy. In August of 2022, I came down with a series of vague and non-descript symptoms, and, as an otherwise healthy and active person, I felt concerned when this illness did not resolve itself within a few weeks. After several months and a lengthy process of elimination, medical gaslighting, and uncomfortable exercises in advocating for myself, I have formally been diagnosed with post-acute sequelae SARS-CoV-2 infection (PASC), more commonly known as Long Covid. I seemingly woke up with a chronic illness one morning and have had to

adapt to drastic changes to my health and wellbeing while simultaneously managing the later stages of this study. This has led to an extended timeline for completing this thesis, as well as compounding personal, professional, and financial challenges. With extremely limited support from healthcare systems across two countries, and in an effort to manage symptoms on my own, I have learned more about the nervous system, gut microbiome, and spike proteins than I care to divulge. As an avid marathon runner and hillwalker, I used to find energy in exercise. However, due to unforgiving levels of fatigue, I no longer have access to these hobbies as a way to unwind and relieve stress, and I find myself in an ongoing process of grieving the life I used to have, wondering if and sincerely hoping that my current quality of life is temporary. At the time of submission, my symptoms are still ongoing, and it is with great appreciation and continued thanks to my supervisors that I have reached this stage.

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## **Declaration of Authenticity and Author's Rights**

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Signed:

Date: 08 June 2023

## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore how secondary school history teachers in Scotland engage with social justice, if at all. In doing so, this study seeks to, more specifically, explore their understanding of social justice and social justice education (SJE) as well as how this understanding might impact upon their teaching practice. Further, this study seeks to explore what history teachers in the Scottish educational context see as their role in the classroom and how this might emerge in their reporting of their practice. Three instruments for data collection were used, including participant-created (1) identity charts and (2) Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) question annotations, and (3) semi-structured interviews. Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) and Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) were drawn upon to analyse the data. The flexible nature of Reflexive Thematic Analysis and storied nature of Narrative Inquiry allowed for the exploration of the nuanced and complex nature of each participant's experiences. The findings suggest that there is a trend of using exams as a mechanism towards social justice, which leads to a status quo of a results-focused exam culture for some teachers in Scotland, reinforcing a contradiction or access paradox where teaching and learning revolve around exams as a way to access social mobility. In this way, what happens in the classroom is bound to exams and offers little or no opportunities to interrupt this cycle. The access paradox posits that by helping learners to access SQA qualifications, which are achieved through exams and are a dominant form of currency in the Scottish context, teachers help learners unlock opportunities within the confines of the existing educational system, without necessarily problematising or transforming it, and this, therefore, leads to perpetuating the value of SQA qualifications. However, if teachers deny learners access to SQA qualifications, they contribute to their marginalisation in a society that continues to place high value on SQA qualifications. Participants recognised that the status quo of a results-focused exam culture is problematic but placed blame on the system, claiming that there is nothing they can do about it other than work within it, and this indicates what they think their role is in the classroom: to teach to the test.

## Contents

<a href="#">COVID-19 Impact Statement</a> .....	1
<a href="#">Acknowledgements</a> .....	3
<a href="#">Declaration of Authenticity</a> .....	4
<a href="#">Abstract</a> .....	5
<a href="#">Table of Contents</a> .....	6
<a href="#">Lists of Tables and Figures</a> .....	9
<a href="#">List of Appendices</a> .....	10
<a href="#">List of Abbreviations</a> .....	11
<b><a href="#">Chapter 1 - Introduction</a></b>	
<a href="#">1.1 - Aims of the Study</a> .....	12
<a href="#">1.2 - Research Questions</a> .....	12
<a href="#">1.3 - Rationale</a> .....	13
<a href="#">1.4 - Theoretical Framework</a> .....	21
<a href="#">1.5 - Definition of Social Justice</a> .....	27
<a href="#">1.6 - Background of the Researcher</a> .....	27
<a href="#">1.7 - Overview of the Thesis</a> .....	30
<b><a href="#">Chapter 2 - Literature Review</a></b>	
<a href="#">2.1 - Introduction</a> .....	33
<a href="#">2.2 - Structural Inequity Leading to Structural Inequality</a> .....	33
<a href="#">2.3 - Growing Conservatism</a> .....	40
<a href="#">2.4 - Accountability and Standardisation</a> .....	45
<a href="#">2.5 - Defining Social Justice Education</a> .....	51
<a href="#">2.6 - Ranging Sociopolitical Emphasis</a> .....	57
<a href="#">2.7 - Challenges and Hesitations</a> .....	63
<a href="#">2.8 - Teaching for Social Justice in the History Classroom in Scotland</a> .....	70
<a href="#">2.9 - Teacher Identity</a> .....	82
<b><a href="#">Chapter 3 - Methodology</a></b>	
<a href="#">3.1 - Introduction</a> .....	94
<a href="#">3.2 - Research Questions</a> .....	94
<a href="#">3.3 - Approach to Research Design</a> .....	95
<a href="#">3.4 - Approach to Data Collection</a> .....	96
<a href="#">3.4.1 - Identity Charts</a> .....	97
<a href="#">3.4.2 - SQA Exam Question Annotations</a> .....	98
<a href="#">3.4.3 - Semi-Structured Interviews</a> .....	101

<u><a href="#">3.4.4 - Step-By-Step Account of Data Collection Process</a></u> . . . . .	102
<u><a href="#">3.4.5 - Interview Questions</a></u> . . . . .	103
<u><a href="#">3.4.6 - Pilot</a></u> . . . . .	104
<u><a href="#">3.4.7 - Data Collection During the COVID-19 Pandemic</a></u> . . . . .	105
<u><a href="#">3.5 - Participants</a></u> . . . . .	106
<u><a href="#">3.5.1 - Inclusion Criteria</a></u> . . . . .	108
<u><a href="#">3.5.2 - Exclusion Criteria</a></u> . . . . .	108
<u><a href="#">3.5.3 - Nature of Participants</a></u> . . . . .	108
<u><a href="#">3.6 - Approach to Data Analysis</a></u> . . . . .	113
<u><a href="#">3.7 - Analysing the Data</a></u> . . . . .	117
<u><a href="#">3.8 - Ethical Considerations</a></u> . . . . .	121
<u><a href="#">3.9 - Limitations</a></u> . . . . .	123
<u><a href="#">3.10 - Conclusion</a></u> . . . . .	125
<b><u><a href="#">Chapter 4 - Vignettes</a></u></b>	
<u><a href="#">4.1 - Introduction</a></u> . . . . .	127
<u><a href="#">4.2 - Chris</a></u> . . . . .	128
<u><a href="#">4.3 - David</a></u> . . . . .	129
<u><a href="#">4.4 - Beth</a></u> . . . . .	129
<u><a href="#">4.5 - Michael</a></u> . . . . .	130
<u><a href="#">4.6 - Len</a></u> . . . . .	131
<u><a href="#">4.7 - Shannon</a></u> . . . . .	132
<u><a href="#">4.8 - Catherine</a></u> . . . . .	135
<u><a href="#">4.9 - Anne</a></u> . . . . .	136
<u><a href="#">4.10 - Carrie</a></u> . . . . .	136
<u><a href="#">4.11 - Conclusion</a></u> . . . . .	138
<b><u><a href="#">Chapter 5 - Findings and Discussion</a></u></b>	
<u><a href="#">5.1 - Introduction</a></u> . . . . .	139
<u><a href="#">5.2 - Results-Focused Exam Culture</a></u> . . . . .	140
<u><a href="#">5.2.1 - Choices</a></u> . . . . .	142
<u><a href="#">5.2.2 - Skills Disconnect</a></u> . . . . .	157
<u><a href="#">5.2.3 - Phases Disconnect</a></u> . . . . .	162
<u><a href="#">5.3 - Blaming the System</a></u> . . . . .	172
<u><a href="#">5.3.1 - Blaming the SQA</a></u> . . . . .	173
<u><a href="#">5.3.2 - Recognising the System is Insufficient</a></u> . . . . .	176
<u><a href="#">5.3.3 - Rationalising the Education System</a></u> . . . . .	183
<u><a href="#">5.3.4 - Working within the system, but taking no action</a></u> . . . . .	189
<u><a href="#">5.3.5 - Examples of Action</a></u> . . . . .	192
<u><a href="#">5.4 - Ranging Definitions of Social Justice</a></u> . . . . .	199

<a href="#">5.4.1 - No Clear Definition</a> . . . . .	202
<a href="#">5.4.2 - Lower Sociopolitical Emphasis</a> . . . . .	206
<a href="#">5.4.3 - Higher Sociopolitical Emphasis</a> . . . . .	210
<a href="#">5.4.4 - Challenging the Status Quo and Encouraging Activism</a> . . . . .	212
<a href="#">5.4.5 - Making Content Relevant and Relatable</a> . . . . .	218
<a href="#">5.5 - Differing Views on Personal and Professional Identities</a> . . . . .	225
<a href="#">5.5.1 - Identities as Teachers</a> . . . . .	226
<a href="#">5.5.2 - Personal and Professional Identities</a> . . . . .	233
<a href="#">5.5.3 - The Activist Teacher Identity</a> . . . . .	237
<a href="#">5.6 - Narrow Representations of History</a> . . . . .	242
<b><a href="#">Chapter 6 - Conclusion and Recommendations</a></b>	
<a href="#">6.1 - Summary of Findings and Discussion</a> . . . . .	256
<a href="#">6.2 - Recommendations</a> . . . . .	262
<a href="#">6.2.1 - #NoWrongPath in a Results-Focused Exam Culture?</a> . . . . .	262
<a href="#">6.2.2 - Overhaul the Assessment System</a> . . . . .	264
<a href="#">6.2.3 - Stronger Focus on Social Justice</a> . . . . .	268
<a href="#">6.2.4 - More Activism from Teachers</a> . . . . .	271
<a href="#">6.3 - Implications and Concluding Thoughts</a> . . . . .	271
<a href="#">References</a> . . . . .	277
<a href="#">Appendices</a> . . . . .	309

## Tables and Figures

### Tables

1. <a href="#">Key Elements of Teaching for Social Justice</a> .....	54
2. <a href="#">Nature of Participants</a> .....	110
3. <a href="#">Reported Gender of Population and Sample</a> .....	111
4. <a href="#">Place of Qualification of Population and Sample</a> .....	111
5. <a href="#">Reported Age of Population and Sample</a> .....	111-112
6. <a href="#">Secondary school teachers with history as main subject taught by ethnicity and national identity</a> .....	112-113
7. <a href="#">Data Analysis Steps</a> .....	118-119
8. <a href="#">Outline of Codes Organised into Themes</a> .....	120-121
9. <a href="#">National Five Topics</a> .....	154
10. <a href="#">Progression Statistics</a> .....	170
11. <a href="#">Examples of GTCS Professional Standards Supporting Teachers in Acts of Resistance</a> .....	196

### Figures

1. <a href="#">The Four Capacities</a> .....	72
2. <a href="#">Kitson &amp; McCully's (2005) Risk-Taking Continuum</a> .....	91
3. <a href="#">SQA Exam Question from Workbook</a> .....	100
4. <a href="#">SQA Exam Question Annotation Instructions and Prompts from Workbook</a> 100-101	
5. <a href="#">Recruitment Process</a> .....	109
6. <a href="#">Approach to Data Analysis</a> .....	117
7. <a href="#">Tweet from @DYWScot</a> .....	264
8. <a href="#">Tweet from @sqanews</a> .....	264

## Appendices

A.	<a href="#">Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form</a> .....	309
B.	<a href="#">Call for Participants</a> .....	312
C.	<a href="#">Blank Workbook</a> .....	313
D.	<a href="#">Example of a Completed Workbook</a> .....	317
E.	<a href="#">Schedule of Potential Interview Prompts</a> .....	320
F.	<a href="#">Rationale for Instruments of Data Collection</a> .....	322
G.	<a href="#">Early Draft of Themes in Relation to the Research Questions</a> .....	324
H.	<a href="#">Mind Map of Themes</a> .....	326
I.	<a href="#">Ethics Application</a> .....	327
J.	<a href="#">Essay Question</a> .....	342
K.	<a href="#">Excerpt from Codebook</a> .....	344

## Abbreviations

ADL	Anti-Defamation League
BERA	British Educational Research Association
BGE	Broad General Education
BPoC/BAME	Black Person and Person of Colour/Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic
CfE	Curriculum for Excellence
CRER	Coalition for Racial Equity and Rights
DYW	Developing the Young Workforce
FOI	Freedom of Information
GIRFEC	Getting it Right for Every Child
GTCS	General Teaching Council for Scotland
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Ofsted	The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PGDE	Postgraduate Diploma in Education
PIS	Participant Information Sheet
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SATH	Scottish Association of the Teachers of History
SERA	Scottish Educational Research Association
SHANARRI	Eight wellbeing indicators (safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible, and included)
SHEG	Stanford History Education Group
SJE	Social justice education
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
UNCRC	United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child



## Chapter 1 - Introduction

*If you don't know history, it's as if you were born yesterday. And if you were born yesterday, anybody up there in a position of power can tell you anything, and you have no way of checking up on it - Howard Zinn in 'Howard Zinn: You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train' (Ellis & Mueller, 2004).*

### 1.1 Aims of the Study

This thesis seeks to explore how secondary school history teachers in Scotland engage with social justice, if at all. In doing so, this thesis aims to, more specifically, explore their understanding of social justice and social justice education (SJE) as well as how this understanding might impact upon their teaching practice. Further, this thesis aims to explore what history teachers in the Scottish educational context see as their role in the classroom and how this might emerge in their reporting of their practice. This thesis seeks to expand upon current SJE literature and break ground, contributing new knowledge to the field, by focusing specifically on the role of teachers in relation to social justice teaching within Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and the climate of high-stakes Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) examinations in the secondary school history classroom. While issues around the high-stakes nature of national exams are experienced widely across subjects, this thesis is original in that it focuses specifically on the experiences of secondary school history teachers in Scotland and recognises the utility of history as a discipline that aligns strongly with a social justice approach to teaching and learning. For clarity, the term *social justice* as used throughout this thesis is defined more explicitly in section 1.5 of this chapter.

### 1.2 Research Questions

This thesis explores the following research questions:

1. To what extent do history teachers in Scotland engage with teaching for social justice?
  - a. What do they understand by social justice and social justice education?
  - b. In what ways does this understanding impact upon their reported

teaching practice?

2. In relation to the Scottish educational context, what do history teachers see as their role in the classroom and how does this emerge in their reporting of their practice?

### **1.3 Rationale**

This research is necessary because the vision of Scotland's CfE (Scottish Executive, 2004) does not appear to align with the demands of SQA exams. This apparent misalignment, as this thesis explores, impacts upon the ways in which history is taught in Scotland. In this way, a social justice approach to teaching and learning as well as opportunities to capitalise on the social utility (Kitson & McCully, 2005) and transformative potential of the discipline of history (Santiago & Dozono, 2022), both of which align with the vision of the CfE, seem to be sacrificed as a way to prepare learners for the demands of SQA exams. While a social justice approach to teaching and learning is often a big focus of teacher education programmes, this focus does not appear to translate into the history classroom in Scotland because of SQA exam demands. As a result, this thesis seeks to explore this concerning trend as well as history teachers' experiences, beliefs, values, and identities to gain a deeper understanding of teaching for social justice within the Scottish context, where research has been limited so far.

The research questions in this study are important to explore because social justice is clearly situated in Scotland's CfE (Scottish Executive, 2004) and General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) Professional Standards for Teachers (GTCS, 2021), yet appear contradictory to the high stakes nature of assessment in Scotland. I chose to focus this study on the experiences of teachers because teachers are uniquely positioned to fight injustice (Goodson, 2011). Similarly, I chose to focus this study on the subject of history because the history subject area is often identified as a prime location for grappling with injustices of the past and their effects on the present and future (Santiago & Dozono, 2022). Debates related to racial and gendered justice in the USA, UK, and even postcolonial contexts take questions about national histories as necessary in Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, pride,

and decolonial movements. This can place history teachers in a unique position when it comes to social justice. Further, this research resonates with ongoing issues in Scottish education as several reports have recently been published calling into question the alignment of assessment in Scottish secondary schools with the vision of the CfE, where education is explicitly positioned as a means to address social justice, inclusion, and equity (Hayward, 2023; Muir, 2022; OECD, 2021; Shapira et al., 2023; Stobart, 2021). This study incorporates the findings of these recent reports and adds the experiences and voices of the secondary school history teachers in Scotland who participated in this study.

Further, I started this study in January of 2020 and, along the way, it has been difficult to avoid the pertinent reasons as to why a social justice approach to teaching and learning is necessary. The world has seen a strengthening of neoliberal tendencies over the past several years (Giroux, 2020), that is, increased trends toward competition and privatisation with an emphasis on individual autonomy and limited government involvement. Without trying to oversimplify the events of the past three years, here, I attempt to outline several of them in relation to a need for SJE as a response to neoliberalism. Firstly, in the early days of this study, Australia was experiencing a catastrophic wildfire season, signalling a critical junction in the fight against the growing threat of climate change (Yeung, 2021). In the same month, the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the USA, who was impeached twice during the course of this study, had a top-ranking Iranian military official assassinated, increasing tension between the two countries and leading to a credible threat of nuclear war (Baker et al., 2020).

By February of 2020, the world was consumed by the rapidly spreading COVID-19 pandemic. Its spread highlighted the interconnectedness of our world and ushered in widespread fear mongering and racist rhetoric, which can be exemplified by the then-president of the USA, Donald Trump, referring to the deadly virus as the “Kung Flu” (Wise, 2020). Placing the economy over human lives, people in positions of power failed to act in responsible and evidence-led ways, costing more than 6.9 million deaths worldwide (World Health Organisation, 2023).

Importantly, implications of the COVID-19 pandemic are still ongoing and lives around the world continue to be lost to the virus and severely hindered due to the widespread yet poorly understood effects of so-called *Long COVID*. The pandemic also brought to the surface systemic issues and disparities that are by no means new and this revealed out of touch realities, which can be summarised by a billionaire indicating the perils of their lockdown experience by sharing a photo of their superyacht on social media (Freeman, 2020).

The then-novel coronavirus spread as quickly as the mis/disinformation, with the president of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, for example, claiming it was treatable with vodka and saunas (CNN, 2020). More dangerously, the then-president of the USA publicly pondered the use of disinfectant as a treatment for the deadly virus (BBC, 2020). Suggestions of ineffective and potentially dangerous treatments for the virus from people in positions of power aside, much of the world seemed to walk a tightrope between stopping the spread of the virus and keeping the economy open for business, highlighting the highly capitalist nature of the globalised world, with one elected official in Texas claiming “There are more important things to do than living” (Crump, 2020) when asked about easing lockdown restrictions in the midst of a highly transmissible and deadly pandemic. Similarly, Brazil’s then-president referred to the then-novel coronavirus as a “little flu” (Paton Walsh et al., 2020) and later stated:

Everything is about the pandemic nowadays. We have got to stop with this. I’m sorry for the dead, I’m sorry, but we’re all going to die one day. Everybody here is going to die. We have to stop being a country of sissies (Ostrovsky & Lyons, 2021).

In their remarks, the lieutenant governor of Texas, Dan Patrick, and the then-president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, summed up the essence of neoliberalism and its profit before people disposition. Their remarks also indicate the need for a social justice approach to teaching and learning as a response to the dangers of neoliberalism.

The pandemic has disproportionately affected racial and ethnic minorities (United Nations, 2020) and has also led to severe strain on healthcare systems and workers around the world, with interruptions to essential health services (World Health Organisation, 2021). The general population of Britain watched from isolation while people in positions of power flouted the very lockdown restrictions they imposed. While many people mourned the loss of loved ones alone, with limited attendance at funerals, weddings, and births, elected officials attended Downing Street parties at the taxpayer's expense (BBC, 2022). This came alongside physical manifestations of Brexit, including petrol and food shortages (Ziady, 2021) throughout Britain and little governmental stability or continuity in the form of three prime ministers and several cabinet shake-ups in three years. Additionally, in a move that potentially breaks human rights laws, the UK's Conservative Government's proposed response to an alleged influx of asylum seekers has been to send them to Rwanda (BBC, 2023).

In May of 2020, police in Minnesota killed George Floyd, sparking horror and outrage alongside expressions of frustration and lack of surprise that yet another unarmed Black person was innocently and senselessly killed by police in the USA. This act of police violence led to renewed energy in Black Lives Matter movements around the globe, prominently seen in the form of protests and rallies (Westerman et al., 2020). That same summer, protesters in Bristol toppled the Edward Colston statue (Farrer, 2020), condemning displays of the legacy of slavery and calling for a reassessment of other public displays of colonialism. This renewed energy was also tied to the release of information about the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 and the fact that compensation payment to enslavers, companies, and people with a history of enslavement was only completed in 2015 (HM Treasury, 2018). All of this stands to demonstrate the importance of knowing history, how events in the past lead to conditions in the present, and calls for a collective examination of how history is taught.

While the events of and since 2020 have put on an obvious display of the dangers of neoliberalism, this is by no means a pandemic-specific trend. Hunter and

Cassidy (2019) outline an “ultra-conservative” and “socially regressive shift” in Scotland evidenced by recent political events, including Britain’s 2016 Brexit referendum and 2019 general election (p. 7). This political climate is characterised by a rise in anti-intellectualism, changes in voter behaviour, low voter turnout, dismissal of scientific evidence, and the appointment of under-qualified people into positions of power (Hunter & Cassidy, 2019). These trends can be seen beyond Scotland and the rest of Britain, as the world has seen a rise in Fascist rhetoric, with the electoral successes of several far-right candidates either rising to or maintaining power, often running on anti-gay, anti-immigrant, and antisemitic platforms. Recent examples include America’s 2016 presidential election; Austria’s 2016 contested and annulled run-off election between the Austrian Green Party’s Alexander Van der Bellen and the far-right Austrian Freedom Party’s Norbert Hofer; Hungary’s 2018 re-election of Viktor Orban, who ran on an anti-immigration platform; and the contested integrity of Bolivia’s 2019 presidential election. Specifically, during the timeline of this study, the world saw Poland’s narrow 2020 re-election of anti-LGBTQ+ president Andrzej Duda, the 2020 re-election of Alexander Lukashenko in Belarus, Italy’s 2022 election of far-right Giorgia Meloni, and the 2022 election of Bongbong Marcos in the Philippines.

Concerningly, Lukashenko has been the president of Belarus for nearly thirty years and won re-election in 2020 with nearly 80% of the vote, despite massive protests against him (Makhovsky et al., 2020). Lukashenko has gone on record calling himself “the last and only dictator in Europe” (Balmforth, 2012) and has claimed “better a dictator than gay” (Kelly, 2012). Also of concern, Bongbong Marcos is the son of the former president of the Philippines, and their family is known for widespread corruption (Evans, 2022). Marcos was endorsed by the party of the incumbent president (Morales & dela Cruz, 2022), Roderigo Duterte, who once said, “Just because you're a journalist, you are not exempted from assassination if you're a son of a bitch” (Mogato, 2016).

It is important to note that some of these elections have included an upswing in voter turnout, but have been characterised by divisive campaigns,

narrow margins, and questions over the integrity of results. For example, the attempt by a sitting president to undermine the results of the 2020 presidential election in the USA culminated in a president-incited, violent, and deadly insurrection in the form of an attempted coup in early 2021. This happened in a similar fashion in early 2023 when supporters of Brazil's defeated Bolsonaro stormed government buildings after the far-right incumbent was defeated at the polls in late 2022.

With several electoral successes for far-right candidates around the globe, there continues to be attacks on democratic processes to ensure their power is maintained. For example, several states throughout the USA have seen voter suppression laws come into effect in the wake of the 2020 election (Harte, 2022). Also in 2020, the *1776 Commission* for so-called America-first teaching gained support among conservatives in the USA (Evelyn, 2021). Echoes of this rhetoric rippled throughout the UK when the then Education Secretary, Nadhim Zahawi, said learners should not be critical of the prime minister (Stone, 2022). This interestingly came at the same time as renewed attention and scrutiny on the then-prime minister's wrongdoings and corruption regarding COVID-19 protocols. Further, a teacher in Scotland was reportedly suspended after discussing the monarchy in the wake of Queen Elizabeth II's passing (Brawn, 2022). Several states in the USA banned (Trotta, 2022) and even burned (Yang, 2022) books, with a local school board in Tennessee banning *Maus*, a graphic novel depicting the Holocaust from a Jewish perspective (Associated Press, 2022). In addition to banning books, several state legislatures around the USA have taken steps towards banning the supposed teaching of critical race theory (Schwartz, S., 2021). For example, in 2023, on her first day in office as the governor of Arkansas, Sarah Huckabee Sanders signed the Executive Order to Prohibit Indoctrination and Critical Race Theory in Schools (Pengelly, 2023). Further, in a manifestation of manufactured outrage, fears of critical race theory became a leading issue in Virginia's 2022 gubernatorial election (Barakat & Rankin, 2022). Conservative leaders in the USA banned masks, books, and critical race theory in a country where school shootings are the norm, and

restrictive abortion laws came from the same party that simultaneously went on about 'choice' when it came to COVID-19 vaccines. All of this stands to demonstrate the need for a social justice approach to teaching and learning, but, ironically, it is the calls against a social justice approach to teaching and learning that remind us exactly why it is necessary.

Concerningly, claims from one elected official in the USA blaming catastrophic wildfires on "Jewish space lasers" recently resurfaced (Schwartz, M. S., 2021). While unpacking this statement is entirely outwith the scope of this study, it demonstrates the outrageous lack of accountability people in positions of power have and calls into question just how these people come to be in these positions. This also indicates the ways in which a lack of historical context and knowledge enables the production and spread of mis/disinformation. Importantly, the resurfacing of this comment comes as the world has seen a rise in antisemitism. According to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), in 2021 the USA had its highest number of recorded antisemitic incidents since the ADL started tracking data in 1979 and this is 34% higher than the number of incidents reported in 2020 and follows a five-year upswing in reported antisemitic incidents (ADL, 2022). Further, antisemitic incidents have grown significantly around the world, as, according to the Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry's 2021 Antisemitism Worldwide Report, antisemitic incidents have been on the rise globally. For example, like the USA, the UK also saw a 34% increase in antisemitic incidents in 2021, with a staggering 78% increase in incidents involving assault (The Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry, 2022). These statistics demonstrate a concerning trend yet seem sadly unsurprising when considered alongside even isolated examples of antisemitic rhetoric and book bans from people in positions of power.

This is far from an exhaustive list of events and several major news stories of scandal, corruption, violence, and oppression have been omitted due to sheer volume - it offers more of a highlight reel of push notifications from major news outlets from the past three years. However, all of these events have taken place



since starting this study in the early days of 2020 and serve as overwhelming evidence that a social justice approach to teaching and learning is necessary in an effort to combat these trends. In this way, it is clear that this thesis is timely and relevant because these conservative trends around the globe contribute to education systems that serve the needs of people in positions of power by limiting learners in developing the skills and dispositions required to navigate and challenge the unjust world around them, thus maintaining the status of those in power. The events of the past three years are highlighted by mis/disinformation, censorship of what can and cannot be taught and discussed in the classroom, and lack of accountability for the words and actions of people in positions of power. The examples are numerous and are of serious concern when considered alongside, for example, a global increase in antisemitic incidents. Throughout this thesis, I argue that the discipline of history as well as a social justice approach to teaching and learning can act as a response to the confines of the neoliberal world in which we currently live.

Recent years, though, have also provided examples of renewed energy in justice-seeking movements, for example, with large turnouts at Black Lives Matter rallies in the summer of 2020. Similarly, in May of 2021, protestors in Glasgow surrounded an immigration enforcement van for nearly eight hours, successfully preventing the detention by the Home Office of two asylum seekers (Brooks, 2021). Additionally, Finland published a national media literacy policy, which is integral to and positioned across their national curriculum in an effort to combat mis/disinformation (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019). Further, the Pew Research Center reported that nearly two-thirds of eligible voters in the USA voted in the 2020 presidential election, and this is an increase of around seven percent compared to the 2016 presidential election, and largest turnout since it started collecting data in 1980 (DeSilver, 2021). While hopeful, this energy is not enough to mitigate the unrelenting nature of neoliberalism and democratic processes are still seemingly at stake. Therefore, a social justice approach to teaching and learning history is required as a way forward. Teachers, especially history teachers, are in a

unique position to challenge all of this and help learners develop the skills and dispositions to engage productively in problematic issues of power. Given the concerns raised above, a social justice approach to teaching and learning can be a response to the threats posed by these trends and act as a necessary tool to combat growing conservative trends around the world and work towards a more socially just future.

History is important. We are constantly inundated with information in our daily lives, so it is therefore important that we are able to sort through this information and determine what is reliable. The disciplinary practices of historians, while challenging, can be pivotal in this task. Importantly, I am not arguing for everyone to become a historian. However, to understand society today, we can look to the past to see how issues of power and oppression are historically rooted, and engage in the practices of historians to mine the information surrounding us. If we do that, then we can more easily trace how we got here today and be better equipped to identify and challenge injustice when we see it. In this way, a critical lens on the study of history/history education is a means to tease out how both the discipline and the practices to which the discipline may be bound, are also located in systems of power (Dozono, 2021). For social justice, this lens to teaching history is essential because it can help learners to learn about oppression, inequitable conditions, and justice-seeking movements throughout history, and equip learners with the skills and dispositions to identify and challenge oppression and transform inequitable conditions in society today.

#### **1.4 Theoretical Framework**

This study is interpretivist in nature in that it seeks to foreground the experiences and stories of the participants in order to contribute to understanding the ways in which history teachers in Scotland might engage with SJE. Importantly, while this study does not utilise critical theory in its purest form, it is informed by the thinking behind critical theory, specifically critical pedagogy, which this section details. Critical pedagogy, as this section explores, is rooted in critical theory and

critical research, and the histories, trajectories, and ideological underpinnings of critical theory, critical research, and critical pedagogy have become entangled over time. As such, the overview of each field also necessarily works across these areas in organic ways. Critical theory seeks to problematise existing hegemonic structures, practices, and ways of thinking with the intention of changing them. In this way, critical theory is “concerned not merely with how things [are] but how they might be and should be” (Bronner, 2011, pp. 1-2). Unlike traditional, positivistic research, which is grounded in the objectivity and detachment of the researcher (Cohen et al., 2017), critical research, which is grounded in critical theory, does not seek to be neutral and recognises that social systems, practices, and artefacts are never neutral. Instead, critical theory operates from the understanding that society is unjust and “Critical researchers frequently announce their partisanship in the struggle for a better world” (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 164). This means that critical research is driven by a quest for a more socially just world by seeking to transform existing structures in society that reinforce and perpetuate injustice. Further, critical research is “unembarrassed by the label ‘political’” (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 164). This means that research informed by critical theory is not objective and makes no attempt to be politically neutral.

Critical research is rooted in several assumptions about the ways in which societies operate. Firstly, it is assumed that power relations impact upon thought and are socially and historically constructed, and, in this way, it is assumed that facts cannot be isolated from a society’s dominant values (Kincheloe et al., 2011). Further, critical research, which is steeped in Marxist roots, assumes that society is influenced by the polarising nature of capitalism (Kincheloe et al., 2011). Through this polarisation, it is assumed that some groups in society maintain a status of privilege while other groups endure a status of oppression, which is defined by Othering or an Us-versus-Them rhetoric (Kincheloe et al., 2011). Existing social structures and hierarchies in society are thus protected, reinforced, and perpetuated by mainstream thought and institutions, including schools. This can be seen through Marx’s (1859/1971) base-superstructure whereby the base, or mode

of production, reinforces the superstructure, or anything not related to production. Critical research, operating under these assumptions, plays a crucial role in interrupting hegemonic practices that continue to divide society, as “The critical method becomes the tool by which the servants and the slaves—and the masses of the proletariat—realize their power as producers of the particular order from which the lords and masters alone genuinely benefit” (Bronner, 2011, p. 39). This means that critical research provides opportunities to interrupt and transform these unjust practices.

It is important to outline, albeit briefly, the background of critical theory and the historical context in which it emerged. Critical theory, which rejects objectivity and considers knowledge within its social context (Horkheimer, 1937/1976), emerged from Marxism during the interwar years, at a time when “the world was in urgent need of reinterpretation” (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 46). Through the Institute for Social Research, also known as the Frankfurt School, critical theory developed in response to the “practical problems” following the Russian Revolution (Bronner, 2011, p. 9). Considered to be dangerous to the existing power structure, members of the Frankfurt School were forced out of Nazi Germany, relocating to Geneva and later America. According to Darder et al. (2009), “In the early years, the Frankfurt theorists were primarily concerned with an analysis of bourgeois society’s substructure, but with time their interest focused upon the cultural superstructures” (p. 7). This turn to neo-Marxism acts as an extension of Marxism, seeking to include an understanding of the impact of culture rather than just economics. Developing through this turn, “Critical pedagogy is shaped by a neo-Marxist critique of capitalism that views education as part of a wider effort to bring about a radical transformation of the American political and economic system” (Stanley, 2007, p. 371). This means that education can play a part in confronting the confines of neoliberalism. Linking this to the Scottish context and the present study, this idea resonates with the vision of Scotland’s CfE (Scottish Executive, 2004) where education is explicitly positioned as a means to address social justice, inclusion, and equality. This will be explored in more depth in Sections 2.8 and 2.9 of this thesis.

Importantly, writing in the wake of World War II, specifically the horrors of Auschwitz, Adorno (1963/2005), a member of the Frankfurt School, identifies education as fundamental to preventing the rise of authoritarianism, highlighting critical self-reflection (p. 193) and “concrete possibilities of resistance” (p. 203) as hallmarks of an education that opposes authoritarianism. Further, according to Kincheloe et al. (2011), “The oppression that characterizes contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable” (p. 164). In this way, education can maintain and perpetuate existing social hierarchies. Traditional education, where learning is passive and reduced to the memorisation and regurgitation of information and where teachers transmit information and act as gatekeepers of knowledge, reproduces the status quo and protects the interests and positions of people in power. This “banking model” of teaching and learning, where “education thus becomes an act of depositing” (Freire, 1970, p. 45) does little to interrupt the status quo and therefore maintains existing structures in society. However, through critical pedagogy, education can instead play a major role in transforming society and can be an emancipatory tool for young people. In other words, the oppressed “must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform” (Freire, 1970, p. 23).

Emerging from and ideologically underpinned by critical theory, critical pedagogy is the application of critical theory in the classroom whereby teachers “have critical perspectives on the relationship between schooling and societal inequities, and a moral commitment to correcting those inequities through the classroom and school activities” (Groenke, 2009, p. 3). Further, according to McLaren and Bosio (2022), “Critical pedagogy challenges both teacher and students with queries about how power plays a role in their learning experience and examines how it favors some and not others” (p. 1). Critical pedagogy is thus a response to injustice perpetuated by schools whereby approaches to teaching and learning become emancipatory tools that aim to interrogate existing social structures, confront injustice, and interrupt the status quo. Like critical theory,

"Critical pedagogy attempts to understand how power works through the production, distribution, and consumption of knowledge within particular institutional contexts and seeks to constitute students as informed subjects and social agents" (Giroux, 2010, p. 717). Unlike the traditional, banking model of education, through critical pedagogy, a teacher is "a transformative intellectual who does not tell students what to think but who learns to think dialectically and who develops a critical consciousness aimed at social transformation" (McLaren et al., 2004, p. 138). This means that, through critical pedagogy, a teacher does not spoon feed information to learners, but rather helps learners think and act in ways that contribute to a more socially just society. Critical consciousness, or *conscientização*, is "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and [taking] action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 1970, p. 9). In this way, it is proposed that action leads to transformation. Further, according to Giroux (2010), a goal of critical pedagogy is "for students to be able to reflectively frame their own relationship to the ongoing project of an unfinished democracy" (p. 717). For example, students can reflect on their own experiences and develop knowledge and skills to contribute to a more socially just society.

Critical pedagogy has evolved by integrating other theoretical work, including post-structural and feminist theories as well as critical race theories and postcolonial theories (Weiner, 2007, p. 57). This evolution reflects "how new times evoke new manifestations of power, new consequences, and new ways of understanding and resisting them" (Kincheloe, 2004, pp. 45-46). This means that critical pedagogy is continuously evolving in response to changes in society and has come to reflect a deeper understanding of several forms of oppression and the ways in which they intersect, including "class, race, gender, sexual, cultural, religious, colonial, and ability-related concerns" (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 49).

Education itself is a "deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge, values, desires, and identities are produced within particular sets of class and social relations" (Giroux, 2011, p. 159). This means that education is never neutral. Just as the banking method of teaching and learning, which operates to

benefit the interests of people in positions of power, is not neutral in its attempt to stifle the voices and knowledge of young people, critical pedagogy is not neutral because it aims to teach young people how to be critical of official knowledge and to develop tools to transform society in ways that interrupt existing social hierarchies and institutions. In this way, critical pedagogy becomes a response to the “danger that subject matter will be accepted as appropriate educational material simply because it has become customary to teach and learn it” (Dewey, 1916, p. 210).

As such, critical pedagogy in the history classroom provides one means to examine how injustice and power relations in society today are historically rooted. For example, learners can trace present-day voter suppression laws in the USA back to the transatlantic slave trade, chattel slavery, and post-emancipation Jim Crow laws. This makes teaching history a powerful tool in the fight against injustice and oppression. In this way, according to Dewey (1916), “The true starting point of history is always some present situation with its problems” (p. 214). There are several commonly taught topics in history classrooms in Scotland that can provide platforms for this examination. For example, in the *Free at Last? Civil Rights in the USA, 1918-1968* topic, the present-day struggle for civil rights can be seen not in isolation or as an event in history that has ended, but as an ongoing practice of justice-seeking and a continued struggle spanning generations through a manifestation of racist legislation fuelled by deeply rooted racist rhetoric in the USA and how this has affected the ways in which race and racial politics have been conceived across the world. Parallels can be drawn here to student marchers in Northern Ireland modelling their 1969 walk from Belfast to Derry on the march from Selma to Montgomery, to South Africa’s anti-apartheid movement, and to India’s independence movement. Additionally, the *Atlantic Slave Trade, 1770-1807* topic provides opportunities to examine the legacy of Britain’s imperial past and dominance in the slave trade and how this legacy permeates society today, commonly seen in the form of statues and street names honouring the beneficiaries of nearly three hundred years of human trafficking and forced labour, as well as in

the maintenance of racism, classism, and poverty. Further, the mechanics of schooling, including routines and behaviour expectations can be understood through its historical roots as a product of the Industrial Revolution in the *Changing Britain, 1760-1914* topic. This can be seen through the “machine-like” characteristics of the traditional or banking model of education, where emphasis is on “rigid-uniformity” as well as outcomes and measurement (Dewey, 1916, p. 141). These topics provide opportunities to not only trace injustice from its historical roots to its present-day manifestations but also to challenge these present-day manifestations. Drawing on critical pedagogy as integral to SJE, this interpretivist study aims to highlight the experiences and stories of participants as a way to explore how secondary school history teachers in Scotland might engage with SJE.

### **1.5 Definition of *Social Justice***

The term *social justice* appears many times throughout this thesis. One of the perceived problems with social justice that is evident throughout the literature is that the term *social justice* can be difficult to define and therefore difficult to put into practice in the classroom (Dover, 2013a). Throughout this study, I have worked to create a definition of *social justice* and, for clarity and consistency, this thesis works from this definition.

*Social justice* is the process of working towards an equitable society where everyone has social, economic, and political opportunities. As such, social justice in teaching history showcases marginalised voices and equips learners to identify examples of oppression and resistance throughout history, present-day manifestations of oppression and resistance, as well as the skills and dispositions to develop a questioning attitude and challenge oppression, thus engaging in the process of working towards a more equitable society.

### **1.6 Background of the Researcher**

While the experiences of neoliberal education systems are experienced across subject areas, I chose to focus on history teachers because it draws upon my



background and interest in history teaching. At the same time, I am cognisant that my personal and professional experiences influence the ways in which I see the world. As a researcher, it is important to engage in reflexivity, or the “purposeful, often challenging reflection about ourselves, how we identify, and what we take for granted as true or right” as a way “to be transparent about how our backgrounds shape both the process and results of our research” (Call-Cummings & Ross, 2019, p. 4). In identifying my positionality, I acknowledge and work to “locate [my] views, values, and beliefs about the research design, conduct, and output(s)” (Holmes, 2020, p. 2). I identify as a white, cisgender, heterosexual woman who is able-bodied and neurotypical. I consider myself to be privileged in my socioeconomic status and access to education. I was raised Catholic and English-speaking in a part of the world where Catholicism is a dominant religion and English is the dominant language. These experiences have allowed me to move through the world with relative ease and I would be remiss not to acknowledge that.

I am an American living in Scotland and identify as both an immigrant and an expatriate. I recognise the privilege that comes with the expatriate identity and the choice and ability to willingly move to another country but have also felt the limitations of not being a citizen in my country of residence. In my experience, this has manifested most severely in professional settings. This, in turn, may impact upon the ways in which I view the nature of the teaching profession in Scotland.

I consider myself to bring both an insider and outsider voice to this study. I am an insider in that, just like the participants, I am a history teacher in Scotland. I drew upon this insider status to recruit participants and set them at ease at the start of their interview. At the same time, however, I consider myself to be an outsider, as I did not grow up in the Scottish educational context like many of the participants. Similarly, I qualified as a teacher outwith Scotland and began my teaching career in Boston, Massachusetts. As a result, I was entirely unfamiliar with the nature of Scottish education when I first moved to Scotland. As a self-identifying social justice educator, I was drawn to the vision of the CfE as well as the progressive nature of the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021), which are clear

about the placement of social justice within the profession. However, in practice, I found a striking and problematic misalignment between the CfE, the Professional Standards, and the nature of SQA exams. As a result, there was a steep learning curve around exams and the role they play in the Scottish educational context. This experience has led me to this thesis and has been my motivation in conducting this study. Coming to the Scottish educational context later in life makes me an outsider and, while I have found that this has held me back professionally, I also deem it incredibly valuable in that I can compare and contrast the educational setting in which I was raised and in which I qualified as a teacher with the educational context in which I currently study and teach. In this way, I consider myself to bring a unique perspective to my position as a researcher and history teacher.

My experiences as a student and teacher have led me to identify as a social justice educator. My Catholic school upbringing exposed me to the gospel value of social justice and my early-career teaching experience led me to see a disconnect between social justice as narrowly defined by the Catholic Church and the actual commitment to social justice required to work towards a more equitable society. Further, my experience in studying history at the undergraduate level and personal interest in social history have led me to identify social justice as something that is pivotal to challenging oppression and working towards a more equitable society. As a social justice educator, I deem it my responsibility to oppose neoliberalism (Giroux, 2011), teach *about*, *through*, and *for* social justice, and look to history as a way forward towards social justice. It is my hope that this study contributes to change within the realm of history teaching in Scotland towards a version of history teaching that is more critical, transformative, inclusive, and applicable to the world around us; a version of history teaching that encourages the examination of potentially uncomfortable pasts and our own beliefs and values; and a version of history teaching that supports learners in being critical, engaging in activism, and developing a questioning attitude.

I see the discipline of history and SJE as antidotes to the oppressive confines of neoliberalism, and, as this thesis seeks to explore teaching history for social

justice, I acknowledge that my own understanding of social justice and experiences in teaching history for social justice may differ from those of the participants. To mitigate any potential bias, I engaged in critical reflexivity, by keeping a critically reflexive notebook, throughout this study as a way to separate myself from the responses of participants. According to Holmes (2020), “Self-reflection and a reflexive approach are both a necessary prerequisite and an ongoing process for the researcher to be able to identify, construct, critique, and articulate their positionality” (p. 2). This helped me to work through my own understanding of social justice in relation to the reported understandings of the participants. This reflexive process is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, the methodology chapter.

### **1.7 Overview of the Thesis**

This thesis is organised into six chapters. This first chapter provides an introduction and offers context for the study. Chapter Two is a literature review that is separated into nine sections. Firstly, section 2.1 provides an introduction and outlines the structure of the chapter. Sections 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4 explore education in a neoliberal context and outline inequity (Section 2.2), growing conservatism (Section 2.3), and accountability and standardisation (Section 2.4) as problems in education. Sections 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, and 2.8 explore a social justice approach to teaching and learning as a response to the problems identified in the previous three sections. More specifically, Section 2.5 presents definitions of SJE that appear throughout the literature. Section 2.6 explores the importance of sociopolitical emphasis in SJE. Section 2.7 explores the challenges and hesitations teachers might have in engaging with SJE. Section 2.8 offers an overview of teaching for social justice in the history classroom in Scotland. Finally, Section 2.9 explores teacher identity as a necessary component and locus of investigation for enabling SJE.

The third chapter details the methodology of this study, including the approach to research design, approach to data collection, the nature of participants involved in this study, the approach to data analysis, ethical considerations, and potential limitations of the study. This chapter also outlines the use of vignettes as a

research technique before the fourth chapter presents a vignette for each of the nine participants in this study. I used participants' identity charts to construct short narratives about each participant as a way to introduce them and detail their individual journeys into teaching history in Scotland.

The fifth chapter presents the findings and discussion of this study and is broken down into six sections. I chose to present the findings and discussion together to make connections between the literature and the analytic narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Section 5.1 of this chapter provides an introduction to the chapter and offers a rationale for presenting the themes in this particular order. Section 5.2 highlights a *results-focused exam culture*, which is exemplified by choices made by participants (Section 5.2.1), a skills disconnect (Section 5.2.2), and a phases disconnect (Section 5.2.3). Section 5.3 is called *Blaming the System* and unpacks several examples of participants blaming the system for the ways in which they reported teaching to the test, thus acting complacently or passively in the results-focused exam culture explored in the previous section. Section 5.4 explores the *ranging definitions of social justice* that participants provided, with three participants providing no clear definition, four participants providing definitions of social justice that register lower in sociopolitical emphasis, and two participants providing definitions of social justice that register higher in sociopolitical emphasis. This section also explores the extent to which participants engaged in challenging the status quo and making content relevant and relatable for learners, which are key elements of a social justice approach to teaching and learning. Section 5.5 explores the differing views that participants reported on their personal and professional identities and highlights the role of the activist teacher identity in relation to SJE, while problematising the lack of activism reported by participants. Finally, Section 5.6 of this chapter explores the problematically narrow representations of history as reported by participants. These six sections combine to present the findings and discussion of this thesis.

Finally, the sixth chapter of this thesis provides a summary of the findings and discussion in relation to the research questions of this study. I then present

three recommendations for a way forward toward social justice in the history classroom in Scotland before discussing implications for future research and concluding remarks.

## Chapter 2 - Literature Review

*... Education is fundamental to democracy and [...] no democratic society can survive without a formative culture shaped by pedagogical practices capable of creating the conditions for producing citizens who are critical, self-reflective, knowledgeable, and willing to make moral judgments and act in a socially responsible way (Giroux, 2020, p. 1).*

### 2.1 Introduction

Structural inequity perpetuated by a trend of growing conservatism in education systems that are characterised by standardisation and accountability emerge as themes in education research. These three themes pose problems in the face of SJE and threaten democracy in the process. Sections 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4 of this literature review explore these problematic trends and provide a contextual overview. Sections 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, and 2.8 of this literature review explore SJE as a response to the problematic confines of a neoliberal education system, as described in the next three sections of this literature review. Drawing on the above quote by Giroux (2020, p. 1), a social justice approach to teaching and learning is an essential response to these problems because it works to enable learners to identify and challenge inequity. Specifically in the history classroom, a social justice approach can help learners to examine oppression and justice-seeking movements as well as develop the skills and dispositions to identify and challenge oppression today. Finally, Section 2.9 of this literature review explores teacher identity as a necessary component and locus of investigation for enabling SJE. Altogether, this literature review helps to provide a contextual overview for exploring how secondary school history teachers in Scotland engage with social justice, if at all, which is the aim of this thesis.

### 2.2 Structural Inequity Leading to Structural Inequality

According to Gorski (2018), "Inequity is an unfair distribution of access and opportunity" (p. 19). Inequity, or an injustice, leads to inequality, or an imbalance of conditions. Therefore, "Fair or equitable distribution of access and opportunity

might not be an equal distribution, and an equal distribution of opportunity might require an unequal distribution of resources” (Gorski, 2018, p. 19). This means that working towards equity means combating inequity and this requires distributing resources in ways that meet everyone’s needs, which may be unequal.

According to Dover (2009), inequity in education is a “fundamental challenge” facing schools (p. 506). Educational inequity is a challenge because it leads to unequal experiences and outcomes for learners. This is concerning because there is agreement across the literature that inequity exists in society and that schools perpetuate it (Agarwal et al., 2010; Cochran Smith, 2008; Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2011; Dover, 2009; Dutta et al., 2016; Kozol, 1991; Kumashiro, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2013; & Reagan et al., 2016). Inequity, which can be referred to as structural, systemic, or societal, is deeply rooted in the structures of society and can therefore be difficult to change. In schools, “Societal inequities are magnified by hegemonic classroom practices that reproduce and reinforce the cultural and educational traditions of white, middle-class communities at the expense of non-dominant cultures’ educational traditions” (Dover, 2009, p. 507). This means that schooling tends to maintain the status quo rather than challenge structural inequity, or the systems of privilege and oppression created and maintained in society. It is these systems of privilege and oppression that critical pedagogy, as explored in the theoretical framework of this thesis, seeks to upend. However, unaddressed, structural inequity in society and schools leads to inequality, or an imbalance of conditions, and has a “profound” effect on learners (Dover, 2009, p. 507). For example, the unequal quality and availability of resources in schools that result from structural inequity, such as devices and internet access, as well as how teaching load is distributed, lead to unequal opportunities for learners (Darling-Hammond, 2017). This perpetuates an unequal playing field for young people both inside and out of the classroom that lasts well beyond their school years. This unequal playing field can be demonstrated by a gap in achievement between learners on different rungs of society’s ladder. For example, in the American context, Ladson-Billings (2013) describes this *achievement gap*, also

known as the *attainment gap* in the UK, or a pattern of underachievement, that emerges as a result of structural inequity and argues that the problem is that the achievement gap “casts blame on individual students, parents, schools, and teachers without looking at the structural inequalities that have been at work since the establishment of America” (p. 105). This neoliberal framing suggests that the problem of, and solution to, a pattern of underachievement are situated in the micro-level, where individuals are responsible, rather than in failings at the macro-level, where systems and society at large are responsible.

Education Scotland (2023b), an executive agency of the Scottish Government, defines attainment as “the measurable progress which children and young people make as they advance through and beyond school, and the development of the range of skills, knowledge and attributes needed to succeed in learning, life and work” (para. 7), and indicates that “many children and young people living in [Scotland’s] most deprived communities do significantly worse at all levels of the education system than those from [Scotland’s] least deprived communities” (para. 9). There is evidence of a poverty-related attainment gap in Scotland, demonstrated by results of the Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy, which assesses learners at three different points across primary and secondary school. The results demonstrate “a 17, 14 and 16 percentage point difference between children from the least and most deprived backgrounds at P4 [around age 8], P7 [around age 11] and S2 [around age 13] stages respectively” (Sosu & Ellis, 2014, p. 8). This means that learners experiencing higher levels of deprivation in Scotland attain less than learners experiencing lower levels of deprivation, and this is a “direct cause and consequence of poverty” (Robertson & McHardy, 2021, p. 5). This is problematic because it sustains and perpetuates a gap between learners based on systemic issues that are not easily changed at the micro-level. Importantly, in these studies, poverty is isolated from other intersecting social categories and issues, such as how poverty is linked to, for instance, gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, migration and nationality/citizenship, etc., and it is important to consider these factors in relation to poverty.



Apple (2011a) states “It is all too often romantic [...] that reforming schools by only focusing on the schools themselves and the teachers within them is sufficient” (p. 225). This means that inequality is a problem deeply rooted in society and cannot be solved entirely by individuals or at the classroom-level. Further, Cochran-Smith (2008) explains that “Teachers alone cannot fix the nation’s worst schools without simultaneous investments in resources, capacity building, and teachers’ professional growth, not to mention changes in access to housing, health, and jobs” (p. 276). This means that education is merely a piece of the puzzle and not the entire picture.

Reframing the idea of an achievement or attainment gap, to remove responsibility from individual schools and teachers as the sole solution to solving problems related to structural inequity, Ladson-Billings (2013) outlines an “educational debt” that instead affords a “shared responsibility” for the disparity amongst learners based on race and income (p. 105). This responsibility is shared rather than individual in that, collectively, society perpetuates the educational debt by failing to acknowledge and address the structural inequity that leads to this inequality, or imbalance of conditions for learners. This educational debt consists of historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral debts owed to Black Americans and can be seen through patterns of structural racism, including Jim Crow laws of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, voter suppression, and housing discrimination evidenced throughout history in the USA. As a response, Ladson-Billings (2013) argues that a culturally relevant pedagogy (also referred to as *culturally responsive pedagogy* (Gay, 2000) and *culturally sustaining pedagogy* (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014)) that emphasises the importance of getting to know and building strong relationships with learners, parents, and communities is paramount to remedying this educational debt. However, there are objections to a culturally relevant pedagogy because of its “potential to transform the existing social order” (Sleeter, 2012, p. 563). This backlash labels a culturally relevant pedagogy as dangerous and can make engaging with culturally relevant teaching practices risky both professionally and legally for teachers (Sleeter, 2012, p. 577). These objections have

been displayed, for example, through recent fears over critical race theory in the USA. As explored in the introduction of this thesis, these fears have led to the initiation of legislation against critical race theory in several states across the USA; it has been at the centre of some local and state elections; and it has led to the banning of particular books in some parts of the country as well. For example, as referenced in the introduction of this thesis, the graphic novel *Maus*, which depicts the Holocaust from a Jewish perspective, was banned by a school district in Tennessee due to alleged concerns over the language used in the book (Associated Press, 2022). A critical pedagogy that is culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 2013) can be seen as a necessary response to neoliberalism and problems related to structural inequity, and this will be explored further from Section 2.5 of this literature review.

Delving further into the effects of inequitable schools, Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2011) demonstrate not only unequal educational opportunities that arise from structural inequity, but also unequal health problems that are not faced by members of more privileged social positions, such as class, and are exacerbated by a lack of geographic mobility for people living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Such health problems can arise from exposure to lead paint in schools, polluted rivers that flow through disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and toxic land being turned into playgrounds (Kozol, 1991). Further, there is evidence of unequal health outcomes in Scotland, associated with the poverty-related attainment gap, as “Poor educational attainment has been linked with increased rates of death and illness in adults for a wide range of health conditions” (White, 2018, p. 3). Importantly, I reference Jonathan Kozol’s work *Savage Inequalities*, which was first published in 1991 and again in 2012, at multiple points in this literature review. While *Savage Inequalities* was first published over thirty years ago, it remains foundational to understanding how the American school system is set up and funded, and is, unfortunately, still relevant (Morgan, 2020; Raikes & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Therefore, I have chosen to reference key elements of Kozol’s (1991) exploration of the inequalities in American schools in an effort to provide a contextual overview of

structural inequity as a theme in current education research. While this study is set in the Scottish educational context, I draw on literature from the American context because, as outlined in the introduction of this thesis, I grew up in and qualified as a teacher in the American educational context, and find myself in a unique position as a researcher and teacher to be able to draw from and discuss the American and Scottish educational contexts, where I have studied and taught in both contexts. This dual insider-outsider position allows for a critical examination, where difference helps to reveal the issues of power at work across separate but interconnected contexts.

Further, exposure to these health problems is compounded by a lack of access to adequate healthcare, making it challenging for learners to be successful in school. These problems are rarely addressed because “poor communities lack the political clout to protect themselves” (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2011, p. 37). In other words, people from disadvantaged communities often lack the social and cultural capital, or the resources and connections that empower social mobility, to address the imbalance of conditions created by structural inequity and maintained by people in positions of power (Bourdieu, 1984). This means that, in a society ruled by powerful elites, people living in disadvantaged communities tend to have fewer political connections and resources, such as time and money, to help address the inequalities they face. Further, Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory asserts that cognition is socially and culturally constructed and is impacted by one’s environment. This means that behaviour cannot be seen in isolation and must be considered within the context in which it takes place. In this way, learning has social implications and can be used as a tool to better one’s position in life. However, in line with Bourdieu (1984), the tools available to a person are often dependent on social context, thus perpetuating a circle of injustice while protecting those in positions of power.

In England, the 2019 Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) School Inspection Handbook offers an attempt to remedy inequality by ensuring schools support learners in developing social and cultural

capital. This demonstrates an effort to level the playing field for learners but is limited in that it could rely on a narrow interpretation of what constitutes social and cultural capital and fails to place value on the experiences of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, thus reinforcing the very inequalities it appears to intend to alleviate. Therefore, even this attempt to work towards equity is constructed from those hegemonic positions that critical pedagogy seeks to upend. Moving north, while social and cultural capital are not directly referenced in Scotland's CfE, the policy document vaguely promotes equality of opportunity (Scottish Executive, 2004). However, the policy fails to concretely discern how this should happen. According to Arshad, Forbes, and Catts (2007), this "passive policy approach [...] potentially results in those who are not included remaining excluded" (p. 131). So, while the policy alludes to opportunities to increase cultural capital for learners, the vagueness of its language and lack of action steps ensures that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds will continue to have the odds stacked against them with regards to society's normative cultural capital. In this context, increasing cultural capital for learners means socialising learners into those hegemonic positions and roles as a way to access social mobility in the Scottish context. In this way, the normative cultural capital in Scotland is maintained. This contradiction, or access paradox (Janks, 2004; Lodge, 1997), maintains the normative culture without problematising or challenging it.

The uneven playing field of schooling is a serious problem for young people because, simply stated, "a childhood cannot be played again" (Kozol, 1991, p. 180). These unfair conditions are inextricably linked to achievement and opportunities well beyond schooling. Structural inequity poses a problem in both society and education because it creates, perpetuates, and protects conditions where learners achieve less because of an unequal distribution of and access to resources and high-quality teaching that is challenging, supportive, and holds all learners to high expectations. According to Ladson-Billings (2013), for learners, "catching up is made near impossible by the many structural barriers that society has imposed on them" (p. 105). Unfortunately, an uneven playing field has become a status quo not limited

to the USA, but across many so-called developed societies, including the UK. In addition to the challenges of inequality stemming from structural inequity, school systems in so-called developed societies can be severely hindered by a global trend of growing conservatism and be plagued by accountability and standardisation. The following section explores growing conservatism and the detrimental impact it has on education.

### **2.3 Growing Conservatism**

In addition to identifying structural inequity and inequality as major problems in society that are often perpetuated by schools, the literature reveals a pattern of growing conservatism and neoliberalism around the world, which also has serious repercussions for education (Apple, 2011a, 2011b; Biesta, 2010, 2011; Dover et al., 2018; Dutta et al. 2016; Giroux & Giroux, 2006; Giroux, 2011; Hunter & Cassidy, 2019; Kincheloe, 2004; Leeman, 2017; Leistyna, 2007; Macrine, 2020; McLaren et al., 2004; Picower, 2011; Ramlackhan, 2020; Sleeter, 2012, 2014; Smith & Lennon, 2011).

Neoliberalism is a trend towards competition and privatisation with an emphasis on individual autonomy and limited government involvement (Ramlackhan, 2020). For neoliberals, these emphases provide a justification for the standardisation of education as beneficial for everyone involved. Favouring a 'pull oneself up by one's bootstraps' mentality, neoliberalism privileges individual hard work, yet often fails to recognise systemic barriers that prevent the majority of people from thriving under this trend, as well as the lack of barriers encountered by the few who are successful. This means that power, including wealth, resources, and decision-making, is situated in the hands of the few, and the rest of society functions to serve their needs. Consequently, neoliberalism has led to "a loss of equity and social justice, a loss of democracy and democratic accountability, and a loss of critical thought", making it a key problem facing education, especially education that is critical and culturally responsive (Ramlackhan, 2020, p. 195).

In his detailed look into the inequality of the American education system, Kozol (1991) writes of the politicised nature of schooling in a neoliberal climate, stating:

Placing the burden on the individual to break down doors in finding better education for a child is attractive to conservatives because it reaffirms their faith in individual ambition and autonomy. But to ask an individual to break down doors that we have chained and bolted in advance of his arrival is unfair (p. 61).

This demonstrates the barriers faced by many learners in advancing their position in society because of structural inequity deeply rooted in a socially unjust system and further demonstrates how a conservative climate not only fails to ameliorate these barriers, but reinforces them. In other words, the social position a person is born into heavily influences the rest of their life. This is important because, according to Dewey (1916), it is the purpose of schools to ensure that “each individual gets an opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social group in which he was born” (p. 20).

Neoliberalism is competitive in nature and is defined by “placing property and profits above all” (Macrine, 2020, p. 96) and a “winning at all costs” mentality (Giroux, 2011, p. 9). Fuelled by this competitiveness, testing in schools aims to decipher “who is better and who is best” (Biesta, 2010, p. 10). In the context of American schooling, neoliberalism is a “vicious cycle [that] creates school climates characterized by compliance, conformity, and fear” in a system that places blame on individual teachers and learners rather than schools for low scores on accountability tests (Picower, 2011, p. 1106). This means that education is a mechanism that prioritises the economic interests of people in positions of power over a commitment to equity as a way to keep power and resources consolidated and unchallenged in the hands of the few. While testing looks differently in the Scottish context when compared to the American context, which directly links test results to school funding, the impact is similar in that it tracks young people from an early age onto certain paths and requires class time be dedicated to teaching learners how to

be successful in exams. The context of national exams in Scotland is further outlined in Section 2.8 of this chapter and in the Findings and Discussion chapter (Chapter 5) of this thesis.

In the USA, Picower (2011) outlines an education system marked by standardised testing and scripted curricula, leaving teachers “handcuffed by mandates that are often in conflict with their own desires to work for more just societal conditions for their students” (p. 1106). For example, teachers are often tasked with preparing learners for standardised tests, which can take time away from teaching the skills learners need for life outside the classroom. Teachers in the Netherlands, on the other hand, report challenges in developing their own curriculum in citizenship education because of the amount of freedom to design the curriculum (Leeman, 2017), while, in the American context, teachers have little choice or freedom other than to complicitly teach to standards to achieve results on standardised tests. This forces teachers to rely on “survival teaching”, which is the trend of focusing on mandated content so that learners perform well in exams (Smith & Lennon, 2011, p. 35). Further, Dover et al. (2018) write of a system that “prioritizes standardization and free-market economics over equity-oriented teaching and critical thinking” (p. 230). Kincheloe (2004) echoes the economic interests of standardised education, or education hallmarked by accountability testing, that aim to keep those in power unchallenged.

A conservative climate like this is problematic for education and society at large because it prioritises the economic interests of the powerful over creative and critical thinking that would equip young people to challenge the status quo, including challenging problematic issues of power. As explored in the opening quote of this chapter by Giroux (2020, p. 1), this stands as a threat to democracy. Standardisation of education and teaching for standardised tests simply perpetuates the status quo and does not help to create a more socially just society. This is seen in the American context where teachers in many subjects teach to standardised tests, which places pressure on both teachers and learners to perform well for the sake of school funding. In the Scottish context, learners earn qualifications in their

chosen subjects by sitting national exams, created by the SQA, at the end of S4 [around age 15], S5 [around age 16], and S6 [around age 17]. While learners have the ability to choose which subjects they take, this is often dictated by requirements for admittance to university courses and can be limited by school timetables and teachers of particular subjects within schools. Masked as choice for learners, a key element of Scotland's CfE (Scottish Executive, 2004), this system can instead act as a form of tracking that places pressure on young people to choose subjects in line with a specific career from an early age. This can also be seen through Scotland's Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) initiative that similarly channels young people and aims to "prepare young people for the world of work" (Education Scotland, 2015, p. 2). According to Priestley and Shapira (2018), despite advertising flexibility and choice, Scotland's CfE has narrowed curricular choices for young people, and thus narrows opportunities for future studies and career choices (p. 102). They argue that "a broad education is necessary for the formation of future citizens able to make a significant and critical contribution to their social and natural worlds, and premature narrowing will truncate this development" (Priestley & Shapira, 2018, p. 102). This demonstrates the importance of a broad curriculum that allows learners to immerse themselves in a range of subjects rather than be funnelled in one direction.

Historian Howard Zinn expressed worry over this focus on economic interests, a narrow curriculum, and lack of creativity and critical thinking in education. In his landmark work, *A People's History of the United States: 1492 to Present*, Zinn (2015) cites William Bagley's early twentieth century text *Classroom Management*, stating,

One who studies educational theory aright can see in the mechanical routine of the classroom the educative forces that are slowly transforming the child from a little savage into a creature of law and order fit for the life of civilized society (p. 263).

Using this historical text, Zinn (2015) shows how schools were used during the Industrial Revolution as "aids to the industrial system" (p. 263). Zinn's inclusion of



this text also demonstrates the power of education and how it has been used as a form of control throughout history and is deeply politicised as a way to fulfil the needs of those in power (Freire, 1970). This emphasises the role and importance of teaching and learning history as a way to challenge present-day oppression and hegemonic structures that directly result from the past. Otherwise, learners receive an education that keeps them stationary on society's ladder and prevents them from learning the skills necessary to challenge oppression and the status quo. According to Giroux (2011), "History has not become irrelevant, but rather that historical consciousness is being suppressed" (p. 21), and in this way, economic and political power for the elites is protected. This can be exemplified through the UK Government's *Operation Legacy*, which aimed to destroy documents that could be seen as damaging to Britain during the mid-twentieth century process of decolonisation (Sato, 2017). In this way, "historical consciousness is acceptable to the prevailing dominant interest when it can be used to buttress the existing social order" (Giroux, 2011, p. 21). In other words, in a neoliberal climate, history can be used to maintain the existing hierarchy in society. This means that a version of history teaching that instead encourages the examination of potentially uncomfortable pasts and supports learners in being critical, engaging in activism, and developing a questioning attitude can be a response to the dangers of neoliberalism. This situates critical pedagogy as well as the discipline of history in a potentially powerful position in the fight against neoliberalism in that they provide learners with opportunities to examine and challenge oppression and problematic issues of power. Further, Dewey (1916) states "the problem is to extract the desirable traits of forms of community life which actually exist, and employ them to criticize undesirable features and suggest improvement" (p. 83). With power consolidated in the hands of the economic elite, this can mean that education is used as a tool that works to socialise young people in a way that benefits the powerful and limits challenges to that hierarchy. For example, as shown by Bagley's *Classroom Management* (1910), during the age of industrialisation, the routine and discipline of school aimed to prepare workers for life in factories. However, this is

not a phenomenon limited to the history books. For example, a key focus of Scotland's CfE is its DYW initiative (Education Scotland, 2015), and, despite being referenced in Scotland's CfE as vital skills, there appears to be a misalignment between the vague language of the policy and the realities of classroom teaching in relation to the pressure of SQA exams on teachers and learners in that exam results reign supreme. Additionally, the focus on scripted curricula and test results, found in many countries, such as the USA, limits opportunities for critical thinking and creativity, thus limiting opportunities for learners to enact change in their own lives and in society.

This section outlined a trend of growing conservatism and neoliberalism as a problem in education. Structural inequity, as explored in the previous section, is perpetuated by this growing conservatism and neoliberalism. The following section outlines themes of accountability and standardisation, which appear as hallmark features of education in a neoliberal climate.

#### **2.4 Accountability and Standardisation**

Features of education in neoliberal climates include standardisation and accountability testing (Dover, 2009; Gorski, 2018; Leeman, 2017; Macrine, 2020; Picower, 2011; Sahlberg, 2023). Accountability testing is the means for governments and/or regulatory boards to use standardised testing to assess learners against strict developmental markers as well as to hold schools, including teachers, school management, and local authorities accountable (Gorski, 2018). According to Agarwal (2011), proponents of accountability testing claim that schools can use the information gleaned from standardised tests to improve performance and therefore become more equitable (p. 53). However, this focus on testing instead "serves to reproduce inequality rather than create environments that engage students in struggles against oppression" (Picower, 2011, p. 1112). In other words, instead of creating and sustaining equity in schools, accountability and standardised testing maintain "narrow", "homogenized", and "static" curricula that fail to take the individual differences and experiences of learners into account

(Agarwal, 2011, p. 53). In this way, accountability testing serves the interests of a neoliberal context, where the focus is on individual performance and outcomes and does not consider the role of systemic barriers, or lack thereof, in attainment/achievement.

Further, according to Dover et al. (2016), “emphases on high-stakes testing and accountability can undermine teachers’ ability to use their professional expertise to respond to the localized needs of their students” (p. 457). This means that because teachers must prepare their learners for exams, they lose the time and ability to teach to the needs of learners, which can be context specific. Interestingly, it is the freedom to develop context-specific curricula that challenges teachers in the Netherlands (Leeman, 2017), alluding to the importance of striking a balance and providing support for teachers. Further, Dover et al. (2016) explain that despite a focus on accountability testing, the USA does not compare well internationally according to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test results. This invites necessary questioning about the effectiveness of standardised and test-focused education systems. Additionally, “PISA scores attest to the persistence and prevalence of race-based inequities in educational achievement on the basis of race and school poverty” (Dover et al., 2016, p. 458). Echoing Ladson-Billings’ (2013) call to remedy the educational debt, this means that PISA results show a gap between learners based on race and socioeconomic background. This discrepancy highlights the structural inequity present in the American education system.

To further exemplify the discrepancy highlighted by PISA test results in the American context, Kozol (1991) and Gorski (2018) explain how federal funding for schools in the USA is allocated based on test results. The funds raised by property taxes within school districts are supplemented by state and federal funds, which are distributed in “unequal and inequitable” ways (Kozol, 1991, p. 57). As a result, schools with lower test scores receive less funding and are expected to then raise test scores with fewer resources. This system becomes a vicious cycle that maintains structural inequity.

Because federal funding for public schools in the USA is tied to test results, tested subjects, such as English language arts and maths often become the sole focus in many schools. For example, the teaching in social studies classes often shifts to support the teaching of skills for English language arts tests. This “[results] in the marginalization of social studies as a discipline, and the pressure to focus more on students’ literacy development” (Dover et al., 2016, p. 458). Further, according to Picower (2011), “71% of school districts reduced instructional time in subjects other than math and reading, with social studies reported as the most frequently cut subject area” (p. 1115). This means that social studies, a subject which is “most amenable” to teaching for social justice, takes a back seat to tested subjects like English language arts and maths (Picower, 2011, p. 1114; Agarwal, 2011). A decrease in time allocated to history is also being seen in England and, similarly to in the USA, this is “possibly in response to a renewed emphasis on English and maths results in school accountability measures” (Harris, 2021a, p. 103). As a result of this testing-based system that reinforces structural inequity and diminishes the value of subjects like social studies, there are “generations of students who are not learning about where they come from or why current inequalities exist” (Picower, 2011, p. 1115). This is problematic because if learners are unaware of inequalities in society and are unable to interrogate them, these conditions will continue to exist and they unknowingly become complicit in maintaining and reproducing those conditions. However, examining history through a social justice lens allows learners to develop an understanding of how current inequalities have come to be and provides opportunities to interrogate and challenge them. In this way, the discipline of history provides opportunities for learners to examine how oppression and power relations are historically rooted. This arguably cannot be done, however, in educational contexts that are forced to teach to narrow accountability tests and/or eliminate instruction in social studies for the sake of allocating more time to tested subjects with the intention of increasing results.

Similarly, in Scotland, subjects are marred by SQA exams that dictate what is learned in the secondary classroom, which often requires significant time spent on teaching learners how to answer exam-style questions (Smith, 2018b). So, unlike in the USA, learners in Scotland are still engaging with history content. However, much of time in class is dedicated to exam mechanics, techniques, and strategies, including how to write formulaic answers to exam questions. For example, at certification-level (during the Senior Phase), "teachers have criticised the way that the syllabuses have distorted their teaching and, in turn, children's historical understanding to meet the narrow demands of the examination mark scheme" (Smith, 2018b, p. 443). While this is most prominent in certificate-level classes, exam skills are introduced throughout the junior phase of secondary schooling. Not only does this demonstrate the high priority and value of exams in the Scottish context, it also limits the amount of time available for a social justice approach to teaching and learning as learners are engaging with the content on the surface level for the purpose of answering exam questions, rather than delving deeper into the content and making connections to current events and their own lives. In an education system that places such a high value on exam scores, "the zeal for 'answers' is the explanation of much of the zeal for rigid and mechanical methods" (Dewey, 1916, p. 175).

Further, the focus on standards and high stakes testing can lead teachers to rely on survival teaching where they focus on mandated curriculum in an effort to boost test results (Smith & Lennon, 2011). According to Dover and Pozdol (2016), these "reductive standardized assessments to scripted curriculum" are limiting for teachers (p. 43). Unfortunately, "these mandates steal time from our classroom and undermine our attempts to develop and implement curriculum that reflects the unique academic, cultural, and situational needs of our students" (Dover & Pozdol, 2016, p. 43). This is problematic because it prevents access to an equitable education that equips learners for life beyond school. Further, the scale of this problem is highlighted by the fact that teachers are leaving the profession over it,

deepening the challenges of creating a more socially just society through schooling (Dover et al. 2016, p. 465).

However, the literature highlights ways in which teachers in the American context have worked at the classroom-level to navigate strict mandates and pressures of testing to weave in elements of social justice teaching. According to Picower, (2011), “obediently following the mandated curriculum is not neutral, but rather is siding with the status quo” (p. 1114). This means that when teachers abide by the strict curriculum, they help perpetuate the very inequality that most enter the profession to alleviate (Picower, 2011). However, showing that teachers work at the classroom-level to navigate standards with a social justice lens, a qualitative study by Dover et al. (2016) found three overlapping strategies that teachers use at the classroom-level to negotiate standards while incorporating elements of social justice teaching into their classrooms in the USA. Firstly, some teachers “embrace the possibilities” of skills-focused standards, allowing them to have more flexibility with content (Dover et al., 2016, p. 461). This means that teachers can teach mandated skills through content of their choosing. From a SJE lens, one way to do this is to incorporate multiple perspectives. Secondly, teachers use standards to “reclaim their discipline” by developing a curriculum that is critical and incorporates what is not included in the standards (Dover et al., 2016, p. 462). This requires creativity on the part of teachers, as well as “a comprehensive foundation in their disciplines and a willingness to engage in the difficult work of curricular authorship and activism” (Dover et al., 2016, p. 461). Thirdly, teachers resist standardisation (Dover et al., 2016, p. 463). This means that teachers choose not to teach standards, in this context the Common Core State Standards, that they do not agree with. One teacher in the study referred to this negotiation of the standards as “going underground” (Dover et al., 2016, p. 463). In this way, the teacher in the study “studied the standards and found ways to integrate social justice-oriented content into the state approved framework” (Dover et al., 2016, p. 463).

Additionally, Picower (2011) identified that “teachers became quite adept at figuring out how to teach within the constraints they faced while still focusing on

issues of social justice within their classrooms” (p. 1123). In other words, teachers worked to “camouflage” their social justice teaching so as not to make waves and adhere to the mandates while still weaving social justice elements into their teaching (Picower, 2011, p. 1123). While this does little to address issues of structural inequity at large, it demonstrates how individual teachers have the ability to invoke change on a smaller scale and shows a trend of teachers working at the classroom-level or micro-level to teach for social justice, despite a climate that aims to prevent this. Negotiating standards must be done at the classroom-level and relies on individual teachers to commit time and resources to work creatively around strict mandates. While this is a step that teachers can take towards creating a more socially just society, it does little to address deeply rooted structural inequity (Zembylas, 2021).

Unlike the strict curriculum mandates in the American context, Scotland’s CfE intends to allow more autonomy and choice for learners and teachers (Scottish Executive, 2004). In the secondary context, this is done by providing learners with opportunities to choose their subjects (Scottish Executive, 2004). This is intended to allow learners to personalise their education by following their individual skills and interests. However, while the CfE affords learners opportunities to choose their subjects, choices are often dictated by requirements for future careers and university courses, making the choices for learners actually quite limited. As a result, this tracks and narrows the curriculum for learners (Priestley & Shapira, 2018). For teachers, the CfE intends to afford more autonomy over planning and teaching strategies (Scottish Executive, 2004). In theory, the vagueness of the policy provides teachers with opportunities to adapt their teaching to their local context, meeting the needs of individual learners. However, in practice, while the vagueness of the policy offers autonomy for teachers, this vagueness might also fail to support teachers (Cassidy, 2018). For example, the four capacities of the CfE aim to enable all young people to become *Confident Individuals, Successful Learners, Effective Contributors, and Responsible Citizens*, but lack concrete definitions. The four capacities of the CfE can provide teachers with opportunities to interpret them

widely and engage with various teaching strategies, including a social justice approach. However, this same lack of concrete definitions has the potential to lose teachers in the vagueness of what they are supposed to be teaching (Cassidy & Christie, 2014, p. 39). As a result, teachers become less able to support the needs of the learners effectively and respond to their local contexts.

Sections 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4 of this literature review explored how growing conservatism combined with accountability and standardisation in education both act to perpetuate structural inequity and threaten democracy. It is clear that these trends are problematic and that learners suffer because of them. SJE seeks to help learners develop the skills and dispositions to interrogate power and injustice to create a more just society and therefore acts as an antidote to the confines of a neoliberal education system. In this way, education acts as a “practice of democracy” (Glickman, 1999, p. 16). The following four sections of this literature review explore SJE as a response to the confines of a neoliberal education system as outlined sections 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4 of this literature review. The next section, Section 2.5, explores definitions of SJE, including myriad elements of a social justice approach to teaching and learning.

## **2.5 Defining Social Justice Education**

Teaching for social justice or SJE appears throughout the literature in several ways and many of the definitions highlight similar key features of this teaching approach. According to Agarwal et al. (2010), teachers

who teach for social justice (a) enact curricula that integrate multiple perspectives, question dominant Western narratives, and are inclusive of [...] racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity [...]; (b) support students to develop a critical consciousness of the injustices that characterize our society; and (c) scaffold opportunities for students to be active participants in a democracy, skilled in forms of civic engagement and deliberative discussion (p. 238).



With a similar focus on developing a questioning attitude, according to Reagan et al. (2016), teaching for social justice is “more than skills, strategies, and activities, but also beliefs, advocacy, and involvement with families and other educational stakeholders,” and also that “teachers must ‘work to situate pedagogical practices within analysis of structural inequality and prepare their students to understand injustice on this level’” (p. 214). This means that teachers must not only teach *about* social justice, but also *through* and *for* social justice, as a way to help learners develop a deeper understanding of injustice. This notion of teaching *about*, *through*, and *for* social justice comes from Struthers (2015) work in Human Rights Education, which, in turn, comes from Human Rights Education and Training (United Nations, 2003).

Likewise, according to Tilley and Taylor (2013), “[SJE] represents an ongoing effort to interrogate the curriculum, school policies, and the institutional practices that support inequities that persist in schools” (p. 407). This definition also focuses on developing a questioning attitude towards the inequity in schools that lead to inequality, or an imbalance in conditions for learners, impacting on opportunities inside and out of the classroom.

Dover (2013a; 2015) echoes the need for explicit teaching and questioning of inequity, but expands the definition of teaching for social justice to include three dimensions: curriculum, pedagogy, and social action (Dover, 2013b). The curricular dimension “(a) reflects students’ personal and cultural identities, (b) includes explicit instruction about oppression, prejudice, and inequity, and (c) makes connections between curricular standards and social justice topics” (Dover, 2015, p. 363). The pedagogical dimension “(a) creates a supportive classroom climate that embraces multiple perspectives, (b) emphasizes critical thinking and inquiry, and (c) promotes students’ academic, civic, and personal growth” (Dover, 2015, p. 363). Finally, the social action dimension includes “(a) teachers’ sense of themselves as social activists, (b) teachers’ intent to raise students’ awareness of inequity and injustice, and (c) teachers’ intent to promote students’ social action” (Dover, 2015, p. 363).

Finally, according to Wade (2007), teaching for social justice is “the process of working toward, and the condition of, meeting everyone’s basic needs and fulfilling everyone’s potential to live productive and empowered lives as participating citizens of our global community” (p. 5). This definition highlights the end goals of teaching for social justice as, simply put, meeting basic needs and preparing learners to participate in society, highlighting the reasons for SJE as fundamental. However, as this section will demonstrate, it is the process of working towards these goals that presents challenges in teaching for social justice. Despite several overlapping key features, teaching for social justice is often dismissed as a vague, complex, and unachievable approach to teaching (Agarwal et al., 2010; Dover, 2009, 2013a, 2013b, 2015; Lee, 2011; Reagan et al., 2016). This idea will be explored more deeply throughout this section.

While these definitions vary in the terms that they use, they include many of the same features that aim to interrogate injustice and achieve a more socially just world. These common features include explicitly teaching about injustice and helping learners develop a critical consciousness, or questioning attitude, towards dominant narratives ([Table 1](#)). Another common feature in these definitions is the goal of helping learners to become informed participants in society. These definitions also include elements of teaching *about*, *through*, and *for* social justice. As Struthers (2015) explains in her work on Human Rights Education, these are complementary elements and cannot be effective in isolation. So, simply teaching *about* injustice is ineffective in combating injustice when teachers fail to also teach *for* social justice, by empowering learners to take action, as well as *through* social justice, by creating a space where learners and teachers are respected and themes of justice are evident and valued. The following table outlines several key elements of teaching for social justice that appear throughout the literature.

<p><b>Engaging multiple perspectives</b></p> <p>Alarcon et al. (2022); Agarwal et al. (2010); Dover (2013a, 2015); Kincheloe (2004); Nowell &amp; Poindexter (2018); Sleeter (2013); Tichnor-Wagner et al. (2016); Westheimer &amp; Kahne (2004b)</p>	<p><b>Raising critical consciousness of injustices, including explicit instruction about oppression, prejudice, and inequity</b></p> <p>Agarwal et al. (2010); Dover (2013a, 2015); Freire (1970); Kumashiro (2000); Parkhouse &amp; Massaro (2018); Reagan et al. (2016)</p>
<p><b>Using counternarratives and questioning dominant narratives, including interrogating curriculum and policies</b></p> <p>Agarwal et al. (2010); Dover (2015); Kumashiro (2000); Miller et al. (2020); Picower (2012b); Solorzano (2001); Tilley &amp; Taylor (2013)</p>	<p><b>Active participants in a democracy and global community, including civic engagement</b></p> <p>Agarwal et al. (2010); Dover (2013a, 2015); Ho &amp; Barton (2020); Parkhouse (2015); Picower (2012b); Ramlackhan (2020); Wade (2007); Westheimer &amp; Kahne (2004a, 2004b)</p>
<p><b>Inclusive of racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity, including personal and cultural identities</b></p> <p>Agarwal et al. (2010); Dover (2013a, 2015); Hambacher &amp; Ginn (2021); Kumashiro (2000); Ladson-Billings (1995, 2009); Picower (2012b); Ramlackhan (2020)</p>	<p><b>Deliberative Dialogue</b></p> <p>Agarwal et al. (2010); Applbee et al. (2003); Barton &amp; Levstik (2004); Byford et al. (2009); Freire (1970); Helgevold (2016); Lipman (1993); Nieto Ángel et al. (2020); Sleeter (2013); Smith &amp; Lennon (2011); Splitter (2011)</p>
<p><b>Safe, brave, contested, and supportive spaces</b></p> <p>Arao &amp; Clements (2013); Boler (1999); Boostrom (1998); Breunig (2019); Dover (2013a, 2015); hooks (1989); Kumashiro (2000); Ludlow (2004)</p>	<p><b>High expectations of learners</b></p> <p>Au et al. (2007); Dover (2009, 2013a, 2015); Ladson-Billings (1995, 2009)</p>
<p><b>Teachers and learners as activists</b></p> <p>Agarwal et al. (2010); Carr (2008); Dover (2013a, 2015); Nicol et al. (2019); Picower (2012b); Ramlackhan (2020); Sachs (2001, 2003a); Westheimer &amp; Kahne (2004a, 2004b)</p>	<p><b>Getting to know and building relationships with learners, family, and community to make content relevant and relatable</b></p> <p>Adams (2016); Darling-Hammond (2017); Dover (2015); Gorski (2018); Ladson-Billings (1995, 2009); Picower (2012b); Reagan et al. (2016)</p>

Table 1: Key Elements of Teaching for Social Justice

According to Agarwal et al. (2010), social justice is an “umbrella term” (p. 238). This means that teaching for social justice or SJE appears throughout the literature in many forms and includes a range of elements and strategies, but shares a common goal of educating for a more socially just and equitable world. SJE

appears throughout the literature in several ways, including but not limited to *culturally relevant/revitalising pedagogy* (Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2009), *culturally responsive pedagogy* (Gay, 2000), *critical literacies* (Freire, 1970), *critical multicultural education* (Banks, 2008; Childs, 2017; Grant & Sleeter, 2011; May & Sleeter, 2010; Nieto, 2004; Torres & Tarozzi, 2020), *equity pedagogy* (Banks & Banks, 1995), *democratic education* (Dewey, 1916), *citizenship education* (Banks, 2001; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004a, 2004b), *anti-oppressive education* (Kumashiro, 2000, 2004), and *culturally sustaining pedagogy* (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014). These terms have similar goals that allow them to be considered teaching for social justice, though they may have different emphases, approaches, or “sociopolitical priorities” (Dover, 2013a, p. 4). For example, democratic education (Dewey, 1916) focuses on developing skills for civic participation through experiential education, but does not always have an explicit focus on interrogating injustice. Similarly, critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) enacts a social approach to learning, but also has an explicit agenda of interrogating and challenging social justice issues. Despite these differences, both approaches to teaching for social justice have end goals of achieving a more socially just and equitable society.

Agarwal et al. (2010) note that “teaching for social justice is a journey and not a finished product” (p. 245). This means that teaching for social justice is an ongoing process that requires continuous reflection and interrogation of oneself and larger structures. This idea is reflected in Freire’s (1970) notion of praxis, or “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (p. 25). So, it is not enough to simply reflect on experiences, but also to seek action and transformation. Further, according to Ladson-Billings (2014), “if we get to a place of complete certainty and assuredness about our practice, we will stop growing. If we stop growing, we will die, and, more importantly, our students will wither and die in our presence” (p. 77). This means that, when engaging with a critical pedagogy, teaching practice should not be fixed and that learners benefit from teachers’ ongoing engagement with and commitment to teaching for social justice.

Teaching for social justice is often seen as a complex approach to teaching and learning. According to Agarwal et al. (2010), the “openness” of the term can lead teachers to feel overwhelmed by the task of teaching for social justice (p. 238). Further, it is often seen as an “unattainable idea” in the confines of standardisation and accountability (Agarwal et al., 2010, p. 238). According to Lee (2011), applying social justice to classroom contexts, which are “multidimensional and unpredictable”, also makes teaching for social justice complex (para. 8). Additionally, while many teachers aim to teach for social justice, “defining the practice has proven to be elusive, fuelling critiques of teaching for social justice as under-theorized and troubling attempts to assess its impact” (Dover, 2013a, p. 3). This means that because teaching for social justice can be seen as difficult to define, it is also difficult to put into practice and measure its effectiveness. Further, “teachers may struggle with their depth of knowledge and understanding of social justice, while also being unsure of how to bridge their visions of social justice with the daily realities of teaching” (Agarwal, 2011, p. 61). This can make teaching for social justice a challenging and daunting task for teachers.

However, it is possible to teach for social justice at the classroom-level within the realm of standardisation and accountability testing (Picower, 2011; Dover et al., 2016). According to Dover (2013b), social justice is simply a “‘lens’ through which to teach standards-based content” (p. 94). This means that teachers can weave social justice content and strategies into their teaching practice while they adhere to standards and exam demands. Further, Dover (2015) understands the “dichotomization” of teaching for social justice and the demands of standards-based teaching as a misconception (p. 366). This means that teachers do not have to choose between one or the other. However, this requires teachers to “think outside the box to design curriculum that fits the standards while also going beyond them” (Wade, 2007, p. xii). So, it is possible for teachers to teach for social justice at the classroom-level, but it requires time, resources, and creativity to navigate standards and exam demands. It is important to reiterate that while efforts made at the

classroom-level are valuable, they do little to address the root causes of systemic inequity in society (Zembylas, 2021).

Despite varying labels, the definitions of teaching for social justice outlined in this section share several common features and end goals. Teaching for social justice is a response to the problems created by structural inequity, growing conservatism, and standardisation and accountability in education, as outlined in the previous sections of this literature review, because teaching for social justice protects democracy. The literature highlights ways teachers can teach for social justice at the classroom-level. While this is important, it can also be limited in impact, time consuming, and challenging for teachers. However, by teaching learners how to interrogate the status quo and confront personal beliefs and values, they are better able to navigate the world around them and become agents of change, which is necessary in the short term, as teachers and learners, especially those most affected by oppressive systems, cannot wait for structural change. According to Dover and Rodríguez-Valls (2018), “culturally [...] responsive teaching has a positive impact on students’, especially marginalized students’, academic, social, and attitudinal outcomes” (p. 60). This means that teaching for social justice acts as a direct deterrent to structural inequity and its negative impact on academic outcomes and opportunities for young people based on race and socioeconomic status, as outlined by Darling-Hammond (2017). There are myriad elements that contribute to teaching for social justice, and there are many ways that these elements can be utilised in the classroom, including a range of sociopolitical emphases, which is explored in the following section.

## **2.6 Ranging Sociopolitical Emphasis**

Teaching for social justice is an ongoing journey with many elements and strategies that teachers can use in the classroom with the goal of teaching for a more socially just world. Through her three aspects of teaching for social justice, (1) curricular, (2) pedagogical, and (3) social action, Dover (2015) suggests that teaching for social justice can vary in sociopolitical emphasis. Firstly, in terms of curricular

aspects of teaching for social justice, curricula lower in sociopolitical emphasis include content that examines themes of social justice in literature. On the other hand, curricula registering higher in sociopolitical emphasis might draw connections between examples in history or literature of social inequity and students' lived experiences. The latter approach delves deeper to incorporate students' experiences, whereas the former touches the surface by looking at examples of social inequity in literature without making personal connections. In this example, the former approach is akin to teaching *about* social justice, while the latter is aligned more strongly with teaching *through* and *for* social justice (Struthers, 2015). While approaches to teaching for social justice that register lower or higher in sociopolitical emphasis can both be considered teaching for social justice, an approach that registers higher in sociopolitical emphasis is more critical and offers more opportunities to engage with issues of oppression and power relations as well as more opportunities for action. Importantly, a *lived experience* here refers to the tangible and authentic reporting of experience rather than, for instance, imagined experience or extrapolating 'experience' based on assumed universals. It is a more explicit call to engage with experience as it has been lived rather than any sanitised version of it that is considered to be appropriate to schools or other educational settings. In this way, it is a means to call for engaging with learners' realities, as opposed to the experiences that they are more typically asked to imagine for themselves or about the Other.

Around this deeper, more personal, level of engagement with content, Zembylas (2015) makes an important consideration of the potential ethical implications of Boler's (1999) *pedagogy of discomfort*, or the process that calls upon teachers and learners to question their beliefs and values. This pedagogy is underpinned by the creation of a safe space that allows teachers and learners to engage productively with sensitive content (Boler, 1999). A safe space, however, is not meant to lack discomfort, and herein lies a question of ethics. Zembylas (2015) asks whether it is "ethically responsible" to create a space that encourages discomfort in learners (p. 164). Zembylas (2015) concludes that "individual and

social transformation may be impossible without enduring some sort of ethical violence, and thus causing students discomfort and pain in social justice may be unavoidable” (pp. 172-173). Therefore, encouraging learners to lean into discomfort is necessary for transformation and should not be seen as a negative experience. Other iterations of this idea include *building brave spaces* (Arao & Clemens, 2013; Boostrom, 1998; Breunig, 2019) and creating *contested spaces* (Breunig, 2019; hooks, 1989; Ludlow, 2004). Brave and contested spaces allow teachers and learners to acknowledge discomfort and move forward through discussion of potentially sensitive or controversial topics that acknowledge problematic issues of power.

Secondly, registering lower in sociopolitical emphasis, Dover’s (2015) pedagogical aspect of teaching for social justice might include creating a supportive classroom community that welcomes and celebrates diversity. However, pedagogy with a higher sociopolitical emphasis might include challenging dominant narratives through the interrogation and analysis of multiple perspectives because this helps learners not only to see perspectives other than their own, but also to approach multiple perspectives with a questioning attitude. In other words, the latter takes the former a step further by encouraging learners to interrogate multiple perspectives rather than simply welcoming and accepting them. It also directly engages with issues of power, or being critical of privileging and Othering, so that any discussion about difference and inclusion is explicitly inclusive of the power relations tied to those differences (Kumashiro, 2000). For example, learners studying the Children’s Crusade during the American Civil Rights Movement can analyse accounts from Black and white children who chose to participate in the protest, as well as children who chose not to participate, and also adults involved in the protest, including white law enforcement officials. A valuable approach to this is deliberative participation where “perspectives are listened to and challenged in a manner that is respectful” (Cassidy, 2017, p. 330). Doing this helps learners to see an event, such as the Children’s Crusade, from various perspectives and seek an understanding as to why some people chose to participate or not.



Lastly, social action-oriented aspects of teaching for social justice that register lower in sociopolitical emphasis include teachers seeing themselves as educational change agents in the classroom. However, teachers who see themselves as activists with a role of addressing injustice in society, not just teaching about it in the classroom register higher in sociopolitical emphasis (Dover, 2015, pp. 367-368). The latter speaks to the emancipatory aims of the activist teacher (Sachs, 2003a). This will be explored further in Section 2.9, which outlines teacher identity as a necessary component and locus of investigation for enabling SJE.

The ranging sociopolitical emphases in these three aspects of teaching show that “teachers’ conceptual frameworks for teaching for social justice have a profound impact on their curricular and pedagogical practices” (Dover, 2015, p. 369). This means that what teachers understand teaching for social justice to be impacts on how and what they teach. For example, the goal of one teacher in Dover’s (2015) study was to “broaden students’ horizons” whereas the goal of another teacher was to “contextualize students’ lived experiences” (p. 367). Each teacher had different goals, but both considered themselves to be teaching for social justice. In other words, while both teachers had the goal of creating a more socially just world, their approaches varied in sociopolitical emphasis. However, teaching with a lower sociopolitical emphasis does little to address oppression structurally rooted in society (Zembylas, 2021).

Boontinand and Petcharameesree (2018) found a similar trend in Thailand where education has been reformed to include civic education. Their findings speak to a varying sociopolitical emphasis with civic/citizenship education being adopted in Thailand as a way to prepare young people to participate in a newly adopted democratic form of government, but “there are tensions in the education system for preparing youngsters to become patriotic, obedient, and conforming citizens, on the one hand, and non-dogmatic, critical, and valuing diversity, on the other” (Boontinand & Petcharameesree 2018, p. 37). The curriculum in Thailand reflects “state-prescribed moral, ethical, civic, and democratic values and student behavior,” which can be seen through the emphasis on virtues of unity, wisdom, and respect,

and is “centered on cooperation, individual responsibility, adherence to rules and regulation, being trustworthy, being polite, and showing respect for Thai cultural norms and the key institutions” (Boontinand & Petcharamesree, 2018, p. 37). This is reinforced by the hidden curriculum, including uncritically saluting the flag and singing the national anthem every morning (Boontinand & Petcharamesree, 2018). In this way, “school routines and rules seem to be socializing young people into accepting uncritical patriotism, authoritative control, and obedience” (Boontinand & Petcharamesree, 2018, p. 46). This example shows that the sociopolitical emphasis of teaching for social justice can vary and that not teaching young people to be critical of practices in schools can lead to obedience. This means that it is important to consider the implications of sociopolitical emphasis because a low sociopolitical emphasis can lead to conformity rather than allowing learners to engage critically with content and approach the world with a questioning attitude.

Likewise, Sim et al. (2016), found a similar trend in Singapore where teachers engaged with SJE but had ranging sociopolitical emphases. For example, some teachers focused on *character-driven citizenship*, or “being a person of good character and high morals” (Sim et al., 2016, p. 96). This type of teaching established dominant values and maintained the status quo, focusing on responsibilities rather than rights, with one teacher stating, “we have rights to do certain things, but we must be responsible not to cross that line, and jeopardize the situation” (Sim et al., 2016, p. 96). By not questioning or challenging the status quo, the sociopolitical emphasis of teaching through *character-driven citizenship* can lead to learners being docile and obedient rather than learners who are equipped with the tools to challenge the status quo. Other teachers focused on *social-participatory citizenship*, or “active participation in the social life of the community” (Sim et al., 2016, p. 96). This approach took a more global view of citizenship, that is, it looked beyond Singapore, and aimed to involve students in community affairs. It also included a stronger focus on action, compared to a *character-driven* approach, but actions “were designed to support and maintain, not to challenge existing social and political structures” (Sim et al., 2016, p. 97). For

example, teachers designed projects where learners went into the community to conduct interviews. Finally, some teachers focused on *critically-reflexive citizenship*, or a “deep political awareness, a strong belief in fairness and justice, and a critical examination of not just the systemic structures and relationships in society, but of the self as part of this system” (Sim et al., 2016, p. 97). Teachers who engaged with this approach “were more likely to problematize citizenship, and less willing to readily accept the dominant view” (p. 98). These three approaches are all considered teaching for social justice, as they have a similar end goal of a more socially just, democratic world, but vary greatly in sociopolitical emphasis, which can be seen here through the level of questioning and relating oneself to the system. Importantly, it is apparent that factors that affect sociopolitical emphasis include established cultural norms that might be context-specific, a fear of crossing the line, and constructing citizenship through the decontextualised individual, or each person being morally responsible without enough consideration of the conditions they live in or under.

Finally, Westheimer and Kahne (2004a, 2004b) identify three types of citizens that democratic education can foster. The (1) *personally responsible citizen* acts responsibly in their community through volunteering and community service, the (2) *participatory citizen* organises in addition to contributing, and the (3) *justice-oriented citizen* “calls explicit attention to matters of injustice and to the importance of pursuing social justice goals” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004a, p. 243). To show the variance in sociopolitical emphasis, Westheimer and Kahne (2004a) state, “if participatory citizens are organizing the food drive and personally responsible citizens are donating food, justice-oriented citizens are asking why people are hungry and acting on what they discover” (p. 243). In this example, while each of the three types of citizens are participating in the community, it is the *justice-oriented* citizens who are interrogating injustice with the intention of taking steps to change it so that the food drive is no longer necessary. So, *justice-oriented* citizens have a higher sociopolitical emphasis than *personally responsible* and *participatory* citizens. In this way, a *justice-oriented citizen* is similar to a

*critically-reflexive citizen* as described by Sim et al. (2016), and a *personally responsible citizen* is akin to a *social participatory citizen* (Sim et al, 2016).

Different approaches can have different sociopolitical emphases, but can all be considered as teaching for social justice, with the end goal of achieving a more socially just world. However, Picower (2011) makes a valuable point, stating, “you can decorate a jail cell, but you still aren’t free” (p. 1130). This means that while teaching for social justice with a lower sociopolitical emphasis still counts as teaching for social justice, it does little to address the structural inequity deeply rooted in society compared to explicitly teaching about structural inequity and skills to interrogate the status quo. However, there are some levels of sociopolitical emphasis that teachers may shy away from for myriad reasons. There are several reasons why teachers may be hesitant to teach for social justice ranging from pragmatic reasons like a lack of time and resources to personal reasons and a lack of comfort, or discomfort, with sensitive topics that arise in history classes, all of which are explored in the following section.

## **2.7 Challenges and Hesitations**

Teaching for social justice can be considered complex. According to Dover (2013b), although all participants in her study were able to teach for social justice in their current school contexts, two-thirds of participants reported challenges when doing so, citing myriad reasons (p. 89). These findings show that teaching for social justice within neoliberal education systems is possible but requires creativity from teachers. Problematically, this puts the onus on teachers to teach in this way, including the burden of having to develop teaching practices, resources, and curricula, which requires significant time and energy. Additionally, Byford et al. (2009) found that teachers see teaching for social justice, including teaching potentially controversial or sensitive topics, as important, but are hesitant to do so because of the realities of classroom teaching. This means that teachers see value in teaching for social justice, but “pragmatically, problems exist in teaching them effectively and with minimal disturbances” (Byford et al., 2009, p. 169).

Several challenges reveal themselves throughout the literature and range from a lack of time and resources to a lack of support and fear of losing one's job. Challenges and hesitations in teaching for social justice tend to fall into three categories, each of which will be explored throughout this section:

1. Logistical,
2. Classroom-level and teacher experience, and
3. Institutional and political.

The logistical challenges of time and resources are present throughout the literature (Agarwal, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2017; Dover, 2013b; Lee, 2011; Nolan & Molla, 2011; Nowell & Poindexter, 2018; Sleeter, 2014; Smith & Lennon, 2011). In terms of time, Lee (2011) found that many teachers perceive teaching for social justice to include "extra content" that is not always feasible with a standardised curriculum (para. 65). However, it is important for teachers to adopt an approach that teaches *through* social justice rather than just teaching *about* social justice issues, thus adding extra content on top of standardised curriculum. Lack of resources can include lack of access to and time to discern what constitutes culturally responsive materials and a lack of time to create them (Dover, 2013b).

At the classroom-level, challenges in engaging with SJE often relate to teacher experience and include classroom management, content knowledge, discomfort with content, and resistance from students (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Byford et al., 2009; Dover, 2013b, 2015; Leeman, 2017; McKinney, 2008; Smith & Lennon, 2011). According to McKinney (2008), engaging with resistance can be challenging, but "resistance does not necessarily prevent productive engagement [...] it can provide powerful teaching moments" (p. 114). Therefore, the "aim then should not be to overcome resistance, but rather to engage with it" (McKinney, 2008, p. 114). For example, teachers can help learners explore their feelings of resistance towards a topic. However, this requires some sort of comfort or confidence from teachers, which may be challenging for teachers emotionally and physically (Dover, 2013b, p. 97).

At the institutional level, challenges that can make teachers hesitant to teach for social justice include the constraints of standards and accountability testing as well as a lack of support from colleagues and school administration (Byford et al., 2009; Dover, 2013b; Lee, 2011; Smith & Lennon, 2011). A further challenge to the constraints of standardisation is the trend that social studies teachers often sacrifice their subject to teach for English language arts exams (Dover et al., 2016; Picower, 2011). Challenges at the institutional level pose problems for SJE by focusing time and resources on testing and standardised curriculum.

Similar to institutional challenges, there are also political challenges that can make teachers hesitant to teach for social justice. These challenges mark teaching for social justice as “dangerous” and bring about a fear of losing one’s job and fear of backlash from parents (Byford et al., 2009; Cassidy et al. 2014; Dover, 2016; Smith & Lennon, 2011). According to Cochran-Smith (1991), “teaching is fundamentally a political activity,” and in order to teach for social justice, teachers must learn how to teach against the grain (p. 280). This means challenging the status quo and not passively teaching a scripted curriculum. To do this, “teachers have to understand and work both within and around the culture of teaching and the politics of schooling” (Cochran-Smith, 1991, p. 284). This means negotiating standards and challenging teaching practices as well as the hidden curriculum. Further, Cochran-Smith (1991) argues that because “teachers who work against the grain are in the minority [...] it is not surprising that teachers who work against the grain are sometimes at odds with their administrators” (p. 284). Although teachers can work at the classroom-level to teach for social justice, institutional and political challenges can prevent them from addressing systemic issues and reaching a higher sociopolitical emphasis in their social justice teaching.

It is important to note that despite these challenges and hesitations, teachers can teach for social justice even in an education system marred by standardisation. According to Ladson-Billings (2014), it is possible to “meet both demands without diminishing either” (p. 84). Ladson-Billings (2009) describes several teachers in the USA who “travel a different route” to ensure high quality and

culturally relevant teaching for their learners (p. 17). This means that teachers work creatively to navigate standards and exam demands in ways that are challenging and culturally responsive. In other words, they practise “the kind of teaching that promotes [...] excellence despite little administrative or collegial support” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, pp. 13-14). Additionally, Dover (2009) suggests, “Teaching for social justice is the attempt by classroom teachers to use their position in the classroom to affect meaningful change within and despite current educational conditions and mandates” (p. 518). Continuing with a similar trend as throughout the literature, these teachers work at the classroom-level to work towards a more socially just society.

Additionally, Dover (2013b) sought to find a balance between standardisation and a social justice approach to teaching (p. 91). In tune with the literature, she also found that teachers were able to teach for social justice in their classrooms but met several challenges along the way, such as lack of support from colleagues, restrictive policies, and a lack of resources. However, participants viewed mandates as obstacles instead of boundaries (Dover, 2013b, p. 94). This shows that it is possible to teach for social justice in a neoliberal climate, but it requires increased effort from teachers. A limitation of Dover’s (2013b) study is that all participants self-identified as social justice-oriented teachers. This means that participants might be more inclined to find ways to teach for social justice, despite the challenges they face, because they are already invested in its aims.

Alternatively, participants may have differing definitions of what it means to be a social justice-oriented teacher, leading to different interpretations of teaching for social justice and therefore varying sociopolitical emphases in the classroom. The consequences of varying sociopolitical emphases can include a range in impact in the classroom, as approaches that register lower in sociopolitical emphasis tend to be more celebratory than emancipatory, and approaches that register higher in sociopolitical emphasis tend to engage more with issues of oppression and power.

Further, Parkhouse (2018), found that teachers do not need to avoid the standardised curriculum to teach for social justice, but can “[treat] it as one of many

resources available for understanding contemporary conditions, as opposed to a guide for instruction” (p. 302). This can act as a resource in developing a critical stance towards power and injustice. For example, in the history classroom, learners can work to interrogate the curriculum itself to identify whose stories are included and whose are left out and examine who benefits and suffers from the presentation of history in this way.

For example, according to historian Howard Zinn (2015), “it is possible, reading standard histories, to forget half the population” (p. 103). To show this, while looking at the portrayal of women in history, Zinn (2015) demonstrates “while poor women [...] went to army encampments, helped, and fought, they were represented later as prostitutes, whereas Martha Washington was given a special place in history books for visiting her husband at Valley Forge” (p. 110). This representation of women during the American Revolution places value on women who married into status and wealth while marginalising women of lower socioeconomic status who played key roles in the war effort. Further, Zinn (2015) explains “if you look through [...] textbooks in American history, you will find Andrew Jackson the frontiersman, soldier, democrat, man of the people, not Jackson the slaveholder, land speculator, executioner of dissident soldiers, exterminator of Indians” (p. 130). This common portrayal of America’s seventh president romanticises Jackson as a war hero and explorer rather than being critical of his use of power and forced removal of Native Americans from their land. It is typical for textbooks in American history to start in Europe and move West chronologically with the expansion of the country. When included, Native, African, Asian, and Mexican Americans are used in telling this tale in ways that serve the dominant, white, Eurocentric narrative (Agarwal, 2011). These representations of history, especially in textbooks, make interrogating the curriculum an important task for teachers and learners as a way to identify how stories are being told, who benefits from stories being told in that way and who loses out.

However, on the Scottish National Five history exam (typically taken at the end of S4, around age 15), it is merely the illusion of interrogating sources like



textbooks that earns marks. For example, the *evaluate the usefulness* question appears to require learners to demonstrate evaluation of a source, but it instead encourages rudimentary engagement with a source (for an example of this question type, please see [Appendix C](#)). This question type is worth five marks, which can be earned in a number of ways. For one mark apiece, learners can earn up to four marks for commenting on the (1) type, (2) author, (3) timing, and (4) purpose of the source. Up to two marks can be earned for commenting on information that is included in the source and up to two marks can be earned for commenting on information that the source omits. So, there are eight potential marks to work with for a five-mark question. This means that learners can, for example, write about two points that are included in the source, two points that are omitted from the source, and only one of the four type, author, timing, or purpose marks to earn a full five marks for the question. This allows learners to earn full marks without actually evaluating the source. Learners are often taught a formula and bank of phrases to memorise to successfully earn the marks for this question, which allows teachers to typically sacrifice most of the type, author, timing, or purpose marks for exam efficiency. When commenting on the content included in the source, learners can simply state that this is “useful because it is accurate”. Additionally, a learner can state that the source is a textbook, which, in the context of the SQA, counts as “useful” because it was written with the benefit of hindsight. Further, a learner can state that the author is a modern historian, which is “useful” because historians, in the context of the SQA exam, are considered to be experts. This oversimplification of the intricacies of history is dangerous and trains learners to trust sources and representations of history rather than problematise and interrogate them (Accardi, 2019). More fully evaluating sources involves criticality, and this aligns strongly with a social justice approach to teaching and leads to history being engaged with in more transformative ways.

Wineburg and Wilson (1991) outline a case study of two excellent history teachers who have differing teaching styles, but are similar in that they are “masters of their subject matter,” which allows them to talk about history at length and

uncover themes within the content (p. 408). According to Wineburg and Wilson (1991), a mastery of history content along with a wealth of general knowledge allows these teachers to set content within a context and make comparisons and connections to present day events. Both teachers focus on creating a representation of history grounded in choice. By working to bring actors in history to life, these teachers are able to engage learners in thinking about the choices people made in the past. By focusing on human experience, this representation shows history as dynamic and demonstrates that choices made throughout history shape the world we live in today, “just as people today shape their futures by the choices *they* make” (Wineburg & Wilson, 1991, p. 400). In doing so, these teachers create a representation of history that “is not an endless parade of names and dates but an intriguing story filled with discernible patterns and trends” (Wineburg & Wilson, 1991, p. 408). This approach to teaching history aligns strongly with teaching for social justice because it allows learners to make connections between the content and their own lives.

Further, according to Picower (2011), social justice-oriented teachers cope with standardisation and testing by camouflaging their social justice approach. This means that they work to creatively integrate elements of social justice teaching into the prescribed curriculum as well as to substitute pieces of the curriculum as they see fit. This is not unfounded, as Dover et al. (2016) found that teachers who teach for social justice describe their approach as “going underground” so as not to risk making waves and losing their jobs (p. 463).

This is underscored by a disconnect between theory and practice in SJE (Agarwal et al., 2010). This disconnect is echoed by Picower (2012a), stating, the “academic texts that link social justice theory and practice, often [...] remain theoretical, which makes knowing what to actually do in practice challenging” (p. 562). In this way, teachers may be “unsure of how to bridge their visions of social justice with the daily realities of teaching” (Agarwal, 2011, p. 61). This means that teaching for social justice can be daunting for teachers because the literature relies more on theory than practical tools for the classroom, potentially making it

inaccessible or time consuming for teachers. In the reality of classrooms where time is already limited, this can make teachers hesitant or unable to find time to engage with literature regarding teaching for social justice. Further, Parkhouse (2018) states that the literature is often “conceptual” and offers “little guidance on how the theory speaks to their daily instruction” (p. 281). She argues that this inaccessibility of the literature combined with the confines of standardisation makes it “unsurprising” that teachers often revert back to a more teacher-centred, banking model of teaching and learning (Parkhouse, 2018, p. 281).

These challenges and hesitations in teaching for social justice are real and valid. This therefore suggests a need for systemic changes so that teaching and learning can align more strongly with, for example, the vision of Scotland’s CfE. If teaching and learning revolve around exam demands alongside teachers having limited resources and fears over losing their jobs, they are incentivised to avoid a social justice approach to teaching learning, and this serves the nature of education in a neoliberal context. While the literature highlights ways in which teachers can teach for social justice at the classroom-level, the challenges in this are many. Also, while useful, this classroom-level approach may not be as transformative as it could be and is therefore not enough. The following section explores teaching for social justice in the history classroom, and makes links to the Scottish context, including the CfE and commonly taught history topics set out by the SQA.

## **2.8 Teaching for Social Justice in the History Classroom in Scotland**

Resulting from a National Debate on Education in 2002, Scotland's CfE was published in 2004 (Scottish Executive, 2004) and fully implemented in the 2010-11 school year. The CfE extends from ages three to eighteen. Secondary schooling in the Scottish educational context consists of a potential six years (S1-S6), with post-sixteen education being voluntary, and is divided into the Broad General Education (BGE) phase (S1-S3) and the Senior Phase (S4-S6). In secondary school, the BGE phase carries on from primary school and is intended to last until the end of S3 (around age 14). This phase includes eight curriculum areas and is designed to

offer, as the name indicates, a broad and general education, before learners choose subjects to take in the Senior Phase. The Senior Phase is intended to begin with S4 (around age 15) and lasts until S6 (around age 17) should learners choose to remain in education. It is during the Senior Phase that learners sit SQA exams, with *National Five* often taken at the end of S4 (around age 15), *Higher* at the end of S5 (around age 16) and *Advanced Higher* at the end of S6 (around age 17). Literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing are the responsibility of all teachers across both phases, which means that they are intended to be integrated into each subject.

Scotland's CfE outlines four capacities that aim to "enable all young people to become (1) successful learners, (2) confident individuals, (3) responsible citizens, and (4) effective contributors" (Scottish Executive, 2004). However, the four capacities lack definition and detail, which can be both useful and problematic. The four capacities can also be seen as reductive, where they are boiled down to slogans (Humes, 2014). In this way, the language of the four capacities can be seen as limiting. However, there are statements that accompany each of the four capacities ([Figure 1](#)). These statements can be seen to provide opportunities to engage with SJE. On the one hand, if a teacher chooses to interpret them in this way, the four capacities can be well-developed through a social justice approach to teaching and learning. On the other hand, the policy lacks the structure to support teachers and has the potential to lose them in its vagueness. In this way, the CfE can be "perceived as promoting vagueness through autonomy rather than affording autonomy through vagueness" (Cassidy, 2018, p. 41). For example, the four capacities, which are shown in [Figure 1](#) and are detailed in Education Scotland's revised narrative of the CfE, which is published as a website/digital text, "enable all young people to become responsible citizens able to understand different beliefs and cultures" (Education Scotland, n.d., retrieved from <https://scotlandscurriculum.scot/3/>). While this statement can easily lend itself to a social justice approach to teaching and learning, it can also fall victim to a more celebratory rather than transformative or emancipatory approach that engages with

issues of power, or being critical of privileging and Othering (Kumashiro, 2000), thus registering lower in sociopolitical emphasis (Dover, 2015), which is limited in impact compared to more critical approaches, or approaches that register higher in sociopolitical emphasis (Zembylas, 2021).



Figure 1: The Four Capacities (NoTosh, 2022, p. 9)

A social justice approach to teaching and learning can lend itself well to the policy goals and language of Scotland’s CfE. According to Education Scotland (n.d.), the CfE “places learners at the heart of education” (retrieved from <https://scotlandscurriculum.scot/3/>). This language appears to align strongly with the active, dialogue-based elements that are commonly featured in SJE. Likewise, as a subject, history can lend itself well to the goals and language of the CfE. Due to its vagueness, though, this can only be done if teachers choose to interpret it in this way. While successful learners and confident individuals can develop through the active, dialogue-based elements of SJE, responsible citizens and effective contributors can develop through history content. For example, by engaging with

content from the *Free at Last? Civil Rights in the USA, 1918-1968* topic, learners can develop an understanding of the power of voting and peaceful, nonviolent protest. This content can be easily compared to current events and opportunities to engage in justice-seeking movements, making the topic relevant.

Teaching for social justice is important for social studies and history teachers because they often teach civics and government or teach content where themes of civics and government are easily intertwined (Parkhouse, 2015), such as the *Free at Last? Civil Rights in the USA, 1918-1968* topic. In other words, the content can act as a vehicle for the delivery of social justice themes. For example, learners can study the Civil Rights Movement in the USA as a way to understand the historic roots of present-day race relations and voting rights. Or, Nowell and Poindexter (2018) explore Holocaust education as SJE, and explain that “through reflecting on the past and looking towards the future, Holocaust education promotes engaged citizenship, historical empathy, social justice, and our ethical and moral obligations as human beings” (p. 287). In this way, history content can provide opportunities to engage with issues of social justice, including interrogating problematic issues of power and the impact of justice-seeking movements.

While historical content offers plentiful opportunities to examine social justice themes, likewise, the skills developed in the discipline of history, referred to as historical inquiry or historical thinking skills, can also align strongly with the elements of SJE. Simply, historical inquiry is “the act of doing history” (Santiago, 2019, p. 97). Further, historical inquiry entails “asking questions, gathering and evaluating relevant evidence, and reaching conclusions based on that evidence” (Barton & Levstik, 2004, p. 188). In other words, to engage with historical inquiry is to engage with the disciplinary practice of historians. As a result, historical inquiry encourages learners to “act like historians by teaching them the skills and tools historians use to answer historical questions” (Santiago & Dozono, 2022, p. 3). In this way, developing history-specific skills allows learners to approach texts like historians rather than memorise the names and dates of a seemingly fixed and unchallenged version of history (Santiago & Dozono, 2022; Wineburg & Wilson,

1991). Further, according to Shanahan and Shanahan (2012), “a disciplinary literacy approach emphasizes the specialized knowledge and abilities possessed by those who create, communicate, and use the knowledge within [...] disciplines” (p. 7). In other words, disciplinary literacy helps learners approach a text in discipline-specific ways and, in history, develop the skills to read, write, and think like a historian (Fang, 2014).

So, while the content explored and disciplinary practices developed through history education can align strongly with SJE, the literature also highlights alternative approaches to history education, which might not have an explicit social justice focus. Firstly, as explored above, history education can have a social justice approach (Salinas et al., 2012). This approach to history education “advocat[es] for historically marginalized groups and emphasiz[es] the importance of structural changes” (Santiago & Dozono, 2022, p. 6). In doing so, this approach to history education recognises that education and history itself are not neutral, registering higher in sociopolitical emphasis (Dover, 2015) and aligning strongly with the elements of SJE explored in [Table 1](#). This approach to teaching history aligns with Kitson and McCully’s (2005) idea of the *risk-taker*, or the history teacher who capitalises on the social utility of history, helps learners to make connections between the past and present, incorporates potentially controversial or sensitive topics into the classroom, and is “not afraid to push the boundaries” (p. 35), which will be explored more fully in Section 2.9 of this chapter. In the classroom, this might look like exploring racism as historically rooted in the transatlantic slave trade and later colonial pursuits, as “placing racism in its historical context is crucial to understanding its legacy today” (Sutherland, 2023, p. 6). Altogether, this approach to history education aligns with SJE and can provide learners with opportunities to see how issues of power and oppression are historically rooted.

Secondly, history education can be taught for civic participation (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Endacott & Brooks, 2018; Wineburg, 2016). While this approach focuses on disciplinary practices, it ultimately aims to “foster citizenship” (Endacott & Brooks, 2018, p. 208). This approach is important in that it aims to prepare and

encourage learners to participate in a democracy; however, it can also be seen as limited with regards to SJE because it identifies “who counts as a citizen and what is considered legitimate civic participation, often eschewing historically marginalized communities and their collective agency” (Santiago & Dozono, 2022, p. 7). This means that an approach to history education that aims to equip learners for participation in a democratic society might be limited with regards to social justice if it also fails to encourage learners to question and challenge issues of power and oppression and/or see these issues as historically rooted. For example, this approach to history education, by focusing on civic participation and citizenship, might overlook the contributions of asylum seekers or grassroots resistance movements. So, while this approach to history education is valuable with regards to encouraging participation in society, it might also be limited with regards to SJE, thus registering lower in sociopolitical emphasis (Dover, 2015) than a social justice approach to history education.

Thirdly, and also rooted in the disciplinary practices of historians, a purpose of history education may be for independent thinking where learners are encouraged to be critical of the past. Importantly, this is something that needs to be taught explicitly because it can be considered an “unnatural act” in that it “goes against the grain of how we ordinarily think” (Wineburg, 2001, p. 7). In other words, according to Wineburg (2001), this is in contrast to history as the unproblematic memorisation of names, dates, and events in the past. Importantly, while the disciplinary practices of historians are useful and transferable outwith the history classroom, for example, by evaluating the authorship of a source or text, they can also be challenging (Wineburg, 2016). In response to challenges in teaching the disciplinary practices of historians, the Stanford History Education Group (SHEG) was founded in 2002 and offers resources and training for teachers (retrieved from <https://sheg.stanford.edu/about/history-sheg>). The *Reading Like a Historian* resources designed by SHEG encourage learners to engage in the disciplinary practices of historians to “evaluate the trustworthiness of multiple perspectives on historical issues and learn to make historical claims backed by



documentary evidence” rather than experience history as the memorisation of historical dates and figures (retrieved from <https://sheg.stanford.edu/history-lessons>). Helping learners to become independent thinkers through the development of disciplinary practices can contribute to a social justice approach to history education and to history education that has a civic purpose by encouraging them to be critical, but, on its own, might lack the action required in the two former approaches. This can be considered similarly to Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004b) potential limitations of the personally responsible citizen whereby “this emphasis distracts attention from analysis of the causes of social problems and from systemic solutions” (p. 243). With regards to SJE, this approach is akin to Kitson and McCully’s (2005) *avoider* or *container*, or history teachers who see the purpose of history as making learners better at historical inquiry while avoiding potentially sensitive topics and the social utility of history or who teach potentially sensitive or controversial topics in a way that is “contained through the historical process” (p. 35). This might take the form of teaching the Civil Rights Movement as unique to the USA in the 1960s. Similarly to the approach that aims to prepare learners to be active participants in a democracy, this approach can be seen as limited with regards to social justice because it “does not make explicit its goals beyond cognitive purposes” and this “can erase the role of power structures and systemic oppression” (Santiago & Dozono, 2022, p. 12). This is to say that history education for the purpose of developing independent thinkers can be critical and align with SJE but does not necessarily encourage the criticality involved in examining systems of oppression and acting in socially just ways. This distinction is important because the former approach might stop short of interrogating issues of power, and this does little to challenge injustice.

These three approaches to history education all work to develop learners’ critical thinking through the disciplinary practices of historians (Santiago & Dozono, 2022). However, they each vary in sociopolitical emphasis (Dover, 2015), where teaching history as a means to prepare learners for civic participation and/or to be critical consumers of the past might not encourage engagement with issues of

power as a social justice approach does. This latter element is important with regards to social justice because it works to interrogate issues of power and foreground marginalised voices in history, which is paramount to SJE. With regards to SJE, while these three approaches can vary in sociopolitical emphasis (Dover, 2015), they are similar in that they each work to take history education beyond memorisation (Santiago & Dozono, 2022; Wineburg, 2001). However, it is important to note that history in schools can also be used “as a vehicle for promoting a particular, often celebratory vision of the national past” (Harris, 2020, p. 16). This means that representations of history can be presented in the classroom in singular and unproblematic ways. For example, this might take the form of presenting the slave trade from the perspective of those who benefited from it and failing to problematise the generation of wealth from forced labour. This approach to teaching history can be seen as limited with regards to SJE because “history is the study of human activity in the past, in all its diversity. It therefore follows that the diversity of human experience should be visible in whatever is studied” (Harris, 2020, p. 16). This means that this approach to teaching history does not align with SJE because it, to name two examples, fails to incorporate multiple perspectives and is not inclusive of racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity ([Table 1](#)).

Importantly, as outlined in the rationale of this thesis, I do not argue for everyone to become a historian, instead, like Wineburg (2016) and SHEG, I recognise the utility of the disciplinary practices of historians in the day-to-day lives of active participants in a globalised world as well as in counter-conduct in a neoliberal context. That is, the disciplinary practices of historians can be transferable outwith the history classroom, for example in assessing the reliability of a text. This is important because history “can be used to legitimise and justify the political, social and cultural status quo”, for example to justify colonialism, just as much as it can be used as an emancipatory tool, therefore, it is important to understand the role and utility of history (Donnelly & Norton, 2011, p. 151). This means that exploring the past and engaging in the disciplinary practices of historians enables learners to

move forward in ways that can, if acted upon, challenge oppression, and this aligns strongly with a social justice approach to teaching and learning.

As a discipline, history has the potential to be transformative. By engaging in historical inquiry, or the disciplinary practices of historians, learners can develop the tools to identify and challenge oppression and problematic issues of power. Santiago (2019) argues that the development of historical inquiry skills can help learners to challenge dominant representations of history. These skills include, “assessing the reliability of a source, placing the source in its historical context, and evaluating the evidence to corroborate information to make a historical claim” (Santiago, 2019, p. 97). By engaging in the disciplinary practices of historians, learners can be guided to see that, “Storylines do not just exist; people create them. As such, alternative narratives can also be constructed” (Santiago, 2019, p. 97). Therefore, if taught in this way, history has the potential to be a transformative experience for learners when compared to versions of history teaching that rely on the memorisation and regurgitation of singular, dominant narratives. Further the social utility of history can be capitalised on to make links between the past and the present (Kitson & McCully, 2005), thus aligning the discipline of history with a social justice approach to teaching and learning.

While it is important to note that a social justice approach to history education is not the only approach to or purpose of history education, according to Dover et al. (2016), “teaching for social justice has multiple points of alignment with social studies curriculum and pedagogy” (p. 458). This includes, critically examining the past and present, analysing multiple perspectives, and applying events in history to today. For example, learners can place themselves in the shoes of children who chose to participate or not participate in the 1963 Children’s Crusade for civil rights in Birmingham. They can connect the experiences of young people during the civil rights era to their own experiences with current climate change protests organised and attended by young people. Viewing events in history from multiple perspectives and relating them to current events helps learners to see history as dynamic and not occurring in a vacuum. By helping learners develop these skills,

history teachers “can challenge culturally hegemonic portrayals of history” (Dover et al., 2016, p. 458). So, teaching for social justice in history allows teachers to “[...] nourish students’ critical literacy and consciousness by interrupting and interrogating the texts used in the classroom, and make explicit connections between historical and contemporary examples of struggle and resistance” (Dover et al., 2016, p. 458). Linking this to teaching history in the Scottish context, this means that the disciplinary practices developed through history can help learners to develop as responsible citizens and effective contributors, as outlined by the four capacities of the CfE. This shows that not only is history a valuable subject, but also that a social justice approach to teaching and learning helps to meet the curriculum goals of the CfE.

The literature around historical inquiry offers several practices of historians that can be developed in the history classroom and can be utilised in each of the approaches to history education outlined above. For example, Seixas and Morton (2012) outline six historical thinking concepts: (1) establishing historical significance, (2) using primary source evidence, (3) identifying continuity and change, (4) analysing cause and consequence, (5) taking historical perspectives, and (6) understanding the ethical dimension of historical interpretations. Similarly, Wineburg (2001) describes the four skills of (1) sourcing, (2) contextualisation, (3) corroboration and (4) close reading as pivotal to acting like a historian. This focus on history-specific skills allows for a move away from memorisation and towards helping learners to act like historians (Santiago & Dozono, 2022). With these history-specific skills, Wineburg (1991) sees working with historical texts as “[leaping] from the words authors *use* to the types of people authors *are* [...] not as ways to describe the world but as ways to construct it” (p. 499). This means that learning to engage critically with sources in history can act as a means for seeing how different representations of history have been built, as well as how these representations of history may be beneficial or detrimental to different groups of people. In this way, learners can engage with the social utility of history in order to read the world around them (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

In addition to a skills-focused approach to history, Santiago and Dozono (2022) describe critical history inquiry, which they argue goes “in tandem” with and is integral to the skills-focused historical inquiry outlined above (p. 9). Using the disciplinary practices above, critical historical inquiry seeks to “question dominant narratives [...], account for historical positionality of the historian in the present, and third engage in a self-reflexive practice in order to acknowledge how one’s position impacts their engagement with historical texts” (p. 4). This includes thinking critically about when and why texts were created (Moje, 2007).

Historical empathy is also an important skill developed through studying history (Endacott & Brooks, 2013; Huijgen et al., 2017; 2019). The goal of historical empathy is to engage with historical contextualization, historical perspective taking, and affective connection in order to more deeply understand and explain the values, motives, experiences, feelings, choices, and actions of people in the past and explore their impact as a way to learn from the past and build a better future. According to Endacott and Brooks (2013), “Historical empathy is the process of students’ cognitive and affective engagement with historical figures to better understand and contextualize their lived experiences, decisions, or actions” (p. 41). Developing historical empathy is important because it allows learners to “view historical figures as human beings who faced very human experiences and leads to a richer understanding than perspective taking alone” (Endacott & Brooks, 2013, p. 43). Historical empathy does not seek to justify the choices people made in the past, but to explain why people made those choices. In this way, “Historical empathy refers to placing oneself in the position of people in the past to understand their motives and values regarding their decisions and actions” (Huijgen et al., 2017, p. 113).

Because of the content they teach, history teachers are in a strong position to make waves when it comes to teaching for social justice; this, however, depends on whether they interpret social justice as integral to their approach to history education. In this way, teaching history for social justice is not a universally accepted idea, but history as discipline and social justice can strongly align. The

discipline of history provides opportunities to examine oppression and justice-seeking movements as well as to develop the skills to identify and challenge oppression and injustice today. In this way, learning history, through both content and the disciplinary practices of historians, provides opportunities to examine oppression and how power relations are historically rooted. The waves of teacher activism can vary in sociopolitical emphasis, but can work to challenge the status quo and the ways learners see the world around them (Boontinand, & Petcharamesree, 2018; Dover, 2015; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004a, 2004b). According to Freire (1970) education is never neutral. In this way, teachers can choose to either maintain the status quo by following the curriculum, or they can explicitly teach about injustice and help learners develop the skills to interrogate power and injustice. This will be explored in greater detail in the following section by exploring the GTCS professional Standards (2021). According to Picower (2011), “obediently following the mandated curriculum is not neutral, but rather is siding with the status quo” (p. 1114). This means that by, for example, choosing to teach for exams without a questioning attitude, teachers conform to and maintain the status quo, contributing to the trend of education to perpetuate inequity in society. Therefore, teaching for social justice is not only crucial to defeating the confines of neoliberal education and working towards a more equitable society, but it also aligns strongly with curriculum goals already in place.

Sections 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4 of this literature review explored the problematic nature of structural inequity perpetuated by a trend of growing conservatism in education systems that are characterised by standardisation and accountability. Sections 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, and 2.8 of this literature review explored SJE as a response to the problems posed by neoliberalism. The following and final section of this literature review explores teacher identity as a necessary component for enabling SJE.

## 2.9 Teacher Identity

While the previous sections of this literature review identified the problems of structural inequity perpetuated by a trend of growing conservatism in education systems that are characterised by standardisation and accountability, and outlined SJE as a response to these problems, this section of the literature review explores teacher identity as integral for enabling a social justice approach to teaching. Firstly, this section briefly outlines the general nature of teacher identity, before exploring the idea of an *activist teaching profession* (Sachs, 2003a) as pivotal to SJE. Then, teacher identity and social justice are explored in relation to the GTCS (2021) Professional Standards for Teachers in Scotland. Finally, this section explores teacher identity and social justice in relation to history teaching.

Simply put, teacher identity is “the way that teachers, both individually and collectively, view and understand themselves as teachers” (Mockler, 2011, p. 2). Further, according to Sachs (2003a), “identity [...] is about how teachers define themselves through their experience and the factors that mediate that experience and how meaning is attributed to these experiences” (p. 125). Teacher identity is often cited as a concept with no clear definition (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004) or can be seen as “inconsistently defined” (Schutz, Nichols, & Schwenke, 2018). While it can be difficult to articulate an all-encompassing definition of teacher identity, there is agreement throughout the literature regarding the nature of teacher identity, in that it is dynamic and shifting (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Darvin & Norton, 2015; Francis & le Roux, 2011; Mockler, 2011; Richardson & Watt, 2018; Zembylas & Chubbuck, 2018). It is something that is ongoing (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Francis & le Roux, 2011; Zembylas & Chubbuck, 2018), “formed and re-formed” (Mockler, 2011, p. 1) or a “continual process of becoming” (Schutz, Nichols, & Schwenke, 2018, p. 49). It is developed over time (Richardson & Watt, 2018). It is active rather than passive (Francis & le Roux, 2011; Francis et al. 2018). It is fluid rather than static (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Schutz, Nichols, & Schwenke, 2018). It is multidimensional (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Richardson & Watt, 2018; Zembylas & Chubbuck,

2018). And, according to Mockler (2011), teacher identity is “non-linear and downright messy” (p. 3). This means that a teacher’s identity can change and develop over time and is not fixed.

Mockler (2011) identifies three intertwined dimensions of the formation and reformation of teacher identity. The three dimensions, *personal experience*, *professional context*, and *external political environment*, overlap but have their own distinctive features. This means that there are myriad elements that contribute to teacher identity. The *personal experience* dimension includes “aspects of [teachers’] personal lives, framed by class, race, and gender, that exist outside of the professional realm” (p. 4). This dimension includes teachers’ own experiences as learners as well as “interests, hobbies, roles held and activities engaged in outside of the profession” (p. 4). With regards to social justice, this dimension is important to recognise because people live gendered, classed, and racialised lives and are situated in power relations, and this might impact on a teacher’s understanding of and investment in SJE. Next, the *professional context* includes “career histories, professional learning and development experience, those features of the particular school and system contexts [teachers] have worked within that have made a particular impact upon their ‘professional selves’” (p. 4). With regards to social justice, this might take the form of navigating school contexts that function in wider, accountability-based systems (Buchanan, 2015). This means that the expectations imposed on teachers to achieve high exam results, for example, might, in turn, impact on the ways in which they teach and how they view themselves as teachers. If this is the case, in an S3 (around age 14) class; for example, a teacher might cater their practices to exam demands, which resonates with the notion that teachers might be seen as technicians (Buchanan, 2015; Ramlackhan, 2020). Finally, the *external political environment* includes “the discourses, attitudes and understandings surrounding education that exist external to the profession” (p. 4). This includes portrayals of teachers in the media as well as the impact governments have upon education policy. With regards to social justice, this may take the form of navigating the tension between a teacher’s values, which might, for example, align



strongly with social justice, and expectations imposed on teachers around accountability measures, such as achieving high exam results, which might offer a more neoliberal framing of education (Knight, 2023). This might be considered a so-called “values schizophrenia” (Ball, 2003, p. 221) whereby the values of a teacher do not align with the ways in which they are expected to teach in a performative, neoliberal context. For example, a teacher might want to engage in SJE by introducing multiple perspectives of a historical topic or event but might be restricted in doing so due to time constraints and the amount of content already on course specifications to cover. While each dimension is distinct, these dimensions combine to form and re-form teacher identity. Importantly, Mockler (2011) argues that “teachers with a strong sense of their professional identity and the connection between their purpose and their practice are more likely to be pro-active in the enactment of their ‘moral purpose’ both within and beyond the school” (p. 525). This means that a strong sense of teacher identity is important with regards to social justice because it can help to challenge the neoliberal structures in education described throughout this literature review. This idea of teachers as activists (Sachs, 2003a) is discussed below.

A person's identity often places them in social positions of privilege and marginalisation in different ways, and so their understanding of and investment in SJE may be influenced by that. Importantly, as integral to SJE, teachers should consider themselves to be activists (Dover, 2013b; 2015; Ramlackhan, 2020), or, they “must choose to rebel” (Glickman, 1999, p. 19). However, based on individual understandings of and investment in SJE, this may vary in sociopolitical emphasis (Dover, 2015). Sachs (2003a) identifies an activist teaching profession that works under the assumption that education is political. Activist teachers are “change agents” working to improve education in ways that challenge oppression (Sachs, 2003a, p. 54). This means that activist teachers should have aims that are emancipatory. Similarly, Picower (2012a) outlines three commitments for teacher activism where teachers have a strong vision of social justice and work both inside and out of the classroom that revolve around actively challenging oppression and

working towards a transformative form of education that is linked to action. Further, Ramlackhan (2020) states that “social justice-oriented educators [...] are activists with an intentional and steadfast focus on equity and inclusion for marginalized populations (i.e., based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, ability, sexuality, religion, immigration status, and other categories of oppressive differences)” (p. 203). This means that an intentional focus on learners from marginalised backgrounds functions as a means to mitigating the confines of the neoliberal context in which teachers work, and this requires activism from teachers. Although challenging, teacher activism is important because it works against neoliberalism and towards a more equitable society. The neoliberal context, as outlined in sections 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4 of this chapter, poses considerable challenges for social justice-oriented teachers, as they “are expected to acclimatize to the neoliberal ideology that has been ingrained in education, for the advancement of market and efficiency logic and the need to create an educated and skilled workforce” (Ramlackhan, 2020, p. 201). This, in turn, has created conditions where teachers are “technicians” teaching to narrow exam demands (Ramlackhan, 2020, p. 200). In other words, teacher identity can be shaped by accountability measures, such as exams, inspections, or expectations from the department head, head teacher, or parents, leading to tension between a teacher’s vision for teaching and actual practice, which might, in turn, impact on a teacher’s identity (Berger & Le Van, 2019; Buchanan, 2015). Altogether, this means that within the confines of a neoliberal system, the role of the teacher is reduced to that of a technician, utilising Freire’s (1970) banking model to transmit information for exams to learners. Instead, in order to work towards a more socially just system, teachers must engage in activism, or actively oppose the problematic neoliberal system.

Focusing this discussion on the Scottish context, teaching in Scotland is a graduate-only profession, meaning that all teachers are required to hold a university degree and initial teacher education (ITE) is completed through university programmes that are accredited by the GTCS. So, a history teacher in Scotland, for example, holds a university degree in history and a Professional Graduate Diploma

in Education. In this way, ITE is a collaborative endeavour between universities, the GTCS, the Scottish Government, and local authorities (Christie & Menter, 2009). In addition to accrediting ITE programmes, the GTCS is also responsible for maintaining teacher registration as well as the Professional Standards for Teachers (2021). So, all teachers register with the GTCS once they complete their ITE programme and have demonstrated that they meet the Standards for Provisional Registrations (GTCS, 2021). Then, during the one-year induction programme, which provides a year of employment, they must evidence that they have met the Standards for Full Registration (GTCS, 2021). The GTCS has a set of robust and recently updated Professional Standards for Teachers (2021), and the idea of an activist teaching profession sits well within them. The current Standards (GTCS, 2021) are the third iteration of Professional Standards for teachers in Scotland since Education was devolved in 1999. The first set of Standards (GTCS, 2000) was revised in 2012 (GTCS, 2012), and the current set (GTCS, 2021) replaced the 2012 Standards.

The current suite of Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) is separated into five different sets of Standards. The Standard for Provisional Registration and the Standard for Full Registration provide benchmarks for all student teachers and practising teachers respectively in Scotland. The Standard for Career-Long Professional Learning, the Standard for Middle Leadership, and the Standard for Headship all provide standards that are aspirational in supporting the growth of teachers throughout their careers and in leadership positions. According to the GTCS (2021), the suite of Standards

[...] provide the framework for all teachers in Scotland to enhance their professionalism and ensure rigour and challenge that supports a resilient and enabled profession confident in the skills, knowledge and values needed to enable Scotland's young people to develop skills for learning, life and work (p. 3).

While professional standards can be seen as limiting, as “the very act of defining standards [...] demeans and diminishes the status of any profession so defined”, they can also be seen as an opportunity (Christie & Kirkwood, 2006, p.

265). In this way, seeing professional standards as an opportunity might allow teachers “to take control of the process of self-definition”, contributing to the development of a professional identity (Christie & Kirkwood, 2006, p. 266). This means that the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) and their focus on social justice might offer teachers in Scotland opportunities to engage with SJE, including activism, as instrumental to teaching. Further, standards might offer transparency of teachers' work, potentially leading to increased professionalisation for teaching (Kennedy, 2015). This transparency through standards, with the goal of improving teacher quality, could be beneficial for both teachers and learners because standards can showcase what a good teacher is deemed to be in a particular educational context (Sachs, 2003b). Importantly, though, professional standards can serve various purposes, including the socialisation of teachers, by placing value on what might be considered important by stakeholders, such as the government or teachers' unions (Kennedy, 2015). In the case of the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021), the clear focus on social justice, which is stronger than in the previous iterations of the standards, seems to identify social justice as integral to teaching in Scotland. Professional standards can also offer human capital development whereby teachers “are equipped to contribute to governmental aims by demonstrating practice that is at least at a level considered to be baseline competence” (Kennedy, 2015, pp. 187-188). This purpose seemingly aligns with the increase of performance culture and accountability in neoliberal contexts (Sachs, 2016). In the case of the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021), this purpose might align with the expectation of teachers preparing young people for “learning, life and work” (p. 3). Finally, professional standards can provide “subjectification” (Biesta, 2009) by “promot[ing] autonomy, creativity and teacher voice” (Kennedy, 2015, p. 185). This might, for example, allow teachers to “show professional courage and judgement to support and challenge system improvement” by advocating for change to, for example, the current assessment system or the limitations of the current course specifications with regards to culturally responsive representations of history (GTCS, 2021, p. 11). Altogether, professional standards can be seen as an

opportunity; however, it is important to acknowledge the various purposes professional standards can have. With regards to social justice, the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) offer teachers in Scotland opportunities to engage with SJE and position social justice as integral to teaching in Scotland. At the same time, though, there might be tension between the vision of the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) and the day-to-day practices of teachers working in a neoliberal educational context that is shaped by accountability measures such as exams at the later stages of schooling. This means that the vision of the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021), which aligns strongly with SJE, might not align with the ways in which teachers are expected to obtain high exam results.

The Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) clearly incorporate social justice and support teachers in challenging the status quo, in line with Sach's (2003) activist teaching profession. The Professional Standards (2021) state that social justice is "the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities now and in the future" (p. 4). This definition focuses on equality, yet does not suggest how this equality should be achieved. However, as discussed below, the Professional Standards (2021) outline several ways for teachers in Scotland to teach for social justice and engage in activism, and this, in turn, works towards social justice. Importantly, in creating my own definition of *social justice* in this thesis, I drew upon this definition as outlined by the GTCS. However, I shifted focus away from equality and towards a focus on equity because I would argue that it is important to recognise that working towards social justice, at times, requires inequality (Gorski, 2018).

The Professional Standards (2021) are separated into three main sections: (1) professional values, (2) professional knowledge and understanding, and (3) professional skills and abilities. The three professional values, which are (1) social justice, (2) trust and respect, and (3) integrity "help to develop our professional identity" (GTCS, 2021, p. 4). In this way, the Professional Standards (2021) clearly identify social justice as integral to teaching in Scotland, and upholding the Professional Standards (2021) is seemingly at odds with neoliberal values. Further,

the Professional Standards (2021) “support [teachers] to ask critical questions of educational theories, policies and practices and to examine our own attitudes and beliefs” (p. 4). This statement is pivotal in supporting teachers in challenging neoliberal structures in education, including a reliance on high stakes exams. All of this stands to support teachers in resistance and develop the self-knowledge critical to transformative professionalism. However, while policies, such as the Professional Standards (2021), might appear to be inclusive and/or progressive, they do not always translate directly into changed lived circumstances. This means that there can be a policy-implementation gap where what is intended by a policy is not easily replicated in practice by teachers. For example, according to Priestley et al. (2015), “policy demands that teachers exercise agency in their working practices, then simultaneously denies them the means to do so, effectively disabling them” (p. 2). This means that, while the Professional Standards (2021) might support and encourage teachers in engaging with SJE, for example, by specifically highlighting social justice as a professional value, there also might be obstacles preventing them from doing so. These obstacles, or so-called “values schizophrenia” (Ball, 2003, p. 221), for example, might take the form of pressure around exam results or high workloads relating to the thirty-five hours of career-long professional learning required of teachers in Scotland each year. With obstacles potentially preventing teachers from engaging with the vision of the Professional Standards (2021), opportunities for professional standards to enable transformative professional learning for teachers may be stymied (Sachs, 2016). This means that the potential for the Professional Standards (2021) to improve practice and contribute to social justice might not be fulfilled due to potential or perceived obstacles, thus contributing to a policy-implementation gap. Priestley et al. (2015) go on to say that “such policy overtly focuses on the individual dimensions of what it means to be an effective teacher, while ignoring or subverting the cultural and structural conditions which play an important role in enabling this to happen” (p. 2). In the Scottish educational context, this might be exam demands taking priority over a social justice approach to teaching and learning, despite a teacher’s desire to engage with SJE and

the Professional Standards (2021) being clear on where social justice sits in the profession. This might also take the form of pressures around subject uptake, availability of resources, or workload. So, while the Professional Standards (2021) support teachers in challenging problematic issues of power, and this might align with a teacher's vision for their teaching practice, the reality of teaching in a neoliberal context where there is a strong focus on exams might prevent the intentions of the policy and a teacher's vision from being implemented (Buchanan, 2015).

From their study on history teaching in Northern Ireland, Kitson and McCully (2005) outline a continuum of risk taking, including the *avoider*, the *container*, and the *risk-taker*. At one end of the continuum, the *avoider* tends to avoid controversial topics in the classroom and does not see history teachers as instrumental to social change. In the middle of the continuum, the *container* engages with controversial topics but in limited ways, with few connections to the lives of learners. Finally, at the other end of the continuum from the *avoider*, the *risk-taker* emphasises the social element of history teaching and embraces controversial topics while making connections between content and current events and the lives of learners. The *risk-taker's* approach aligns strongly with SJE but might face obstacles in the Scottish policy and assessment landscape. Because the *avoider's* approach fails to incorporate the possibility of social change through teaching history, it registers lower in sociopolitical emphasis while the *risk-taker* registers higher in sociopolitical emphasis (Dover, 2015). This is important because teaching for social justice requires teachers to challenge problematic issues of power. As a subject, history offers several opportunities to learn about and challenge oppression throughout history while linking it to present day events. History teachers identifying as the *avoider*, and to a certain extent, the *container*, fail to expose learners to potentially controversial or sensitive topics and therefore miss opportunities to engage in SJE. As discussed in section 2.7 of this chapter, there are several reasons why history teachers might hesitate to adopt the *risk-taker* identity.

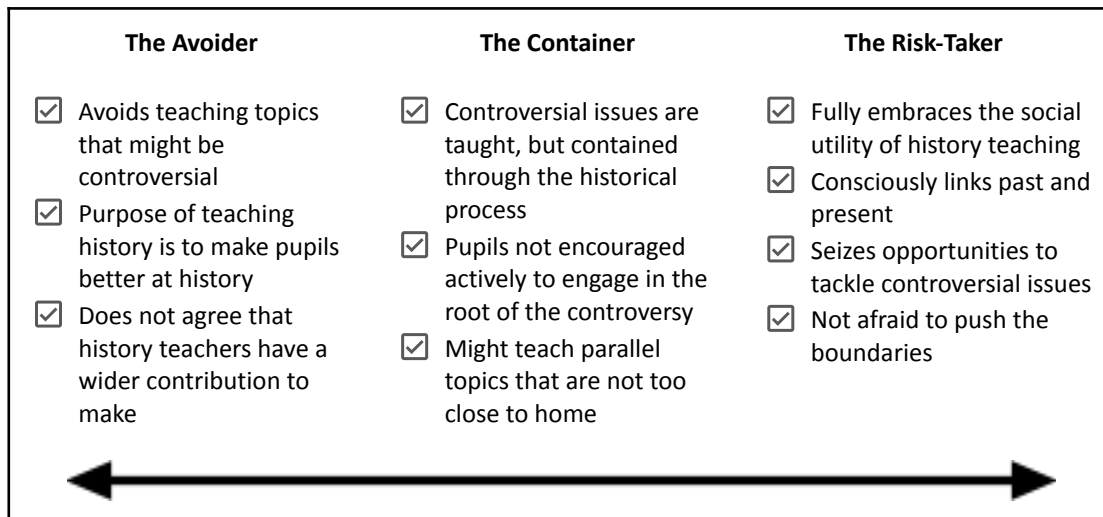


Figure 2: Risk-Taking Continuum (Kitson & McCully, 2005, p. 35).

Pace (2019) used Kitson and McCully's (2005) continuum to explore how teacher educators across three different contexts prepared new teachers to engage with potentially sensitive topics in the history classroom. Pace (2019) identifies that the teacher educators that she studied fell between the *container* and the *risk-taker* when preparing pre-service teachers how to engage with potentially controversial topics in the classroom. Pace (2021) identifies eight strategies for teaching potentially controversial topics in the classroom, including: (1) "cultivation of warm, supportive classroom environments"; (2) "thorough preparation and planning"; (3) "reflection on teacher identity and roles"; (4) "proactive communication with parents, other teachers, and administrators"; (5) "careful selection, timing, and framing of issues"; (6) "emphasis on creative resources and group activities"; (7) "steering of discussion"; and (8) "dealing with emotional conflicts" (pp. 230-231). Importantly, with regards to the third strategy, which requires teachers to reflect on their identity and their role in the classroom, Pace (2021) identifies teachers as facilitators and emphasises the importance of reflecting on one's positionality and "whether, when, and how" one discloses their personal views in the classroom so that learners are able to come to their own conclusions around the controversial topics being explored (p. 230). This is directly opposed to the role of teachers as "technicians" in a neoliberal context (Ramlackhan, 2020, p. 201). Therefore, it is



important for history teachers teaching in a neoliberal context to embrace a role as a facilitator in order to work towards social justice.

Activist teachers and history teachers who are *risk-takers* are essential for SJE because challenging problematic issues of power involves taking risks. Importantly, the Standards (GTCS, 2021) support history teachers in Scotland in being both activists and *risk-takers*. This can be demonstrated by the explicit focus on social justice in the Standards (2021). Additionally, the GTCS offers opportunities for teachers to engage with social justice. For example, in March of 2023, the GTCS provided teachers with a guide for “speaking up when something doesn’t feel right” via email. The *Ethics in Teaching: Speaking Up Guide for Teaching Professionals* outlines the importance of reflection and “aims to promote and build confidence in addressing professional challenges, this includes having the professional courage to ‘speak up’ when you have concerns” (GTCS, 2023, p. 2). The guide specifically outlines speaking up with regards to child protection as well as workplace issues. However, the “professional courage” (GTCS, 2023, p. 2) around which the guide focuses can also be applied to Kitson and McCully’s (2005) notion of risk-taking. The guide highlights professional courage as an ethical responsibility for teachers in Scotland. The guide is also supported by a series of online roundtable events open to teachers registered with the GTCS. This recent professional development opportunity provided by the GTCS highlights the focus on social justice in the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) and provides opportunities for teachers to engage with this professional value. This seemingly aligns with a so-called subjectification (Biesta, 2009) purpose of professional standards whereby teachers “contribute to the common good through the fostering of their own specific interests and talents in creative ways” (Kennedy, 2015, p. 185). However, as previously explored, there might be obstacles or barriers to engaging with the Standards in this way, due to, for example, exam demands, workload, or career-long professional learning requirements. This thesis explores the extent to which history teachers in Scotland engage with social justice. In other words, this thesis explores the extent to which history teachers in Scotland may be described as activists and

*risk-takers.*

This literature review has explored the problems of growing conservatism and accountability and standardisation in education, which lead to structural inequity. This literature review then explored the role and complexities of a social justice approach to teaching and learning as a response to these problematic trends in education. Working against the confines of neoliberalism, a social justice approach to teaching and learning in the history classroom is critical to democracy and helps learners to look to the past to examine oppression and justice-seeking movements as well as develop the skills to identify and challenge injustice in the world around them, including understanding how oppression and power relations are historically rooted. The following chapter outlines the methodology I used in this study.

## Chapter 3 - Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

While the previous chapter explored literature relevant to this thesis, this chapter outlines the methodology of this study, including the approach to research design, which draws upon critical narrative analysis (Goodson & Gill, 2014) and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), the approach to data collection, the nature of the participants in this study, the approach to data analysis, which draws upon reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), the ethical considerations, and the limitations of this study. This thesis seeks to explore how secondary school history teachers in Scotland engage with social justice, if at all. In doing so, this thesis also aims to explore what history teachers in the Scottish educational context see as their role in the classroom and how this might emerge in their reporting of their practice. Since identities are a complex web of experiences (Clandinin, 2007), a qualitative approach to research design allowed for an in-depth exploration of these details and suited the nature of the data collected. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research utilises descriptive data, allowing for the rich interpretation of the teachers' experiences and identities explored in this study (Cohen et al., 2017). Further, this study rejects positivism, which seeks to objectively measure reality (Cohen et al., 2017), in that it assumes that there are different ways of understanding or experiencing reality and that knowledge is situated within the context in which it was created (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

### 3.2 Research Questions

This thesis explores the following research questions:

1. To what extent do history teachers in Scotland engage with teaching for social justice?
  - a. What do they understand by social justice and social justice education?
  - b. In what ways does this understanding impact upon their reported teaching practice?
2. In relation to the Scottish educational context, what do history teachers see

as their role in the classroom and how does this emerge in their reporting of their practice?

### **3.3 Approach to Research Design**

This interpretivist study draws upon critical narrative analysis and a narrative inquiry framework to explore the above research questions. Critical narrative analysis is a means to explore “how individuals are subject to a certain social political and power dynamics, and how a person as a bearer of a particular social identity is placed in a wide scheme of things that are beyond their choice and preference” (Goodson & Gill, 2014 p. 75). Drawing on both critical narrative (Goodson & Gill, 2014) and a narrative inquiry framework (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I aim to draw upon the nuanced and “storied nature” (Agarwal et al., 2010, p. 239) of secondary school history teachers’ experiences, beliefs, values, and identities to gain a deeper understanding of teaching for social justice within the Scottish context, where research has been limited so far. The data collected aims to paint a portrait of a selection of teachers’ understandings of teaching for social justice within the history classroom in Scotland while highlighting the realities of this approach to teaching in relation to the CfE and SQA examinations. In this way, narrative is seen as a “quest for meaning” (Goodson & Gill, 2014, p. 73). Further, identity is “something *produced* through the narratives people use to explain and understand their lives” (Lawler, 2002, p. 250, emphasis in original). Therefore, narrative is a useful tool to explore the research questions in this study.

Teaching for social justice requires an understanding that society is unjust as well as a “critical conception of the world [that] recognises that education contributes to the perpetuation of unequal power and the unjustness of the status quo through the way in which knowledge is defined, constructed and implemented in the socially formed space” (Goodson & Gill, 2014, p. 42). In this study, critical narrative allowed participants to reflect critically on their beliefs, values, and experiences, position themselves within this particular context, and consider the extent to which they participate in transformative action, if at all. The critical reflexivity required to do this is an “extended reflection” that “incorporates

thoughtful action” (Door, 2014, p. 91). This allows for deep examination of one’s beliefs and values as well as opportunities for change. In the same way, Freire’s (1970) concept of praxis, or action-reflection, posits that transformation is inextricably linked to critical reflexivity. Further, “although life narratives may appear to be immersed in the past, they are reflective of the present and can lead us to the future” (Goodson & Gill, 2014, p. 31). This means that reflecting on their experiences, participants can uncover their identities in the present and how this in turn might contribute to their teaching practice, as well as create an opportunity to seek transformation in their future practice.

### **3.4 Approach to Data Collection**

Qualitative methods were used in this study to collect data that seeks to explore the nuanced details of participants’ experiences. Drawing on the approaches detailed above, I designed each of the instruments for data collection to specifically draw out the stories that underpin each participant’s experiences. I used three instruments to collect data, each of which are discussed in turn:

1. Identity charts;
2. SQA exam question annotations; and
3. Semi-structured interviews.

Firstly, participants were emailed a workbook ([Appendix C](#)) where they created an identity chart about themselves and annotated an SQA exam question. Participants completed this workbook and then emailed it to me ahead of their scheduled semi-structured interview. I reviewed the completed workbook and then used the information they provided as a starting point for the semi-structured interview. These three instruments, which are discussed in turn below, were used to construct narratives, in the form of vignettes, that are representative of the experiences of each participant and are located within the Scottish context. The vignettes are presented in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

A table demonstrating the rationale for each instrument in relation to each research question can be found in [Appendix F](#). Sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2, and 3.4.3 of this chapter outline each of the three instruments for data collection. Section 3.4.4 expands upon the description above to outline the steps I took during the data collection phase of this study. Section 3.4.5 outlines the questions I asked during the interviews. Section 3.4.6 outlines the pilot study, and section 3.4.7 outlines the considerations made in collecting data during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **3.4.1 Identity Charts**

An identity chart is a “diagram that individuals fill in with words and phrases they use to describe themselves as well as the labels that society gives them” (Facing History and Ourselves, 2009; Krishnan, 2021; Ruales et al., 2021; Young, 2017). Identity charts are a pedagogical tool frequently used by *Facing History and Ourselves*, an educational organisation focused on teaching history for equity and social justice, as a way to help young people explore the many factors that make up their own identities. Identity charts can also be used in the classroom to help learners identify factors that make up historical figures and characters in literature. While often used as a pedagogical tool for critical pedagogy, identity charts were similarly used in this study as a tool for critical inquiry to help participants critically reflect on and explore the factors that make up their own identities and how these factors may contribute to or reveal themselves through their teaching practice. I chose to use this approach as a way to encourage participants to explore their identities and experiences and so that they could use the chart they created as support during their interview.

A workbook ([Appendix C](#)), which should have taken around one hour to complete, was emailed to participants ahead of their scheduled interview. A blank copy of the workbook is found in [Appendix C](#) and an example of a completed workbook, including an example of an identity chart, is found in [Appendix D](#). The first part of the workbook provided participants with an example of an identity chart and asked them to construct their own identity chart ahead of the interview.

Participants then emailed their completed workbook back to me in advance of our Zoom interview. We then used the identity chart as a starting point during the interview, which sought to identify critical incidents that contribute to their teaching practice and identities as teachers. The identity chart aimed to be a reflexive exercise for participants that supported them in preparing for the interview by encouraging them to think about their experiences and identities, while putting those thoughts onto paper. This data collection instrument, while also a stimulus to elicit participant responses during the semi-structured interview (Barton, 2015), seeks to respond to research question two by helping participants critically reflect on and explore the factors that contribute to their identities, represent their identities at that moment in time, and construct a history of themselves as history teachers, including what they see as their role in the classroom. Further, I used the information directly contained in each identity chart alongside elaborations from the interviews to construct the vignettes in Chapter 4 of this thesis. In this way, the participant-constructed identity charts elicited and supported discussion in the semi-structured interviews and also generated data about the many factors that make up each participant, which I used to construct vignettes. For example, Chris wrote “opinionated” on his identity chart and also spoke about this label in his interview, specifically in the story he told about how he became interested in history and his journey into teaching, and this is used in his vignette.

### **3.4.2 SQA Exam Question Annotations**

In the second part of the workbook completed in advance of the interview, participants were asked to annotate an SQA exam question. A blank copy of this question is found in [Appendix C](#) and an example of an annotated copy is found in [Appendix D](#). This instrument seeks to explore classroom practice and approaches to pedagogy without observing teachers in the classroom and draws on Dover (2016) and Masuda’s (2014) use of lesson plan annotations as a way to explore teachers’ understandings of social justice teaching in the face of the USA’s Common Core standards and preservice teachers’ understandings of disciplinary literacy,

respectively. While this still explores reported teaching practice, this instrument aims to paint a more detailed portrait of teaching practice where observations of lessons were not possible. I chose to use this instrument instead of observing teachers in the classroom because, due to COVID-19 restrictions, the reality of classroom teaching changed dramatically and this would have hindered access to classrooms. Therefore, I chose to use an instrument where participants wrote their responses and we discussed them during the interview. Like the identity chart in the first part of the workbook, the SQA question annotations were used to prompt the semi-structured interview. So, this part of the workbook acts as a stimulus to elicit participant responses during the semi-structured interviews (Barton, 2015). Examples from this part of the workbook are also referenced in the Findings and Discussion chapter of this thesis to further exemplify participant responses, thereby acting as data within the study. As an instrument, the SQA exam question annotations created by participants helped me to explore research question one, regarding how, if at all, participants reported incorporating elements of SJE into their practice.

After constructing their identity charts (the first part of the workbook), participants were provided with an SQA exam question and instructions to annotate the question (the second part of the workbook) ([Appendix C](#)). I chose an exam question from the National 5 topic *Free at Last? Civil Rights in the USA 1918-1968* because it is a commonly taught topic in history classrooms in Scotland, which means that participants were likely to be familiar with it ([Figure 3](#)). Participants were provided with instructions and prompts to help them complete this task ([Figure 4](#)). For example, the prompts asked participants how they would teach the content required to answer this exam question. Prompts also asked participants if the question brought any particular sources, people, or events to mind. In other words, what tools would they use in the classroom to teach the material required to answer this exam question? What connections do the participants make between the content in this exam question and elements of teaching for social justice? What connections do the participants make between the content required to answer this



exam question and the lives of learners? Participants and I then referenced the annotations during the semi-structured interview when talking about teaching practice. Elements included in this part of the workbook are also referred to in the Findings and Discussion chapter of this thesis. For example, some participants detailed the specific tools or strategies they use to teach the mechanics of this question type, such as mnemonic devices, and these examples from the SQA question annotation task are included in relation to the ways in which participants reported teaching. This data allowed me to explore the reported teaching practices of participants by exemplifying some of the tools or strategies that came to their minds in response to the exam question annotation task.

Source A is from a textbook written by modern historians, published in 2013.

Source A

Slavery had been abolished in the 1860s but the Southern states of the USA used Jim Crow laws to maintain a segregated society. Black children were forbidden to attend school with white children. At work, black Americans collected their pay separately from whites. There were also strict bans on whites and blacks marrying. In 1896, the Supreme Court ruled that such segregation of black people from white people was acceptable. Their ruling was called the 'separate but equal' decision.

77. Evaluate the usefulness of Source A as evidence of the ways in which the Jim Crow laws segregated black and white Americans.

(You may want to comment on what type of source it is, who wrote it, when they wrote it, why they wrote it, what they say and what has been missed out.)

*Figure 3: SQA Exam Question from Workbook*

See [Appendix C](#) for an entire blank workbook and [Appendix D](#) for an entire completed workbook

**Your Task**

Annotate the SQA exam question on the following page to demonstrate how you would teach the content required to successfully answer this question.

You do not need to answer the question, but demonstrate how you would engage with the question as a teacher.

**A Few Things to Consider**

- How might you teach the content required to answer this question?
- Does this question bring any particular resources, people, or events to mind?
- What tools might you use to teach the content required to answer this question?
- What connections can you make between the content and the lives of learners?

*Figure 4: SQA Exam Question Annotation Instructions and Prompts from Workbook*

### 3.4.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

I then conducted semi-structured (Magaldi & Berler, 2020; Cohen et al., 2017) online interviews via Zoom to unpack the identity charts and SQA exam question annotations from the workbook and further explore the understandings participants have of SJE and how their identities may contribute to this understanding. The interview, lasting around one hour for each participant (with the shortest lasting forty-five minutes and the longest lasting ninety minutes), was semi-structured in nature to allow for more in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, beliefs, values, and identities. The workbook, including both the participant-produced identity charts and SQA exam question annotations, was used as a starting point for discussion during the interview and was referred to throughout to elicit discussion (Barton, 2015). A schedule with pre-determined, open-ended questions was also used as a guide throughout the interviews. Examples of the questions I asked participants are found in section 3.4.5 of this chapter and the general schedule of questions I used is found in [Appendix E](#). Unlike structured interviews, this semi-structured interview approach allowed for flexibility in the moment to tailor the wording and sequence of questions and prompts to individual participants (Magaldi & Berler, 2020; Cohen et al., 2017). In this context, a structured interview approach would have been limited. Semi-structured interviews were useful as an instrument for data collection in this study because they "allow[ed] for discovery, with space to follow topical trajectories as the conversation unfolds" (Magaldi & Berler, 2020, p. 4825). This means that I was able to ask further questions that built upon a participant's previous answers and the conversation flowed more naturally than if I were to adhere to a strict schedule of questions. As such, while all interviews covered questions on the general schedule, some participants spent more of their interview time discussing their journey into teaching whereas others spent more time discussing teaching practice. As an

instrument, the semi-structured interviews helped me to unpack the identity charts and SQA exam question annotations with each participant.

#### **3.4.4 Step-By-Step Account of Data Collection Process**

For clarity, here I outline the order of steps taken by me and each participant during the data collection phase of this study.

- Potential participants expressed their interest in taking part in the study via a Qualtrics form linked to the call for participants ([Appendix B](#));
- I emailed the participant information sheet (PIS) ([Appendix A](#)) and a link to a Qualtrics form that had (1) an electronic consent form and (2) a demographic information questionnaire to the potential participant;
- After completion of the consent form and demographic information questionnaire via Qualtrics, I emailed the workbook ([Appendix C](#)) and available interview times to the potential participant;
- The participant selected an interview time and emailed their completed workbook to me in advance of the interview;
- I reviewed the participant's completed workbook, making notes of key information and used their completed workbook to create and adjust prompts for the semi-structured interview (this process is outlined in more depth in section 3.4.5 of this chapter);
- The participant and I met via Zoom for the semi-structured interview, which lasted around one hour and was audio and video recorded;
- I verbally reviewed information around consent and the ability to withdraw from the study without reason or consequence at any point before the data was anonymised, and answered participant questions as necessary before then beginning the semi-structured interview;
- After the interview, I made notes in my critically reflexive journal;
- I transcribed the interview verbatim and checked the transcription for accuracy;
- I emailed the transcription of the interview to the participant to be checked;

- In some cases, I redacted information in the transcript at the request of the participant;
- I anonymised the data, including the names of colleagues, pupils, schools, and local authorities and assigned a pseudonym for the participant to protect confidentiality and anonymity.

During this process, I made myself available to respond to any queries from potential participants and participants via email and during the interview. I also took notes before, during, and after the interview, including during the transcription process.

### **3.4.5 Interview Questions**

This section outlines the questions I asked participants during their interview. As the interviews were semi-structured in nature, I started with a schedule of general questions ([Appendix E](#)), which I then tailored to each participant based on the information they included in their workbook. The schedule is organised into three categories: (1) *Using Identity Charts*, (2) *Using SQA Exam Question Annotations*, and (3) *Other Key Questions*. I organised the questions in this way so that I could utilise each element of the workbook during the interview. I did not ask each participant every question, but drew on some of them in the moment based on participants' responses and sequenced the prompts differently based on the natural flow of conversation with each participant (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). Being semi-structured in nature, this allowed me to start with general questions and then adapt based on participant answers, rather than adhering to a strict schedule of questions. I used each participant's workbook to tailor the interview questions. For example, one participant included several locations in which he has lived in his identity chart. I opened the interview by stating that I noticed there were several cities listed on his identity chart and asked if he could tell me more about them. This led to discussion about each city and what the participant was experiencing personally and professionally while living there, leading to a story of this participant's journey into teaching. The questions I asked are aligned with critical

narrative (Goodson & Gill, 2014) and a narrative inquiry framework (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) because they encouraged participants to reflect on their past, including critical incidents that helped shape their lives, and in this way, “tell stories of their actions to render them meaningful” (Goodson & Gill, 2014, p. 74). In this way, the three instruments for data collection combine to draw out the stories that underpin each participant’s experiences. So, the workbook tasks and semi-structured interviews worked together to generate the stories that participants told about their lives and their teaching, which I then recorded and analysed.

Immediately after each interview, I took notes in my critically reflexive journal and then returned to my journal if and when any thoughts or realisations came to me at a later time. I used this as an opportunity to reflect on the way I asked questions and remain aware of how I ask them. It was my intention to avoid asking leading questions. For example, the following is an excerpt from my critically reflexive journal:

I think my questions were too leading re SQA and activism. Think of a way to rephrase? I think this one was tricky because [the participant] didn’t talk as much and I had to ask more questions and I found myself scrambling a bit compared to when previous participants gave lengthier answers.

This reflection allowed me to adapt the ways in which I asked questions in cases where participants did not engage in as much conversation as other participants. Needing to make adaptations like this, however, was not always necessary. For example, one participant needed very little prompting and spent forty-five minutes of her ninety-minute interview detailing her journey into teaching and reflecting on what she had learned along the way. In this way, this participant exemplified the “storied nature” of her experience (Agarwal et al., 2010, p. 239).

### **3.4.6 Pilot**

All three of these instruments were piloted before data collection began to test their practicality and effectiveness in exploring the research questions. I sought volunteers from the School of Education Postgraduate Research group of students.

Two secondary school teachers, who do not teach history, volunteered to help pilot the identity charts and interview. As they were not history teachers, they did not trial the SQA question annotation. One history teacher participated in piloting all three elements. Piloting each of the three instruments for data collection ensured the instructions for each instrument were clear and provided opportunities for me to practise taking information from the workbook and incorporating it into the interview. This experience also allowed me to “[hone] my interview technique” (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009, p. 120) by practising asking different types of questions, responding to participants in real time, and developing more comfort and confidence in conducting interviews on an online platform. This experience revealed some ambiguity in the instructions for the SQA exam question annotations, which I then amended for clarity. For example, one participant indicated uncertainty around whether or not they were supposed to answer the SQA question in part four of the workbook. For this reason, I edited the workbook to include the sentence “You do not need to answer the question, but demonstrate how you would engage with the question as a teacher”.

#### **3.4.7 Data Collection During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, data collection was conducted entirely online via Zoom. I made this choice in accordance with Scottish Government regulations and to ensure the health and safety of participants and myself. This online format offered the potential for participants to share information differently than they might have in person (Gray et al. 2020; Archibald et al., 2019). In this way, participants might have felt more or less at ease and this could have impacted on how they shared information.

The benefits of collecting data online proved logistically useful. Online data collection allowed for easier geographic access to participants in more remote areas of Scotland. This format also allowed for increased flexibility with timing to the benefit of both participants and me, which was appropriate for the nature of the expectations of teachers during lockdown. For example, some interviews were

easily scheduled or rescheduled by participants at the last minute, which would have been challenging had we been making arrangements to meet in person.

Despite the benefits, there were also limitations in collecting data online. Being unable to hold the interview in person might have hindered the comfort level of participants in sharing potentially vulnerable information with someone they have not met. I aimed to alleviate this by drawing on my insider status and introducing myself as a fellow history teacher and explaining that the interview was meant to be a relaxed conversation about teaching history. The online format might have also included more vulnerability than meeting in person because participants were essentially welcoming me into their home. For this reason, participants were able to leave their video on or off to suit their comfort level. One participant opted to leave their video off during the interview. Further, occasional technical difficulties interrupted some Zoom calls, which might have disrupted the flow of the interview. All interruptions due to technical difficulties were brief and we were able to continue once reconnected.

### **3.5 Participants**

Section 3.4 and its subsections outlined the approach to data collection in this study, including the instruments I used to collect data, steps taken, and considerations made in conducting data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic. This section of the Methodology chapter outlines the participants of the study, including the inclusion and exclusion criteria for participants, and the nature of participants. To recruit participants, I utilised a combination of convenience (Cohen et al. 2017; Picower, 2012a; Stratton, 2021) and targeted snowball sampling (Cohen et al., 2017; Dover et al., 2016; Picower, 2012a). Convenience sampling “involves choosing the nearest individuals [...] who happen to be available and accessible at the time” (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 218). Simply, in conducting convenience sampling “the researcher announces the study and participants self-select if they wish to participate” (Stratton, 2021, p. 373). For example, I circulated a call for participants through networking sites and social media. Snowball sampling utilises the networks

of people who might meet the inclusion criteria to help identify other people who might meet the inclusion criteria (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 220). In utilising snowball sampling, potential participants can also be referred to the researcher rather than the researcher approaching potential participants (Stratton, 2021). In this way, I used my insider status as a history teacher in Scotland to network and advertise the study and request voluntary participation. I advertised the call for participants ([Appendix B](#)) twice in a networking group for history teachers in Scotland on Facebook, twice through a Twitter post, and through a personalised email to my professional contacts. At the time, the Facebook page had around 1,300 members. The Tweet was shared through my account, the University of Strathclyde School of Education account, and was re-Tweeted by several other accounts, including multiple networking accounts for teachers in Scotland. Further, when exchanging emails to schedule interviews, participants were encouraged to spread the word with their professional networks as well. Most participants cited social media when asked how they had heard about the study. Throughout this process, potential participants were not coerced or pressured to participate, were reassured that they did not have to participate, and were assured that they could withdraw from the study without consequence at any time before data is anonymised at the point of analysis and the names of participants were changed to pseudonyms, as per the research ethics guidance from the Scottish Educational Research Association (SERA) (SERA, 2005) and the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (BERA, 2018).

Due to the nature of the study, it might have been the case that the self-selecting participants self-identified as social justice educators and were more likely to participate than teachers who do not associate with the term *social justice*. This might produce a motivation bias where “motivation to participate may depend upon the interest one has in the research topic, a wish to express a disgruntled point of view, or desire to support one’s specific opinions” (Stratton, 2021, p. 373). To recruit a range of participants, though, I advertised the study through professional networks for history teachers in Scotland as a way to reach all teachers. When



asked why they chose to volunteer for this study, participants cited several reasons, including opportunities for:

- Continued professional development
- Professional dialogue
- A reflective exercise
- Exploring own interests
- Making change in education
- Supporting history and education research
- Giving back after being helped as a new teacher
- Giving back after personally benefiting from medical research

### **3.5.1 Inclusion Criteria**

All volunteers who participated in this study were (1) history teachers in Scotland and (2) held current GTCS registration in history. In addition to holding current GTCS registration in history, all participants were employed as history teachers in Scotland at the time. Employment status was not considered as an inclusion or exclusion criterion. However, currently registered but non-employed teachers would have been included if any volunteered to participate.

### **3.5.2 Exclusion Criteria**

In the event that more than twenty potential participants expressed interest in volunteering to participate in the study, participants would have been selected based on the length of their history teaching experience so that there would be a similar number of participants in the early, middle, and later stages of their history teaching careers. However, this step in excluding participants was not required.

### **3.5.3 Nature of Participants**

Twenty-three people expressed their interest in volunteering to participate in the study, which was done by completing a form on Qualtrics linked to the advertisements on social media and in my emails to professional contacts ([Figure 5](#)). Of the twenty-three volunteers, twenty-one met the inclusion criteria. Of the twenty-one volunteers who met the inclusion criteria, twelve returned the consent

form. Of the twelve volunteers who returned the consent form, nine ultimately became participants.

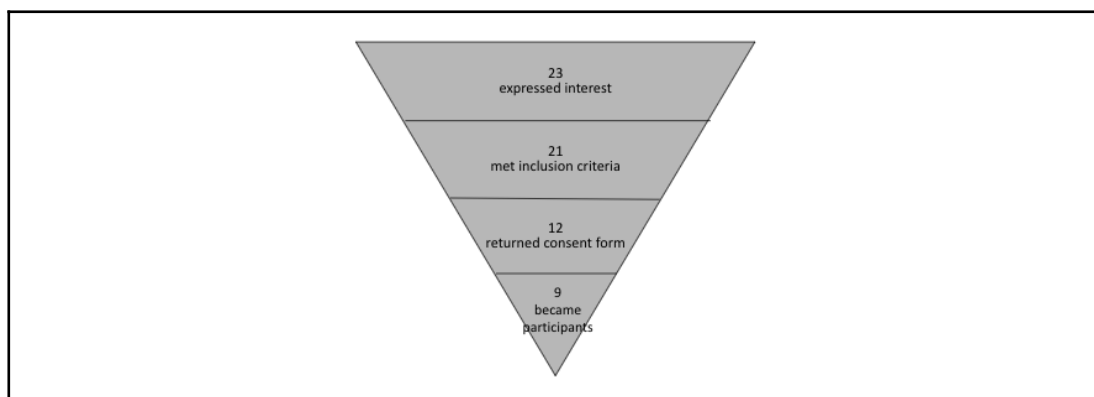


Figure 5: Recruitment Process

The nine participants represented a range of experiences ([Table 2](#)). Of the nine participants, four reported identifying their gender as *male*, five reported identifying their gender as *female*, and zero participants selected *non-binary*, *prefer not to answer*, or *other*. In terms of their age at the time, six participants reported being 30-34, one reported being 35-39, and two reported being 40-44. Four of the nine participants reported being educated to master's-level. At the time, eight participants were full-time classroom teachers with one teaching part-time. Six participants were classroom teachers at the time and three were heads of faculty. Experience ranged from two and a half years to twenty years, with the average experience being around eight years. Five participants were born in Scotland, while four moved to Scotland from abroad or elsewhere in the UK, including two from Northern Ireland, one from England, and one from Australia. According to the GTCS register at the time, three participants were qualified to teach only history, while six were qualified to teach another subject in addition to history. Qualification in additional subjects included English, modern studies, and religious education. Participants also represented schools from both urban and rural parts of Scotland.

Participant's Pseudonym	Age	Years of Experience	Gender Identity	Highest Level of Formal Education	Type of Employment	Role in the School	Place of Birth
Chris	35 - 39	5	male	Master's	Full-time	Classroom Teacher	Scotland
David	30 - 34	6	male	PGDE	Full-time	Classroom Teacher	Scotland
Beth	30 - 34	4	female	PGDE	Full-time	Classroom Teacher	Scotland
Michael	40 - 44	10	male	Master's	Full-time	Head of Faculty	Scotland
Len	30 - 34	2.5	male	Master's	Full-time	Classroom Teacher	Scotland
Shannon	30 - 34	6	female	Master's	Full-time	Classroom Teacher	Northern Ireland
Catherine	30 - 34	11	female	Bachelor's	Full-time	Head of Faculty	Australia
Anne	30 - 34	9	female	Bachelor's	Full-time	Classroom Teacher	England
Carrie	40 - 44	20	female	Bachelor's	Part-time	Head of Faculty	Northern Ireland

*Table 2: Nature of Participants*

I submitted a Freedom of Information (FOI) request to the GTCS and the information provided revealed that the sample is relatively reflective of the population of teachers GTCS registered in history (Tables [3](#), [4](#), and [5](#)). According to the GTCS statistics provided to me, there are 2,922 registered history teachers in Scotland, with 1,117 reporting their gender as male, and 1,805 reporting their gender as female (GTCS, personal communication, June 21, 2021). Four participants reported their gender as male and five participants reported their gender as female. Similarly, 2,472 of the 2,922 GTCS registered history teachers qualified in Scotland, and 450 qualified outwith Scotland (GTCS, personal communication, June 21, 2021). Of the sample, eight qualified in Scotland and one qualified outwith Scotland. Finally, all nine participants fell within the largest two age demographics as reported by the GTCS. These statistics indicate that the sample is representative of the profile

characteristics of GTCS registered history teachers in Scotland. According to the GTCS, they do not keep information regarding ethnicity or national identity. A FOI request to the Scottish Government, however, revealed that the overwhelming majority of history teachers in Scotland identify as white (L. McDonald, personal communication, July 19, 2021) (Table 6). While the statistics from the Scottish Government indicate there are few BPoC/BAME (Black Person and Person of Colour/Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) teachers registered in history with the GTCS (Table 6), there are not any BPoC/BAME teachers represented in the sample. Therefore, this study cannot comment on the experiences of BPoC/BAME history teachers in Scotland but does reflect a need for increased representation among history teachers in Scotland.

	Number of Population	Percentage of Population	Number of Sample	Percentage of Sample
Male	1,117 / 2,922	38 %	4 / 9	44 %
Female	1,805 / 2,922	62 %	5 / 9	56 %

Table 3: Reported Gender of Population and Sample (GTCS, personal communication, June 21, 2021)

	Number of Population	Percentage of Population	Number of Sample	Percentage of Sample
Qualified in Scotland	2,472 / 2,922	85 %	8 / 9	89 %
Qualified outwith Scotland	450 / 2,922	15 %	1 / 9	11 %

Table 4: Place of Qualification of Population and Sample (GTCS, personal communication, June 21, 2021)

GTCS Age Breakdown	Number of Population	Percentage of Population	Sample Age Breakdown	Number of Sample	Percentage of Sample
20 - 30	484 / 2,922	17 %	20 - 24	0 / 9	0 %
			25 - 29	0 / 9	0 %
31 - 40	755 / 2,922	26 %	30 - 34	6 / 9	67 %

			<b>35 - 39</b>	1 / 9	11 %
<b>41 - 50</b>	723 / 2,922	25 %	<b>40 - 44</b>	2 / 9	22 %
			<b>45 - 49</b>	0 / 9	0 %
<b>51 - 60</b>	628 / 2,922	21 %	<b>50 - 54</b>	0 / 9	0 %
			<b>55 - 59</b>	0 / 9	0 %
<b>61 - 70</b>	305 / 2,922	10 %	<b>60 - 64</b>	0 / 9	0 %
<b>71 - 80</b>	26 / 2,922	< 1 %	<b>65 +</b>	0 / 9	0 %
<b>80 +</b>	1 / 2,922	< 1 %			

Table 5: Reported Age of Population and Sample (GTCS, personal communication, June 21, 2021)

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Teacher FTE</b>	<b>National Identity</b>	<b>Teacher FTE</b>
White - Scottish	651	Scottish	626
White - Other British	237	British	239
White - Other	32	English	19
White - Irish	22	Northern Irish	14
White - Polish	0	Welsh	*
White - Gypsy / Traveller	0	Other	26
Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups	5	Not Known	68
Asian - Pakistani / British / Scottish	0	Not Disclosed	23
Asian - Indian / British / Scottish	*	<i>Table 6: Secondary school teachers with history as main subject taught by ethnicity and national identity, 2020 (L. McDonald, personal communication, July 19, 2021)</i>	
Asian - Bangladeshi / British / Scottish	0		
Asian - Chinese / British / Scottish	0		
Asian - Other	0		
African - African / Scottish / British	*		
African - Other	0		
Caribbean or Black - Caribbean / British / Scottish	0		
Caribbean or Black - Other	0		
Other - Arab	0		

Other	*
Not Disclosed	24
Not Known	44

### 3.6 Approach to Data Analysis

In analysing the data, I chose to draw upon reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). While different from one another, these approaches to data analysis complement each other and combine to explore the nuanced and complex nature of teacher experience. This methodological bricolage, or “combining of analytic moves for the purpose of solving a problem or problems tailored to one’s own research project” allows for a deep connection with the data (Pratt et al., 2020, p. 1).

Known for its “theoretical flexibility” (Willig, 2013, p. 58), thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) is a qualitative approach to data analysis where the researcher identifies and analyses patterns in data. Reflecting on thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2019) relabelled this approach to data analysis as reflexive thematic analysis and this change in terminology reflects the active role of the researcher and “[considers] the centrality of researcher subjectivity and reflexivity” (p. 590). In other words, reflexive thematic analysis sees my subjectivity as a strength and places value on my active and reflexive participation in the study. In this way, this approach to data analysis is well-suited to this study because of what I bring to it. For example, like each of the participants, I am a history teacher in Scotland and am therefore closely tied to the topic and, in some instances, share the same experiences and beliefs as some of the participants. My interest in the topic drove the study and highlights the importance of my subjectivity and reflexivity so as to report participant experiences truthfully (Josselson, 2007). I chose approaches that value my subjectivity as a researcher, and, in doing so, I was also committed to reporting participants’ experiences accurately and maintained a critically reflexive journal throughout the research process as a way to mitigate any potential bias and

work through any potential tensions between participant responses and my own personal beliefs and values.

According to Braun and Clarke (2013), subjectivity is “the idea that what we see and understand reflects our identities and experiences” (p. 21). More simply, this means that I bring my own knowledge and experiences to the study. As explored in Section 1.6 of this thesis, I qualified as a history teacher and began my teaching career outwith Scotland and bring this experience as both an insider and an outsider with me as a researcher and teacher in the Scottish educational context. I utilised a criticality reflexive journal to mitigate potential bias or tension (Cunliffe, 2016). In this way, reflexivity is a response to subjectivity and is “the process of critically reflecting on the knowledge we produce, and our role in producing it” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 37). This means that I must acknowledge and examine what I bring to the study. Further, reflexive thematic analysis is an interpretive process in that “the researcher makes active, interpretive choices in generating codes and in constructing themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2014, p. 1948). This further emphasises the active role of the researcher, as themes do not simply emerge from the data, they are instead generated by the researcher.

Using reflexive thematic analysis as an approach to data analysis requires several choices. Firstly, I chose to draw on both latent and semantic approaches to analyse the data. Through a more semantic approach, the researcher identifies themes by looking at what was explicitly said by participants. In addition to this surface-level analysis, I also chose a more latent approach, which goes beyond semantics to “capture deeper ideas or assumptions which underpin what has been said” (Hayes, 2021, p. 196). This, in turn, makes the approach more interpretive (Byrne, 2021) and is more attuned to the nuanced and complex nature of teachers’ experiences being explored in this study. While semantic and latent coding are “end points on a continuum”, coding can fall at any point or many points (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 58). This means that I drew on both what participants specifically said as well as the “hidden meanings” in what participants said (Byrne, 2021, p. 1397). For

example, in talking about her social justice approach in the classroom, Shannon stated:

I am teaching them respect towards in terms of gender, in terms of those that classify themselves as gender neutral, in terms of how we just can't stereotype what a man and what a woman can do, in terms of jobs, and how to deal with sexism and racism in the classroom and in the work environment as well, because, you know, when they go into a workplace, that they have that experience as well, and you want to have them feeling confident and equipped that they can challenge those stereotypes taking place.

Reading this excerpt explicitly, at the surface-level, or semantically, I interpreted that Shannon incorporates issues of social justice, specifically issues of sexism and racism, into her classroom as a way to prepare learners to challenge these issues and stereotypes in the classroom and eventually in the workplace. However, taking a more latent approach to this excerpt, or reading for the implied, deeper, or more hidden meanings, I interpreted that, by listing issues of social justice and lumping them together, Shannon's statement might instead or also demonstrate an understanding of social justice that is limited or lacking and registers low in sociopolitical emphasis, potentially relying on stereotypes (Dover, 2015).

Secondly, the analysis takes on a constructionist epistemology. Epistemology outlines what counts as accepted knowledge and, more specifically, a constructionist epistemology assumes that "meaning and experience are socially produced and reproduced" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85). This means that knowledge and knowledge production is not neutral and are situated within the context and conditions under which it was created. This is in contrast to a realist epistemology, which "theorizes motivations, experience, and meaning in a straightforward way, because a simple, largely unidirectional relationship is assumed between meaning and experience and language" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85). In other words, a realist epistemology is objective and posits one truth.



Known for its flexibility, reflexive thematic analysis is well-suited to be combined with other approaches to data analysis, including narrative analysis (Shukla et al., 2014; Floersch et al., 2010). In addition to reflexive thematic analysis, I chose to draw on elements of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), which is used to make meaning out of experience, and places value on the “storied nature” of participants’ experiences (Agarwal et al. 2010, p. 239). Further, narrative is a means to “[explore] the ways in which social actors interpret the world, and their place within it” (Lawler, 2002, p. 242). Much like reflexive thematic analysis, narrative inquiry places value on subjectivity and requires reflexive and active participation from the researcher (Pino & Adu, 2022). With regards to subjectivity and reflexivity, the researcher is “never there as disembodied recorders of someone else’s experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 81). This highlights the active role of the researcher. Like reflexive thematic analysis, narrative inquiry requires the active participation of the researcher as data is “created, neither found nor discovered” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 92). Further, like reflexive thematic analysis, narrative inquiry is a process where “interpretation is inevitable because narratives are representations” of an individual’s experiences (Riessman, 1993, p. 2).

Reflexive thematic analysis and narrative inquiry complement each other as approaches to data analysis for this study ([Figure 6](#)). Both approaches see subjectivity and interpretation as a strength. Further, both approaches value reflexivity and recognise the active role of the researcher. Combined, these approaches allowed me to engage deeply with teachers’ stories and highlight the nuance and complexity of their experiences. Drawing on narrative inquiry to make meaning out of the storied nature of teacher experience while utilising reflexive thematic analysis to identify and analyse patterns in the data, I chose to draw on latent, semantic, and constructionist approaches to data analysis that acknowledge my active participation in the study, as well as my subjectivity and reflexivity, as strengths.

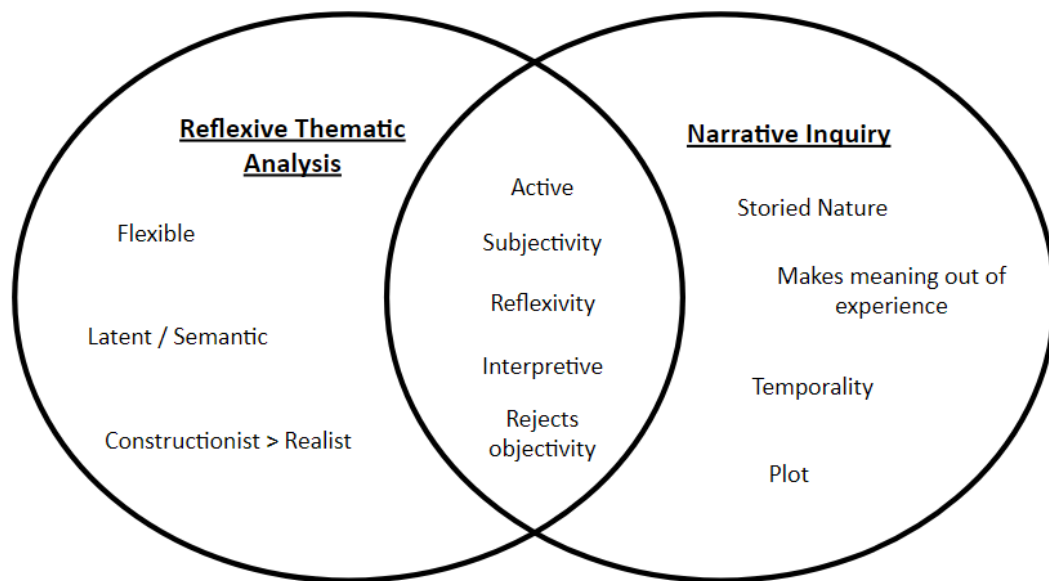


Figure 6: Approach to Data Analysis

### 3.7 Analysing the Data

This section outlines the steps I took to analyse the data using Braun and Clarke’s (2022) framework for reflexive thematic analysis, which includes six phases. The six phases include (1) familiarising oneself with the dataset, (2) coding, (3) generating initial themes, (4) developing and reviewing themes, (5) refining, defining, and naming themes, and (6) writing up. [Table 7](#) briefly describes each phase and provides an example of what I did during each phase. For example, during phase one of analysing the data, I transcribed each interview while listening to the audio recording at a slower speed. I then checked the completed transcript for accuracy by reading it while listening to the audio recording again. Throughout this process, I took notes on anything that jumped out at me as relevant or meaningful to the research questions of this study. As a result, immersing myself in the data during this early phase of analysing the data provided an opportunity to become more familiar with the dataset.

Phase	Example
<p><b>(1) Familiarising yourself with the dataset</b></p> <p>Reading and re-reading data; listening to audio recordings; making notes</p>	<p>I transcribed each interview while listening to the recording at a slower speed; I checked each transcription for accuracy by listening to the recording again while reading my transcription and making corrections as necessary; I took notes on information that jumped out at me, including similarities in participants' responses and major differences between participants' responses. I made connections between the research questions of this study and participants' responses; I made notes linking participants' responses to relevant literature.</p>
<p><b>(2) Coding</b></p> <p>Identify segments of data that appear potentially interesting, relevant, or meaningful to research questions</p>	<p>After immersing myself in the data through the transcription process, I printed the transcripts and read and re-read them multiple times while highlighting key information. With each read-through, I used a colour-coding system (<a href="#">Appendix K</a>) to highlight information relevant to the research questions. After this process, I compiled all relevant data into a separate quote book based on codes. So, I collated extracts from each transcript and workbook into one central document, organised by code, so that I could then begin to generate initial themes based on the meaningful segments of data. During this process, I identified, highlighted, and labelled potentially relevant and meaningful information in the transcripts to generate fourteen main codes that I then used to construct themes. According to Saldaña (2021), the first cycle of coding is like <i>analysis</i> and the second cycle of coding, described next, is like <i>synthesis</i>. Once collated into the quotebook, I then used a colour-coding system to further identify patterns or meaningful or relevant segments of data within each code. For an example of the codes and an extract from the quote book, please see <a href="#">Appendix K</a>. Using an example from the extract in <a href="#">Appendix K</a>, in working with the code "SQA", once I collated all of the relevant quotes, I then further identified "disconnect" (highlighted in pink), "blame" (highlighted in blue), and "access paradox" (highlighted in orange) to describe patterns within the data. These codes then contributed to the generation of the theme "results-focused exam culture".</p>
<p><b>(3) Generating initial themes</b></p> <p>Active process of identifying shared patterned meaning across the dataset</p>	<p>I constructed themes by combining codes in the quote book I created during phase two. For example, I combined codes reflecting participants' comments around the SQA and noticed similarities, or shared meaning, in their responses. This led to the generation of an initial theme around the nature of SQA exam demands.</p>
<p><b>(4) Developing and reviewing themes</b></p> <p>Checking that the themes make sense and combining certain themes</p>	<p>I originally generated nine themes, which I then condensed to six, and later to five themes. This happened as a result of further synthesis and development of the themes independently as well as through discussion with my supervisors. For example, I originally included a theme called <i>Ranging Elements of Social Justice</i>, which depicted elements of teaching for social justice that appeared throughout participants' practice and drew on</p>

	<p><a href="#">Table 1</a> in the literature review. In trying to refine and write about this, I realised it was more relevant and complementary to another theme, <i>Ranging Definitions of Social Justice</i>, and thus merged the two themes.</p>
<p><b>(5) Refining, defining, and naming themes</b></p> <p>Fine-tune the analysis</p>	<p>I made links between the themes and the research questions, making sure each theme worked to explore the research questions. Please see <a href="#">Appendix G</a> for a table depicting these connections. Throughout this phase I also worked to incorporate relevant literature into my analysis. I used my notes taken throughout the first four phases to build and refine my analysis.</p>
<p><b>(6) Writing up</b></p> <p>Formal writing, often starts from phase three</p>	<p>I expanded my notes, taken along the way, into more formal writing about each theme. I selected relevant data extracts to demonstrate each theme and I continued to incorporate relevant literature to support or offer alternative views to participants' responses. In some cases, this process required me to leave out some data extracts and edit some data extracts for clarity.</p>

Table 7: Data Analysis Steps, adapted from Braun and Clarke's (2022, pp. 35-36) six phases of reflexive thematic analysis

Importantly, these six phases are not linear (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and often overlap. For example, I engaged in writing (phase six) from the beginning of the data analysis process, first in the form of informal note taking. I progressed these notes into more formal writing as the data analysis process progressed. Similarly, I generated ideas for codes and early iterations of themes (phases two and three) while I was familiarising myself with the data (phase one). This happened mostly when I was transcribing and noticing similarities across participant responses in the interviews. In this way, the six phases are distinct but overlap at times.

Looking more specifically at the coding process, [Table 8](#) outlines how the codes were grouped and merged into themes. Importantly, themes do not emerge from the data, themes are generated by the researcher, and this highlights the active role of the researcher in reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), both of which I drew upon in analysing the data. For example, participants' definitions of social justice, examples of social justice that came up in their interviews and workbooks, examples around historical empathy, examples around activism, and examples around politics were

grouped together as a theme around participants' ranging definitions of social justice. This theme was then linked to Dover's (2015) notion of sociopolitical emphasis. Originally, this was separated into two themes, *Ranging Definitions of Social Justice* and *Ranging Elements of Social Justice*, but in the process of refining the themes, I saw a lot of crossover between them and saw the elements of social justice that participants reported more as complementary to their definitions of social justice rather than as a standalone theme. Next, participants' comments about the SQA, including assessment, classroom practices, and exam structure, for example, combined with comments around the BGE, comparisons between stages, comments around topic selection, such as whether topics were boring, or might evoke discomfort, were grouped together to form two themes. For the first theme, the data indicate the existence of a results-focused exam culture. The second theme explores participants' relationship to the system they described. Next, comments around their identities and goals as teachers, as well as examples of reflexivity in their practice, and the stories participants told about their journeys into teaching merged into a theme around participants' differing views of their personal and professional identities. Finally, comments around particular topics, including the criticality of the topics offered by the SQA led to a theme around narrow representations of history.

Code(s)	Theme(s)
SQA - Assessment - Teaching to test - Exam structure - Rote learning - System - Potential excuses? - Access paradox - Disempowerment? - Blame? - Disconnect	Results-focused exam culture; Blaming the system
BGE - Exam skills in BGE - Content repetition - Exam culture	
AH - Comparison between stages - Critical of - Disagree - Disconnect - Skills	

Bor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Repetition</li> <li>- Reasons for avoiding topics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Boring &gt; discomfort</li> <li>- Selection based on exams</li> </ul>	
DSJ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Links to content</li> <li>- Links to action</li> <li>- Systemic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social mobility</li> <li>- In the classroom</li> </ul>	Ranging definitions of social justice - link to sociopolitical emphasis (Dover, 2015)
SJ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Elements in table</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low expectations?</li> </ul>	
Emp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Examples of teaching historical empathy</li> </ul>		
Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Examples of activism</li> <li>- Lack of?</li> <li>- Missed opportunity?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Security?</li> <li>- Stopping short?</li> </ul>	
Pol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Age</li> <li>- Exams</li> <li>- Prof. boundaries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Talk about it</li> <li>- Shy away from it</li> </ul>	
ID	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Separate</li> <li>- Overlap</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chart</li> </ul>	
Journey into teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Always knew</li> <li>- Started later</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Own history teacher</li> </ul>	Differing views on personal and professional identity
Goals			
Examples of reflexivity in own practice			
WWI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Critical</li> <li>- Content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Political move?</li> <li>- Scottish topic</li> </ul>	Narrow representations of history (also see BGE/Bor)

Table 8: Outline of codes organised into themes

### 3.8 Ethical Considerations

Throughout this study, ethical considerations regarding research design, data collection, and data analysis were upheld and taken seriously and adhered to SERA (2005) and BERA (2018) guidelines. An application for ethics approval was submitted to the School of Education's Ethics Committee and ethical consent was

gained ([Appendix I](#)). Participation in this study was entirely voluntary and each participant gave informed consent with a digital signature on a consent form through Qualtrics before data collection began. I chose to distribute the consent form digitally because it created a more streamlined process once I chose to move all data collection online due to COVID-19 restrictions. Participants were informed throughout the process that their participation was voluntary and that they would be able to withdraw from the study without providing a reason and without consequence at any time before data was anonymised at the point of analysis.

Participants were not coerced into participating and were reminded that participation was both voluntary and informed. Additionally, due to the use of convenience sampling through professional networks, there was the potential for a situation where I had a pre-existing relationship with some participants. This, however, did not happen as I did not personally know any of the participants prior to their involvement in this study. If I did have a pre-existing relationship with a participant, I would have utilised my reflexive journal to work through any preconceived notions of the participant.

Interviews were audio and video recorded on Zoom for accuracy and with participant permission. I then transcribed the interviews and checked each transcription against the recording for accuracy. Participants were able to leave their video on or off to suit their comfort level, with one participant opting to leave their camera off. Participants were able to create, share, and view their workbooks for and during the interview and the workbook acted as a starting point for the interview.

Due to the potentially sensitive nature of data collected during this study, all participants were assigned pseudonyms at the time of analysis to protect confidentiality and anonymity. In sharing their stories, some participants disclosed personal experiences of physical, sexual, and verbal abuse. Any names of colleagues, pupils, schools, and local authorities that came up during data collection were changed or omitted to protect confidentiality, and have not been included in any data presented within this thesis, subsequent publications, or presentations. A

codebook with pseudonyms and actual names has been kept in a separate location and stored on a password protected laptop and file on Strathcloud, accessible by me, my supervisors, and potentially my examiners. Participants were able to see the transcripts of their interview and were able to comment, change, and omit statements made. Several participants redacted small portions of their interviews. All data, including recordings will be deleted no later than five years after successful completion of this study to allow for potential publication from the study.

During this study, participants were asked to explore their beliefs, values, and identities. Throughout this process, participants were invited to disclose their own personal values and experiences, which might have elicited a range of emotions. For this reason, participants were only invited to share what they felt comfortable with and were made aware of this in writing in the PIS ([Appendix A](#)) as well as verbally at the beginning of the interview.

In the event of uncovering practice that showed that learners may be at risk, or that a participant appeared to be at risk, I was committed to following procedures as outlined by individual schools and local authorities. For example, I would have followed school reporting policies for child protection and staff dignity and respect policies. This situation, however, did not occur.

Researchers bring their own values to a study, and, as a history teacher, I understand the potential for bias during this study. Because of this, I practised critical reflexivity throughout the study as a way to mitigate potential bias. To do this, I kept a reflexive journal (Clandinin, 2007) before and after conducting interviews. I also debriefed on data with my supervisors. Any potential tension between information a participant disclosed and what I personally believe was lessened by engagement with critical reflexivity as a way to represent the beliefs, values, and experiences of each participant accurately.

### **3.9 Limitations**

While every effort was made to capture a realistic image of social justice teaching in the history classroom in Scotland, this study has some limitations.



Firstly, the sample was relatively homogenous in terms of race, ethnicity, age, and length of teaching experience. Most participants (six) reported their age as being between 30-34, while one reported being between 35-39, and two reported being between 40-44. However, according to demographic information on the population of teachers GTCS registered in history obtained from a FOI request, all participants fell into the two largest age demographics as reported by the GTCS ([Table 5](#)). This similarity in ages among participants could account for a potentially heightened interest in research or professional development within these age groups, as some participants identified professional development and support for education research as motivating factors in volunteering to participate in this study. Additionally, as the study was widely advertised on social media, the similarity in ages could also or instead suggest more about the population of history teachers in Scotland who actively engage with social media and therefore this demographic might have had more exposure to the call for participants, leading to a larger number of participants from this age group. Further, with the average length of teaching experience amongst participants being around eight years, the study has not captured the voices of teachers earlier or later in their careers. This means that the study cannot necessarily speak to the experiences of teachers who, for example, have just started their teaching careers or who are closer to retirement than the participants. While every effort was made to make participation in this study as convenient and flexible as possible, hesitations in choosing to participate in this study might have been due to increased workload for teachers during the COVID-19 lockdown. This means that many teachers might not have had the time or energy to take on an additional engagement. Additionally, statistics from the Scottish Government indicate that there are few BPoC/BAME teachers registered in history with the GTCS ([Table 6](#)). While the small number of BPoC/BAME history teachers is concerning on its own, all nine participants in this study reported identifying as white, and this study therefore cannot comment on the experiences of BPoC/BAME history teachers in Scotland.

Secondly, participants could have been predisposed to teaching for social justice and were drawn to this study because of their association with the term

*social justice*. In the same way, the term *social justice* could have prevented teachers who do not actively identify with the term from volunteering to participate in the study. This has the potential to produce a motivation bias (Stratton, 2021).

Finally, the instruments for data collection may reflect espoused or reported practice rather than actual practice. Any information disclosed through the workbook and interview was reported by participants and could not be compared to observations of their actual teaching practice. The intention behind using SQA exam question annotations was to paint a more complete portrait of teaching practice without accessing classrooms, but this has its limitations in that it still relies on the self-reporting of participants and espoused practice. However, it should be noted that participants demonstrated reflexivity about their practice and were thoughtful in sharing their experiences and responding to questions in the moment throughout the interviews.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the methodology of this study. To summarise, I utilised critical narrative (Goodson & Gill, 2014) and a narrative inquiry framework (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to explore the research questions of this study. I used three instruments for data collection, including a workbook which prompted participants to create an identity chart about themselves and annotate an SQA question. The third instrument for data collection was a semi-structured interview, which utilised the workbook as a starting point for discussion. I piloted each of the three instruments for data collection and adapted them as required. I also made adaptations during the data collection phase of this study, in line with Scottish Government guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic. I used convenience and targeted snowball sampling to recruit history teachers in Scotland with current GTCS registration. While homogenous, the sample of nine participants is representative of the profile characteristics of GTCS registered history teachers in Scotland. I utilised reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to analyse the data. Ethics approval was sought and

achieved and I designed this study in adherence with BERA (2018) and SERA (2005) guidelines. Potential limitations of the study include a limited understanding of the experiences of BPoC/BAME history teachers and teachers earlier or later in their careers. Further, there is a potential motivation bias, as participants were self-selecting and might have been drawn to or prevented from volunteering because of the term *social justice*. Finally, the instruments for data collection are potentially limited in that they may reflect reported or espoused practice rather than actual practice. The following chapter utilises the narrative from data collection to introduce each of the nine participants in the form of vignettes.

## Chapter 4 - Vignettes

*“Human life, whilst meaningful, often appears to be chaotic, whereas narratives, through their plots and temporality, allow the chaotic nature of life to assume a certain structure and configuration” (Goodson & Gill, 2014, p. 32).*

### 4.1 Introduction

Following the interviews, I used the data from each participant’s identity chart and interview to construct a vignette (Erickson, 1986; Sim et al., 2016; Sleeter, 2005), written in the first-person, for each participant. I chose to present the data in this way instead of attaching each participant’s identity chart and interview transcript because this format succinctly introduces each participant and the narratives embrace temporality and plot (Goodson & Gill, 2014) to present data, and thus align with a narrative inquiry approach. Additionally, vignettes in education research can be useful in exploring values and complex thoughts (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020). As such, these vignettes seek to present the ways in which participants described themselves in their workbooks and interviews. I wrote each vignette in the first-person (Blodgett et al., 2011) because I compiled each vignette by selecting information explicitly spoken by participants in the first-person or directly included in their identity chart and maintaining this felt like an authentic way to represent participants.

The vignette for each participant includes information from their identity chart and focuses specifically on their journey into teaching as a way to introduce each of the participants and the values they chose to disclose in their identity chart and during their interview. Further, “the motivation to become a teacher is an important component of professional identity, as it relies on the teacher’s perception of his/her role, competencies and beliefs about the task requirements” (Berger & Lê Van, 2019, p. 165). This selection of information reflects the interpretive processes of both reflexive thematic analysis and narrative inquiry (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Erickson, 1986; Goodson & Gill, 2014; Lawler, 2002; Riessman, 1993). The identity chart task was intended to be a reflexive exercise for

participants and the vignettes aim to create detailed accounts of each participant's social position, as they are self-explained and defined within the remit of this study. In this way, narrative is used “to support critically reflective dispositions” (Johnson Lachuk & Mosley, 2012, p. 311). Further, these vignettes are a means of humanising education, thus aligning with critical pedagogy and SJE.

The vignettes utilise information provided by each participant to incorporate Mockler’s (2011) domains of personal experience and professional context, and as much detail as possible from both the identity charts and interviews has been included. Similarly, in an effort to accurately represent each participant, I used the exact phrasing participants wrote on their identity chart or said during their interview as much as possible. Some of the vignettes vary in length and this is due to the amount of information provided by each participant. For example, some participants provided a considerable amount of information throughout their interview and identity chart, while others disclosed less.

## **4.2 Chris**

I think most people end up in the teaching profession because of a teacher they want to be like. I had a history teacher who was interesting and wise, but not in a condescending way. He was just a really interesting guy and everything he said always seemed really interesting. The other thing is that I like arguing and I’m quite opinionated, quite political, a socialist, actually. I liked physics in school, but physics didn’t have opportunities for arguing like history did. So, yeah, I thought my history teacher was interesting and I like to argue.

I’m British, Protestant, and a heterosexual male. I grew up quite middle-class and went to quite a socially diverse school. The general makeup of the school was quite working-class and there were a lot of differences in opinion. The two history teachers were really good at creating debate and getting people to disagree civilly.

I read Orwell as a teenager and always take comfort in a well-constructed sentence. I’m uni-educated now and still keen on language and consider myself to be pretty well-read. Language can be such an efficient tool to lead people and

people who can't write sentences are manipulated far too easily. It's both a tool and a communication device. So, yeah, my goals as a professional, a historian, and as a history teacher revolve around literacy and history acts as a platform for actively engaging with the world. And I'm a football fan, I use that in the classroom to bring in social history. It's a good jumping off point.

### **4.3 David**

I grew up in the East End of Glasgow in a working-class family and I consider myself to be British. History was the only subject I was really good at when I was at school. I had a good relationship with my history teacher and that really helped. The way she taught was always really engaging. It wasn't very active, a lot more chalk and talk, but it was engaging. And she took time to sit with me and go through things.

When I went to uni I did a history degree, kind of as a standalone thing. I was a terrible university student, but I worked really hard and got a 2:2. I'm more educated than my parents and the rest of my family, but I didn't know what I wanted to do with my degree. I went back to my school and my history teacher let me teach a couple of her classes and I just knew teaching was for me and she helped me get into the PGDE (Postgraduate Diploma in Education). It's harder now, but we still keep in touch.

### **4.4 Beth**

I had a cool history teacher. He was 4,000 years old and wore a jacket with leather arm patches. That's how we knew he knew his stuff. I was good at writing essays and I liked history. Going to uni wasn't really a decision for me to make. It was the done thing. I was choosing between doing law or history and some people I didn't like were doing law, so I did history. When I finished uni, I didn't really know what I wanted to do, so I went travelling. I went to China to teach English with no experience and a garbage ESL qualification from the internet. I realised I wasn't too bad at it and kids are just dead funny. Adults are boring. I wouldn't want to work in

an office. So, I came back from China, did the PGDE, and ticked the box. That's how it happened. I'm Scottish - a Glaswegian with an aggressive accent, but I'm a Northern Interloper now and I stay up here for my sons. The pandemic has made me feel a bit too far away from everyone, though.

First and foremost, I consider myself to be a teacher because that's the bit I know I'm good at. Then a history teacher. I don't actually know if I'm very good at history. I try to get young people to be confident and curious and have a good time. I'm strict, but not really, a stickler for the small rules. Then the history comes next. I suffer from a bit of imposter syndrome when it comes to history, though. I'm more likely to find history from a film or fiction book. You can get heavily judged by your peers, like, at a history teacher conference, when they show up with all their dates and documentaries. A job actually came up at a school closer to home and it would have cut my commute down to about two minutes. I didn't even apply because I knew the department was all men and I didn't want to be part of that. Sometimes I wish there were other historians nearby to talk to, but I'm an independent person and I like being a one-person department. I'm in charge from S1-S6 and I get to pick everything on the child's history journey. It's a lot of pressure, but I can really have fun with it.

#### **4.5 Michael**

I'm a teacher, but I came into teaching a bit later, and I think I'm actually all the better for it. Everyone always asked me what I wanted to do and I didn't know. But I knew that I didn't want to teach. Both of my parents and my grandparents were teachers. I'm a historian, though, and I graduated uni with a history degree and became a museum curator. When I lost that job due to budget cuts, I had to make a choice. Do I stay in the city or move back home with my parents? I'm an Edinburgher and a Dundonian, but I certainly wasn't going to do the latter and move back in with my parents, so I stayed in Edinburgh. I'm a musician too. My other passion has always been music, so I got a job working in a guitar shop. The shop closed during the financial crisis and then I started working part-time as a learning

assistant. I started my PGDE at 30 and then worked my way up to curriculum leader where I am now.

I'm the grandson of an immigrant. My gran was born in what is now the Ukraine and fled to Athens at the age of seven. That sparked an interest for me and I specialised in Soviet history at uni. They met when my grandad was stationed in Athens and they moved back to Scotland together. My dad's first language was Greek, actually. My wife is half Italian and her mum only speaks Italian to our wee one. I wonder why my dad never did that with us growing up, but I suppose there was a shame around it as a first generation immigrant. I would view myself, especially now, as a husband and a father, to be Scottish first, and I would be going for European prior to British. I don't really feel British. I've always been a little wary of flag waving, particularly when that flag is the Union Jack. I lean to the left, I'm a liberal, and I don't like the fact that it feels like the Union Jack represents a very uncomfortable, xenophobic, right-wing politics that I want nothing to do with. And I certainly want my daughter to have nothing to do with. So I'm afraid, as far as I'm concerned, Britishness is now tinged with a weird imperial nostalgia, which is ahistorical, but doesn't seem to stop existing.

#### **4.6 Len**

My family really sparked my interest in history. My great-granda was around when I was growing up on the West Coast, Glasgow, and I was lucky enough to hear his stories from World War II, not nearly enough, but I was lucky. And my granda was really into history documentaries. My dad has also been working to put together a lot of genealogy on both sides of the family. So, I've always been interested in history and had an aptitude for it in school, a natural talent. That's when I first considered being a history teacher. My history teacher from school had a part to play in that too and he bears the brunt of still being friends with me now, actually. I went to uni to study history and then went on to do a master's in American history in Edinburgh. I wanted to take on a PhD after that, but my advisor went on leave, so I deferred it for a year. Luckily, I got a job for a year in London,



working for Gordon Brown in his private office. I stayed for about five years. London has a lot of diversity and living there gave me a lot of perspective and opportunities to travel, but after a while, I didn't really want to stay there anymore. I knew I didn't want to pursue politics, and the idea of teaching became very appealing, for the stability of it, plus I've got this unique professional experience, knowledge, skills, and work ethic that I can bring to the table. For me it's about utilising these things to try and give kids a better chance than they otherwise would, social mobility via education and application. If you don't have a family that persuades you, or teachers that encourage you, or opportunities or life experiences that propel you, then that's kind of an unfortunate situation to be in. I'm passionate about that and am encouraging and nurturing in that way. So, all those influences kind of crystallised and it felt like the right thing to do at the time, so, I came back from London, got a little bit of work experience in some schools, then got into the PGDE.

#### **4.7 Shannon**

I'm a history geek. I've been interested in history since the age of six. I'm an avid reader and always looked forward to getting history books for my birthday and Christmas and I'm a big historical movie and TV fan. I remember being so curious about the wives of Henry VIII and always wanting to know more. My mum, who is the most intelligent and empathetic person I know, instilled this thirst for learning in me.

Growing up, I was a quiet student. I knew the answers but I kept them to myself. I had a good relationship with my history teacher in school and he really got me out of my shell. I enjoyed the vigour, the debates, historical perceptions, and how it constantly influences us today. I consider myself to be an activist for social justice and maybe that's where it came from. I knew I wanted to be a teacher when I was doing my A-Level English presentation, which I did on the six wives of Henry VIII. At that point, I just wasn't sure if I wanted to teach history or English.

Then I went to uni and got my BA Joint Honours in History and English. I had a really inspirational history professor and I became a lot more confident as a student. I got better at challenging assumptions. There was an opportunity to work in schools while I was at uni and I got placed at my old high school actually. This experience really confirmed that I wanted to be a teacher. Once I got my degree, I applied for teacher training. I got interviews for both history and English. The man who interviewed me gave me a really hard time and I was unsuccessful. He thought I was just into feminist history. So, I decided to do a master's in history and had another really inspirational professor. I'm interested in sixteenth century English history and Tsarism to Stalinism, but I specialised in British secret intelligence history for this degree. After that, I applied for teacher training again. The same interviewer gave me a hard time and I was unsuccessful. He said I was too academic. I really started to question whether this was the right journey for me, but you have to be resilient. You have to pick yourself up. So, I became a classroom assistant for a year, to get that practical experience they didn't think I had. It was a mixed experience and I was really plunged into the deep end, doing things that were not part of my job description. I was never supported or chaperoned. But it was a really good opportunity to build relationships with young people, be caring, pupil-centred, and try out some transformative learning approaches. I wasn't keen on the bureaucracy of the school. Colleagues were pretty negative and I always felt like I was a hindrance. I was relieved when it was over. I took that experience though and brought it to my third teacher training interview. Of course, I was interviewed by the same man. But this time I was accepted.

I also applied to a course in Scotland on a whim. I'm keen for travelling, and, growing up, I used to visit Edinburgh with my family and I loved the history. Of course, it has its drawbacks, but I was also drawn to the Curriculum for Excellence. And I had a really positive experience during the interview. It just felt right. I just had to figure out how I would pay for it. I'm a bit of a workaholic, though, pretty ambitious. I worked part-time all through uni and while I was a teaching assistant. Looking back, I really wonder how I managed to do it all.

I had three very different placements during my PGDE. The first one was at a private school and this is the first time I became aware of anti-Irish sentiment. I'm Northern Irish/Irish, from Belfast. I'm an immigrant, I speak with an accent, and I'm proud of my Irish culture and identity, but I was introduced to students on my first day as the Irish immigrant. A student asked me if the Irish really brought syphilis over to Scotland and I was told by my male mentor that my accent was problematic and I would need elocution lessons because nobody would be able to understand me. I'm also petite and he told me to wear heels because I'm only five foot one. It made me realise that history is seen to be more of a man's subject. And English is supposedly more for women. He told me off for getting down to eye-level to speak with a student who was struggling. But you have to develop a thick skin.

My second placement was lovely and it came at a difficult time in my personal life. Students are bloodhounds though and they sense fear. So, I threw myself into my work and took on a lot of responsibility in the school. This experience really reaffirmed my choice to be a teacher.

There was a lot of challenging behaviour at my third placement, but the department was really warm and supportive. That makes a difference. I think I'm a supportive colleague because of that experience. However, my first year teaching after my PGDE was not very supportive. There was a lot of conflict in the department. I was assaulted by a student in front of the whole class and nothing was done about it. But I kept developing that thick skin. In all of my experiences teaching, the negative experiences have really only had to do with colleagues.

Then I got a fixed-term contract at the private school where I did my first placement. I spent a lot of time working in support for learning too. I've been at my current school for five years now. I've thrown myself into it and taken on a lot of roles. I'm an SQA marker, mental health first aider, SATH [Scottish Association of the Teachers of History] member, DYW [Developing the Young Workforce] leader, mentor for PGDE students and newly qualified teachers, a Brownie leader, and I'm also doing middle-management training. So, yeah, that's pretty much my journey to where I am today.

#### 4.8 Catherine

Initially, I never wanted to be a teacher. I was a gifted and talented child and I was tired of being told all the time that I was smart. I wanted to do something creative instead. So, I went to uni for photography. I realised halfway through that photography was nice but I didn't want to make a career out of it. I decided to pick up English literature halfway through and finish as a double major.

I was working in a shop during uni and had colleagues who were in high school. They'd complain about school sometimes, so I offered to help them. When they improved I thought, oh, that's a nice feeling! I also helped my brother pass his Year 12 exams, and I thought, "Oh, that's a nice feeling!" I thought if I can feel that from my job, then that's what I want. I didn't get the same feeling or enjoyment from photography.

So, then I got a teaching scholarship and was placed in rural New South Wales. I stayed there for four years before moving to Scotland. I've moved a lot, actually. I'm an immigrant and I moved to Scotland because my dad is from Scotland and I wanted to travel. It's easier and cheaper to travel from here than from Australia. I planned to stay for a year, but it's been six. I actually met my now husband a week after I moved to Scotland. When I started teaching here, I had to work really hard, because the curriculum is a lot different than in Australia. I took advantage of every development opportunity and I just haven't really stopped. I'm always learning and I love that.

I went into teaching history originally because I was told that you're more employable with two subjects instead of just one. And I didn't want to teach photography or art. I'm a history nerd, but I wasn't good at history in school. I had a really good teacher, but she was always at her wits end with me. I loved history at uni and had good relationships with lecturers. When I moved here, there were more jobs teaching history rather than teaching English, so I went with that. I'm dual qualified, but now I see myself as more of a history teacher than an English

teacher. I'm a faculty head too, but to be honest, if I can't get any more history on my plate, I think I'll end up just going back to being a classroom teacher.

#### **4.9 Anne**

I had fantastic history teachers at school. They were people I respected and looked up to and I think that really motivated me. I've always been a bit of a history geek and politics buff too. I was having a conversation with mum about career options, and she said, "Well, you quite like history, why don't you teach it?" And I thought, "Oh, that sounds perfect!" And there and behold was my career plan for life. So, I studied history, politics, and teaching at uni. I'm English, but I politely ditched England and moved up to Scotland for uni because of the Chartered Teacher option. I don't really see myself as the management type. During uni I joined the Reserves and I'm an army reserve medic now as well.

It's an intense balance. I'm a modern studies and history teacher at an independent boarding school, so there's a lot of night and weekend duties on top of being in the classroom. Plus, I balance that with being in the Reserves. You have to wear a lot of different hats. But I'm a people person. I care about other people and often put other people before myself. I bring that into the classroom, that we're responsible for one another and we respect one another.

#### **4.10 Carrie**

My story is a bit non-inspiring. I'm Northern Irish, but I've lived in Scotland longer at this point. I'm a hybrid now. I grew up in Belfast and knew I wanted to go somewhere different for uni. I was on a Christian weekend and spoke to some people from Dunblane who talked me into Stirling Uni. I fell in love with the campus and thought "This is for me!" I enjoy walking and love being outdoors and it's just so beautiful there, beside the mountains, with the little squirrels and rabbits running around the loch. Manchester was on my list too, but it's all city.

I studied history and English at uni. I thought my third unit would be chemistry because my brother and sister are both doctors, but my tutor laughed

and said no. He gave me a list of options to take away and look over. My flatmates were a few years older and they said that education was an open book exam and it's dead easy. I thought I'd be really focusing on history and English, so an easy third option sounded nice. So, I chose education and it was fine. A couple years later the head of education came into the lecture theatre and told us about signing up to do a diploma of education alongside our degree, it would just take an extra semester. I was really enjoying uni, so I thought I'd quite like an extra semester and another qualification! I didn't think I'd actually be a teacher, but I just went with it. I actually ended up becoming a teacher and I'm still one. It just kind of happened. I think God was directing my path without me even really being aware of it. And I really like working with young people, I'm a volunteer youth worker as well, so I think I would have gone in this direction anyways.

I'm an Azungu, and I took a sabbatical in 2008 to go to Malawi before I got married. I brought physical things back to the classroom with me, like paintings and little crafts that people made. I also brought back stories and a new appreciation. It puts things in perspective. I'm a Christian, a child of God. It's part of my person and therefore it's who I am when I'm in the classroom.

When people ask me what I teach, I can be a bit flippant and say I teach children. They say, "Yeah, but primary or secondary?" I teach history, but I think I'm a teacher because I care about young people. I suppose my passion is helping young people. It's probably a bit of a confession to say I'm not as passionate about history as some teachers. But maybe I'm a bit more passionate about caring for young people than some teachers are.

As a teacher, I'm diligent, caring, purposely 'daft', and committed, but I also feel overworked. I'm the faculty head of humanities, but I don't like the faculty system. I'm also disabled by Multiple Sclerosis, but I'm not defined by my disability. I am changing over time though. I'm becoming forgetful and can mix up my words, but I also feel content and blessed. The glass is always more than half full.

#### **4.11 Conclusion**

This chapter aimed to introduce each of the nine participants in this study by presenting data from their individual identity chart and interview, utilising temporality and plot (Goodson & Gill, 2014). In education research, vignettes can be a useful way to explore values (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020). Further, vignettes can also be used to share the voices of the participants (Blodgett et al., 2011). Interestingly, while all of the participants had different timelines and journeys into teaching, most of the participants cited their own history teacher from school as a motivating factor in their choice to become a history teacher. Concerningly, the ways in which most of the participants talked about their journeys into teaching and the ways in which they identify do not appear to align with the ways in which they reported acting complacently with a results-focused exam culture. This will be described and discussed at length in the following chapter. The following chapter presents the findings and discussion of this study and is broken down into six subsections. The first section provides an introduction to and overview of the chapter, and then the following five sections explore each of the five themes generated from the data.

## Chapter 5 - Findings and Discussion

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of this study along with discussion of these findings. I chose to present the findings and discussion together so that the “analytic narrative contains connections with, and develops the analytic points in relation to, other literature” (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 131). This means that the findings are presented and discussed in relation to the literature and the resulting analysis is reflective of the interpretive process of reflexive thematic analysis and highlights the active role of the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2022). For clarity, this chapter is separated into five sections and each section presents and discusses a different theme that I identified within the data. Section 5.2 explores the notion of a results-focused exam culture in Scotland, as reported by participants. This includes several choices participants reported making, including teaching to the test explicitly and through rote learning, choosing not to teach certain disciplinary practices for the sake of SQA exam demands, choosing topics based on how easy they are perceived to be in exams, and choosing not to include historical perspectives that are not on SQA course specifications. In addition to exploring these choices, section 5.2 also explores a disconnect between the skills required to pass SQA exams in comparison to the actual disciplinary practices of historians, as well as a disconnect between phases in Scottish secondary school education, all of which stands to indicate the existence of a results-focused exam culture in Scotland. Section 5.3 explores how participants reported engaging with the system and the reasons they provided for this engagement. Section 5.4 explores the ranging definitions of social justice that participants reported, with some participants lacking a clear definition of social justice, while others provided definitions that ranged in sociopolitical emphasis. Section 5.5 explores the different views of personal and professional identities that participants reported. Section 5.6, the final section of this chapter, explores the problematically narrow representations of history that participants reported. The data is presented and discussed throughout



each section. Altogether, these themes explore how history teachers in Scotland engage with SJE, including their understanding of social justice and SJE, and how these understandings might impact upon their reported teaching practice. These themes also explore what history teachers in the Scottish educational context might see as their role in the classroom and how this might emerge in their reporting of their practice.

## **5.2 Results-Focused Exam Culture**

In this section, I present and discuss evidence from the data that suggests the existence of a results-focused exam culture in Scotland. Throughout their interviews, participants reported making several choices in their teaching practice that revolve around exams, and indicated the existence of skills and phases disconnects, all of which contribute to this culture. This section explores this notion. The data indicate the existence of a results-focused exam culture in Scotland and participants each reported very similar experiences of the Scottish educational context. After this introductory section, Section 5.2.1 outlines several choices participants reported making around their teaching practice, including (a) teaching to the test explicitly and through rote learning; (b) choosing not to teach certain skills; (c) choosing topics based on how easy they are perceived to be; and (d) choosing not to include historical perspectives that are not on SQA course specifications. Section 5.2.2 outlines a disconnect between the skills required to pass the SQA exams and the disciplinary practices historians use, as reported by participants. Finally, section 5.2.3 outlines a disconnect between the BGE and senior phases of the Scottish educational context, as reported by participants.

There appears to be a trend of using exams as a mechanism towards social justice, which leads to a status quo of a results-focused exam culture in Scotland, reinforcing a contradiction or access paradox (Janks, 2004; Lodge, 1997), where teaching and learning revolve around exam success as a way to access social mobility. In this way, what happens in the classroom is bound to exams and offers little or no opportunities to interrupt this cycle. In other words, the access paradox

posits that, by helping learners to access SQA qualifications, which are achieved through exams and are a dominant form of currency in the Scottish educational context, teachers help learners unlock opportunities within the confines of the existing educational system, without necessarily problematising or transforming it. This therefore leads to perpetuating the value of SQA qualifications. However, if teachers deny learners access to SQA qualifications, they contribute to their potential marginalisation in a society that continues to place high value on certain ways of assessing and categorising disciplinary success. The data indicate this access paradox to be true in several ways.

Within this theme, I identified three sub-themes that suggest the existence of a results-focused exam culture in Scotland as represented by the particular participants in this study, each of which will be described and discussed in turn. Firstly, working within this culture, participants outlined several choices they make in their practice that place national examinations at the centre of teaching and learning, thus reinforcing the access paradox. Secondly, this culture creates and reinforces a disconnect between the skills required to pass SQA exams and the disciplinary practices historians use. Thirdly, this culture also creates and reinforces a disconnect between the BGE and senior phases of the Scottish secondary education system where exam preparations begin early in the BGE phase, despite a blatant misalignment with the CfE. In this way, participants indicated that their role in the classroom is to teach to the test. This reflects a limited understanding of social justice and SJE, and has profound implications on their reported teaching practice, such as limiting their instruction to exam mechanics, techniques, and strategies, which is explored in the following section. This understanding of social justice and SJE is limited because it does not see beyond exam skills and results.

Interestingly, participants were unanimous in how they described the nature of exams and SQA requirements. Terms that frequently came up in interviews include *formulaic*, *prescriptive*, *binding*, *restrictive*, *regurgitating*, *tick-box*, and *jumping through hoops*. The descriptors used by participants suggest a culture where teaching to the test is the norm across phases as a way to meet SQA

requirements, thus helping learners to earn qualifications that will unlock opportunities and, as a result, according to participants, social mobility in Scotland. Problematically, participants reported little or no opportunities to interrupt this cycle, thus reinforcing a culture where high-stakes exams reign supreme.

### 5.2.1 Choices

The data show that participants make several choices around their teaching practice that involve teaching to the test in an effort to meet SQA exam demands. These choices, which came up across the interviews, show that participants work within the results-focused exam culture and thus contribute to it and reinforce the access paradox. The choices as outlined by participants, which will be described and discussed in turn in this subsection, include: (a) teaching to the test explicitly and through rote learning; (b) choosing not to teach certain skills; (c) choosing topics based on how easy they are perceived to be; and (d) choosing not to include historical perspectives that are not on SQA course specifications.

Firstly, participants reported teaching exam mechanics, techniques, and strategies (which I have termed *teaching to the test* for brevity) explicitly and through what they described as rote learning. When asked about how she approaches SQA exams, Beth exclaimed, “I teach SQA stuff rigorously and with religious fervour”. This statement indicates a strong conscious focus on SQA exams in Beth’s classroom. As a one-person department, this focus might be driven by demands imposed onto Beth by her school or local authority to achieve high exam results, or there may be limited resources on which she can draw within the school cupboards compared to larger departments. Further, with regards to teaching learners how to answer the *evaluate the usefulness question*, Catherine stated, “It’s rote learning, but it gets the mark”, and this appears to justify the approach of teaching to the test. Similarly to Catherine, Chris stated, “I just teach it through rote learning [...] at least half of them don’t get it, but they will still get the marks and the reason they’ll get the marks is because there’s a rote way of doing it”. This raises questions about what the exams are actually assessing. Interestingly, the

2021 OECD report, *Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future*, confirms this approach, as learners in their study outlined “an emphasis on rote learning and memorisation, which they described as ‘boring’, and on preparing to succeed in the tasks required for qualifications” (p. 52). The report goes on to say that teachers “referred to the need for traditional practices to remain in place as the most efficient way to help students obtain their qualifications” (OECD, 2021, p. 52). This means that qualifications appear to be the driver of approaches to teaching that emphasises exam preparation. Further, in the present study, Len echoed this culture of efficiency, stating, “If the SQA looks for something, teachers are going to follow that and find the most efficient way of doing it”. This creates an incentive for teaching to the test, thus reinforcing the results-focused exam culture. This is problematic because teaching to the test appears contradictory to a social justice approach to teaching and learning, which is not limited to rote learning and does not revolve around high-stakes exams.

It is important to note what is meant by *rote learning* as the participants have used it. Firstly, rote learning is *repetition*, including the repetition of practice exam questions. Secondly, rote learning is *memorisation*. This includes the memorisation of specific content found on course specifications, as well as the memorisation of formulas and particular phrases used to complete exam questions. This means that teaching to the test relies on lower-order cognitive skills (Krathwohl, 2002) and the exclusion of the social functions of certain knowledge and practice in relation to history as a discipline but also real-world application and relevance. In this way, an educational context defined by rote learning and subsequent high-stakes exams does not align with a social justice approach to teaching and learning.

In an admission of complacency with this system, Shannon stated, “Sometimes I would say you feel you are disservic-ing [*sic*] that of your students because you’re teaching them to an assessment format and sometimes it does take away the joy in history”. Here, Shannon acknowledges that the approach of teaching to the test is not aligned with the actual study of history, and the skills

required to pass the exam are not necessarily transferable beyond the exam. Shannon also indicates tension here, outlining how this approach takes the “joy” out of the subject, reinforcing what learners described as “boring” (OECD, 2021, p. 52). In this way, the data indicate that SQA exams have a big presence in the history classroom and that participants teach to test in an effort to help learners do well. The specific ways in which they reported doing this are described and discussed below.

Teaching to the test helps learners to develop the skills required to pass SQA exams, and participants outlined several ways through which they do this. Firstly, this includes teaching learners how much time should be spent per mark, as David stated, “The biggest problem for kids is time. And when you’re teaching skills we try to teach that they have seven and a half minutes to answer a five-mark question”. This means that, in David’s classroom, learners are trained how to answer exam-style questions in a certain amount of time so that they can complete the entire exam in the allotted time. This is problematic because complex disciplinary processes are being rushed through for the sake of completing the exam under unrealistic conditions.

Secondly, teaching to the test also includes explicitly teaching the phrasing of sentences for each of the question types that appear in the exam. For example, Beth has learners create a bank of phrases they can use in their answers:

So, there are almost like a bank of phrases that we’ll write down at the start of the year and be like, right, there are the bank of phrases that you’re going to pull from because these are the ones that get marks.

This means that, in Beth’s classroom, learners are provided with specific phrases to include in their exam responses, indicating that the SQA requires certain phrases to earn marks. This alludes to a formulaic process for the exam and the importance of knowing exam mechanics. This means that knowing how to complete the exam to the perceived liking of the SQA is beneficial for learners, with regard to exam success. This demonstrates how the mechanics of exam responses and structures influence pedagogical practice.

Finally, according to participants, teaching to the test also includes teaching learners to use mnemonics to remember the processes for answering each question type to the SQA's perceived liking. Similar to the bank of phrases, this indicates a need to memorise information around exam mechanics. While all participants described the requirements for passing the SQA exams as formulaic, rote, and binding, four participants (David, Len, Catherine, and Anne) detailed the specific acronyms or mnemonics they teach to learners in an effort to meet exam demands either in their interview or in their workbook. For example, in her workbook, Catherine shared the acronym she teaches to help learners approach this question type: *TACO + FUR (timing, author, content, omission + feature, useful, reason)*. For the full exemplification of this, as provided by Catherine in her workbook, please see [Appendix D](#).

Teaching exam mechanics, techniques, and strategies explicitly and through what participants described as rote learning contributes to a results-focused exam culture because it means that a significant amount of time is spent teaching to the test. This is concerning because the skills needed to pass the test are not necessarily transferable outwith the exam and these skills are not necessarily related to the typical practices used by historians. Beth put it simply, stating, "They will pass the hell out of that one exam". This indicates that the skills required to pass the exam are not necessarily transferable outwith the realm of exams. Further, as Shannon put it, "We're trying to get them equipped for the realities of the workplace and no-one is going to give you a *how fully* question or an *explain* question". This suggests that Shannon disagrees with the system because it does not realistically align with expectations outwith the exam (she specifically references "the realities of the workplace") but she reports adhering to it anyway, thus reinforcing the access paradox. She may feel as though she has no choice other than to teach in this way. In a results-driven, neoliberal context, though, "it is not surprising," according to Harris (2021a), "that some should tend to prioritise narrow, measurable academic outcomes rather than the overall educational experience of young people" (p. 98). Under the confines of neoliberalism, teachers might

therefore choose to teach to exams so that learners can earn qualifications and, thus, social mobility. This has implications for social justice in that it reduces the discipline of history to memorisation and regurgitation, thus hindering its transformative potential in relation to, for example, learning about and challenging or acting upon oppression and problematic issues of power. It might also produce individuals who think in this way.

In addition to choosing to teach to the test, participants also reported choosing to exclude certain disciplinary practices for the sake of exam results. For example, the *evaluate the usefulness* question asks learners to evaluate several elements of a source, such as *authorship*, *timing*, *type*, and *purpose* to make a judgement on how useful a source might be (for an example of this question type, please see [Appendix C](#)). However, learners can earn full marks on this question type and not include certain elements, such as the *purpose* of the source, for example. In other words, there are potentially more elements to evaluate than there are marks. As a result, participants reported sacrificing an entire element to avoid confusion for learners. This means that learners can successfully evaluate a source, in the eyes of the SQA, without understanding the importance of who created the source or what type of source it is. This is contrary to the practice of historians, who take all of these elements into consideration when evaluating sources. In this way, learners get an incomplete experience of the discipline of history because they are instead being trained in exam preparation and in a particular way of being rather than developing the requisite dispositions for engaging with history, historical texts and events, and the effects of these on contemporary society. So, if learners are not exposed to teaching that works *through* social justice, then they cannot succeed in engaging with work *for* social justice, thus extending beyond the realm of flawed assessment practices. This is problematic because these disciplinary practices are paramount to the discipline of history and align strongly with a social justice approach to teaching and learning in that they provide opportunities to examine oppression and justice-seeking movements as well as opportunities to apply these practices to their own lives, through the ability to identify and challenge oppression

today. This transformative potential of the discipline of history is severely stifled by disciplinary practices being omitted and this choice, as reported by participants, contributes to a results-focused exam culture.

For example, according to Shannon, “Students do find *purpose* incredibly challenging and that’s why I made that decision, and you can see it in terms of my [workbook], I don’t teach them *purpose* with it all because they can get the marks otherwise”. Further, in the exam question annotation portion of her workbook, Shannon wrote, “I don’t teach my students *purpose* as they find this tricky and from being an SQA marker rarely are marks given for this”. This example provided by Shannon in her interview and workbook offers an insight into her decision-making whereby her decisions seem to be driven by a desire to generate more valued exam results. In this way, Shannon knowingly omits a disciplinary practice in an effort to simplify things for learners, which in turn impacts upon exam results, thus contributing to a results-focused exam culture, and perpetuating the access paradox. Shannon also indicates drawing on her experience as an SQA marker and reports using this insider status to tailor her teaching practice to exams. While Shannon’s decisions appear to be exam driven, her decision-making may also reflect a risk assessment based on her experience of the SQA. That is, Shannon reports drawing on her experiences as a teacher and SQA marker alongside her understanding of the dominant exam culture, whereby exam results tend to lead to social mobility, and deems the potential risks of including something like *purpose* as ineffective in the wider goal of achieving high exam results. This suggests larger systems at play that are impacting on the ways in which Shannon teaches. This also aligns with the notion that risk-taking in the classroom has higher sociopolitical emphasis (Dover, 2015). In this way, not taking the risk, in this example, to teach *purpose*, because it might lead to lower exam results, registers lower in sociopolitical emphasis because it maintains the status quo of the wider system. As such, risk-taking leads to educational change (Jones & Le Fevre, 2021). However, in this situation, teachers might be disincentivized to take risks (Anderson, 2002). Similarly, David reported making the same choice: “We used to try to teach



everything and then realised that's a fool's errand, so now we go for the acronym *COAT* [*content, omission, author, timing*]"'. This approach omits consideration of the *type* and *purpose* of a source in determining its utility. David indicates that he previously tried teaching all of the skills but chose to change his approach to better suit the nature of the exam. Interestingly, David says "we" here instead of "I", indicating that this is more of a collective decision rather than an individual one, and this might remove blame from himself for choosing to teach in this way. It also indicates that, even if it is something with which he disagrees, he still chooses to go along with it.

Similarly to Shannon and David, Chris stated "I just don't bother [...] why bother trying to teach them *type* or *purpose* when it's just not worth it?". This indicates a misalignment between the disciplinary practices of historians and the skills required to pass an SQA exam. Further, Anne stated, "I suppose the difficulty that I see as a historian is that sometimes the way that we're teaching this skill or the question actually undermines what the question is actually asking in terms of a historical sense". Importantly, here, Anne acknowledges the misalignment between the discipline of history and what is required for the exam.

This choice, as reported by participants, contributes to a results-focused exam culture because discipline-specific practices are being omitted as they are perceived to be more challenging to grasp strictly because it may impact negatively upon exam results. This creates a misalignment between what is required to pass an SQA exam and what is required to think like a historian. Wineburg (2001) posits that thinking historically is not a natural process, and therefore it is something to be taught and learned. The data, however, indicate that this is not happening, as critical elements that inform the practices of historians, such as the *purpose* of a source, are being omitted altogether. Additionally, Smith (2018a) describes epistemic socialisation, or "a process through which the school curriculum shapes the disciplinary epistemologies of high school (11-18) teachers" (p. 18). In this way, the formulaic and binding nature of the curriculum and exam demands ensures a watered-down version of history as a discipline. Smith (2018a) also states,

“although history is an academic discipline with a strong disciplinary identity and epistemic method, the school curriculum in Scotland offers an alternative framing which heavily influences the epistemologies of subject teachers” (p. 32). This means that the discipline of history and the version of this discipline that occurs in Scottish secondary schools do not align because of the nature of the exam. This is problematic because it offers learners an incomplete experience of history and reinforces the value placed on exams and results in the Scottish context.

In addition to choosing to teach to the test and choosing to omit certain disciplinary practices, a third decision participants reported making is choosing topics based on how easy they are perceived to be in relation to the exam. For example, Beth reported choosing the *Changing Britain* topic over the *Mary Queen of Scots* topic because the essays for the *Changing Britain* topic are perceived to be more straightforward, meaning learners tend to do better on them, in her experience. While it might be the case that, with regards to exam essays, the *Changing Britain* topic is more straightforward for learners compared to the *Mary Queen of Scots* topic, Beth’s hesitancy to teach the *Mary Queen of Scots* topic at the exam level may also have to do with her own level of comfort with the topic, including a potential lack of knowledge about or interest in it. However, she said she would be doing her learners a “misjustice [*sic*]” if she chose topics they might not do as well in. This directly links her choice to teach certain topics to a results-focused exam culture.

Similarly, Chris reported choosing the *WWI* topic for National Five “because it’s easy and that means that we can do the *Migration and Empire* [topic] at Higher, [...] and that’s the easiest thing to do at Higher”. This links his choice to a results-focused exam culture and demonstrates that topics are considered more widely with regards to progression through the subject in the Senior Phase. So, as Chris demonstrates, this means choosing a topic that is perceived to be easier at National Five so that he can then choose a similar topic for Higher that is also perceived to be easy. Importantly, the *WWI* and *Migration and Empire* topics, while different, do cover similar time periods (1900-1928 and 1830-1939, respectively)

and are both taught as Scottish topics. This means that, across two school years, learners in Chris' classroom are exposed to Scottish history from a very limited timeframe. It is clear that participants make choices around topics based on potential exam results, and this limits the historical content to which learners are exposed. So, because of the choices that participants reported making, learners miss out on some of the disciplinary practices of historians and are exposed to a very small amount of historical content. This is problematic because it contributes to a results-focused exam culture and provides learners with an incomplete experience of history.

In addition to selecting topics based on how easy they are perceived to be in relation to exams, participants also reported repeating topics in BGE and the Senior Phase, despite disagreeing with this repetition because it limits the amount of history content to which learners are exposed. For example, in talking about the *WWI* topic, Anne stated:

We kind of repeat it, which makes me a bit sad because I'm not keen on repeating history when there's so much, but that's the way we do it. So, we do it in S2 and then we do it in Nat Five.

While this repetition decreases the amount of content to which learners are exposed, it increases the amount of time that learners are exposed to the content on which they will be tested, thus serving a culture of exam performativity. Additionally, similarly to David, Anne also uses "we" when describing the choice to repeat the *WWI* topic, suggesting that it is a collective decision rather than an individual one, and, thus, removing blame from herself and/or signifying a potentially wider issue around topic selection and exam performance. However, despite reporting that she disagrees with this approach to topic selection, she does not report interrupting it, and this does not align with SJE. Further, Catherine also disagreed with this approach, stating:

I think my bugbear with the Scottish history curriculum, especially when you get to seniors, is it's repeated. So, it's the same topic at National Five, Higher, and Advanced Higher [...] so they leave school thinking history is

Nazis and that's it.

Importantly, though, while Catherine reports dissatisfaction with the current system, the topics are repeated across phases because teachers, as individuals or as departments, may be choosing to repeat them. She brought this up again later in the interview, stating,

I think, like, they're like, oh, but you've got the Broad General Education, you can do whatever you want there. I'm like, people do the same stuff. They teach what they know and they don't seem to, kind of, even offer them these options. People always teach what they know. So, a child is going to go through school, get Nazis at Nat Five, Higher, and Advanced Higher, then they're going to go to university where they're probably also going to get Nazis, and then they're going to come back to school, well, I know the Nazis so that's what I'm going to teach because it's what I'm comfortable with.

Here, Catherine is reporting on her experience as a history teacher in the Scottish context and she is not reporting on her own topic selection. In doing so, she alludes to a wider trend in topic selection, based on her experiences with colleagues. The apparent lack of awareness around choosing topics in this way does not sit well with those who profess activism and social justice as central to their identity as a person and as a teacher because it appears to contradict a social justice approach to teaching and learning. Further, here, Catherine's experience alludes to Smith's (2018a) epistemic socialisation described in the previous section, proposing that "If epistemic socialisation begins at school, then this suggests that, not only is the process unconscious, but a positive feedback loop is created: children are enculturated into a weakened subject epistemology, which they then reproduce as teachers" (Smith, 2018a, p. 25). This hugely impacts upon the experiences learners have of history and contributes to a results-focused exam culture and becomes problematic when that feedback loop limits education and opportunity. So, the impact is felt beyond the classroom and therefore does not sit well with a social justice approach to teaching and learning and with those who consider activism and social justice as integral to their personal and professional identities. This feedback

loop consistently includes and excludes certain historic events and figures, thus reinforcing stereotypes and placing value on certain historic events and figures. However, according to Dozono (2021), “History teachers have a specific responsibility to probe the history discipline’s role in producing colonial knowledge about racial others” (p. 4). By sticking to the same topics, though, and, more specifically, the same narrow representations of those topics, it is clear that teachers are not meeting this responsibility, therefore limiting education and opportunity. Further, in addition to failing to meet the responsibility of history teachers (Dozono, 2021), these choices, as reported by participants in this study, also fail to align with the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021), which advocate social justice and integrity as professional values. This might signify a policy-implementation gap whereby the misalignment between the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) and national exams maintains certain politics of knowledge and pedagogy, which appears to be geared towards performativity and exam results. In this way, a so-called “values schizophrenia” (Ball, 2003, p. 221) might prevent teachers from engaging with the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) and their preferred approaches to teaching because of the wider system goals around exam results and the potential for social mobility associated with exam results.

It is worth noting that Catherine qualified as a teacher outwith Scotland and this potential notion of epistemic socialisation might have jumped out at her as something specific to the Scottish educational context in comparison to her previous experiences outwith Scotland. This is to say that someone who went to school and university in a different educational context and has also taught in a different educational context might pick up on the notion of epistemic socialisation in the history classroom in Scotland more keenly than someone whose experience is limited to one educational context. For Catherine, this position of working across two contexts in her career as a teacher might provide opportunities for difference to reveal issues of power at work across separate but interrelated contexts. So, for Catherine, there might be opportunities to compare and/or contrast her experiences across different contexts. In this way, the notion of epistemic socialisation, or the

repetition of content, might appear to her more readily as she compares her experiences in her former context to her experiences in her current context.

Altogether, the choice to stick to certain topics and repeat content contributes to a results-focused exam culture because learners miss out on topics that are perceived to be more difficult in the exam. This narrow selection of topics essentially creates a canon of topics dictated by teachers. Problematically, the SQA dictates a small number of topics from which to choose ([Table 9](#)) and, as participants of this study reported, teachers further truncate the scope of topics by repeatedly choosing the same ones. In this way, the SQA and teachers act as gatekeepers of knowledge. For example, the National Five course is broken down into three sections, labelled by the SQA as *Scottish*, *British*, and *European and World* ([Table 9](#)). The *Scottish* and *British* sections each have five topics from which to choose and the *European and World* section has ten. Teachers then choose to teach one topic from each of the three sections, so one *Scottish* topic, one *British* topic and one *European and World* topic. Unfortunately, this creates what Smith (2019a) describes as a hegemonic curriculum, which “seeks to preserve the status quo” and this can be done accidentally or not (p. 32). So, by selecting certain topics, the historical events, figures, and perspectives included in them become normalised or prioritised over other topics or more inclusive representations of those topics. Participants’ reporting of topic selection demonstrates that it is not uncommon for history teachers in Scotland to select the same topics time and again, and the Historical Association Survey of History in Secondary Schools in Scotland (Smith et al., 2021) revealed that the *Atlantic Slave Trade* and the *Free at Last? Civil Rights in the USA* topics are two of the most frequently taught topics at the National level (p. 17). It is interesting to note, however, that some participants, like Anne, reported not agreeing with this approach but do it anyway. This notion of disagreement will be explored more within theme two (Section 5.3).

Scottish	British	European and World
The Wars of Independence, 1286 - 1328	The Creation of the Medieval Kingdoms, 1066 - 1406	The Cross and the Crescent, the Crusades 1071 - 1192
Mary Queen of Scots, and the Reformation, 1542 - 1587	War of the Three Kingdoms, 1603 - 1651	'Tea and Freedom', the American Revolution, 1774-1783
The Treaty of Union, 1689 - 1715	The Atlantic Slave Trade, 1770 - 1807	USA 1850 - 1880
Migration and Empire, 1830 - 1939	Changing Britain, 1760 - 1914	Hitler and Nazi Germany, 1919 - 1939
The Era of the Great War, 1900 - 1928	The Making of Modern Britain, 1880 - 1951	Red Flag: Lenin and the Russian Revolution, 1894 - 1921
		Mussolini and Fascist Italy, 1919 - 1939
		Free at Last? Civil Rights in the USA, 1918 - 1968
		Appeasement and the Road to War, 1918 - 1939
		World War II, 1939 - 1945
		The Cold War 1945 - 1989

Table 9: National Five Topics (SQA, 2021)

Looking more specifically at the content within the narrow set of topics outlined by the SQA, participants reported not having the time or space to include perspectives that are currently not on course specifications. This led to a choice not to stray from course specifications provided by the SQA and builds on the notion of a hegemonic curriculum (Smith, 2019a) and a canon of topics firstly narrowed by the SQA and then further narrowed by teachers. Not only are the topics for exams selected by the SQA, but the content within each topic is strictly outlined on the course specifications. Citing a lack of time, participants reported feeling uneasy about straying from course specifications and therefore chose not to, with Beth stating, "My clapback to that would be using what time?" Further, Beth stated "If it's not examinable, what's the point in having it in there at all?" This reiterates a

strong link between what is being done in the classroom and SQA exams, with little space for anything else. This choice also suggests a particular attitude to teaching that is problematic for SJE and does not align with an activist teacher identity or someone who views social justice as integral to their identity as a person or as a teacher. As a result of this choice, learners miss out on a wide range of historical content and therefore also miss out on a wide range of perspectives and disciplinary practices. According to Harris (2021a), teachers “shape what parts of the curriculum students encounter, the depth in which different aspects are studied, the type of knowledge that is developed, all of which has an impact on how students see and understand the world” (p. 99). This has implications for social justice, as it reinforces value placed on certain representations of history. While this can be seen more broadly by the topics included in the so-called *European and World* section of the National Five course, which seemingly only includes the USA and parts of the Middle East, between 1071 and 1192, in its scope of *the world*, it can also be seen in the course specifications. For example, the omission of certain perspectives, such as Scotland’s involvement in the slave trade in the *Atlantic Slave Trade* topic, has serious implications for anti-racist education movements in Scotland, such as work being done by the Anti-Racist Educator and the Coalition for Racial Equity and Rights (CRER), as what is being left out is a core concern for these movements, wider society, and social justice. While it is concerning that the SQA does not include diverse representation in course specifications, it is also concerning that participants do not appear to teach beyond what is included in course specifications. This is problematic for social justice because it limits the transformative potential of the discipline of history and it also contributes to a wider results-focused exam culture in Scotland. However, it appears as though participants are aware of and disagree with this misalignment, which will be explored in detail in the following section (Section 5.3). This means that there is tension between the realities of exam demands within the current educational context and the ways in which history teachers in Scotland want to teach, as seen by, for example, participants disagreeing with topic repetition but doing it anyway. Problematically, though, and this will also



be explored in depth in the following section (Section 5.3), participants reported very few examples of taking action against the system in place.

Further, Len reported dissatisfaction with the narrow representation of history included in the *Free at Last? Civil Rights in the USA* course specification. He referenced historical figures not mentioned on the course specification and how their impact is completely missed out. In this way, learners can pass the exam without knowing the impact of several key figures not included on the course specification, such as Fannie Lou Hamer. However, in an illusion of pedagogical agency, there is nothing to say that teachers cannot include material that is not on the course specifications, but the issue lies in the fact that participants are choosing not to include additional content and focus on what is “examinable” instead. This narrow representation of history will be further explored in theme five (Section 5.6). In a similar vein to Len and his dissatisfaction with the course specifications, Beth stated, “there’s nothing that says I’m not allowed to, but there’s no time and I don’t think there’s exam value in it, so I don’t do it”. David expressed a similar notion, circling back to an exam focus and placing blame on the system:

[...] if it ain’t coming up in the course I’ve not got time to go away on a tangent too much. And I could give them extra time, I could say well why don’t you go away and do this and do this and do this, but that’s to the detriment of their total exam because it’s taking time away from other studying for other subjects [...] that’s the driver unfortunately.

Additionally, Beth very clearly reinforces the access paradox by saying:

You’re not teaching them how to put an essay together. You’re not. You’re teaching them how to get very set marks [...] and it’s boring. That’s wonderful. That is wonderful because you have candidates in that room who would not under any other subjects probably wouldn't be sitting at Higher. Well, that’s because in history we’ve got this very formulaic structure, you can take a candidate that’s perhaps a bit dodge and drag them up to a C.

Here, Beth paints the formulaic nature of SQA requirements positively and indicates a strong connection between exam results and social mobility. This results-focused

mindset reiterates the perceived value of exam results in the Scottish context, and is supported by the 2021 OECD report, which states, “one accepted and widely understood measure of success in the Senior Phase – the attainment of five Higher qualifications” (p. 101). In a sense, it does not matter what is being learned, as long as results are achieved. In this context, what is being learned are the exam mechanics, techniques, and strategies necessary to pass the exam. It is the results that will get learners places and not the process of attaining them. This contributes to a results-focused exam culture because teachers are restricting learning by being selective about content. They are being selective about content by adhering to the course specifications. This means that learners are getting an incomplete experience of the discipline of history for the sake of exam preparations. This suggests that participants have a limited understanding of social justice or their own role in enacting social justice through education.

Overall, the choices reported by participants throughout this subsection, including teaching to the test explicitly and through rote learning, choosing not to teach certain disciplinary practices, choosing topics based on how easy they are perceived to be in relation to exams, and choosing not to include historical perspectives that are not on SQA course specifications, contribute to, reinforce, and perpetuate a results-focused exam culture in Scottish education and reflect a limited understanding of social justice. Further, these choices do not sit well with regards to SJE. However, these choices might be a result of demands imposed on teachers around exam results from the school, local authority, and/or national levels. The following subsection further explores the notion of a results-focused exam culture in Scotland through a skills disconnect as reported by participants.

### **5.2.2 Skills Disconnect**

All nine participants detailed a disconnect between the skills required to pass the SQA exams and the disciplinary practices historians use. This disconnect can be linked to the choices outlined above, specifically the choice participants make to omit certain skills for the sake of exam results. For example, participants detailed

their choice to omit teaching *type* or *purpose*. In doing so, Chris stated that “It’s just not worth it”, and David labelled the idea of teaching every skill a “fool’s errand”.

More specifically, with regards to SQA assessment, Chris stated:

They should be asking pupils to directly evaluate things but they don't in any way. There is no evaluation in the evaluation question, especially at National Five [...] there is a huge amount of rote learning and very, very superficial engagement with sources, but it’s not evaluation in any sense and it pains me to teach it.

Here, Chris expresses dissatisfaction, boredom, and frustration with SQA assessment and reiterates the rote way in which it is taught and learned. This demonstrates a clear misalignment between the learning of exam mechanics, techniques, and strategies required to pass SQA exams and the disciplinary practices used by historians. The disembodied “they” suggests that he might not see it as within his responsibility to change the way the system is set up or the way he enacts his role within the system, despite this being advocated by the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021). In other words, Chris might simply see himself as the messenger in this context rather than as someone who has a responsibility or power to act. He went on to say:

Pupils sitting National Five and Higher are sitting it in order to advance their career prospects, to advance their life chances, and so it would be unreasonable and unfair for me to say, ‘you guys, I’d rather you be able to write beautifully than get an A at Higher’, because that would be bad because the kids need As at Higher to get into the university courses that they want.

Here, Chris reinforces the access paradox by not only teaching to the test, but also explicitly stating that the exam results and social mobility are inextricably linked. Importantly, he states that learners take history to “advance their life chances” and get into university, but it might be the case that learners who choose to take history actually have a genuine interest in history, or that social mobility through education is limited to access to higher education. Because of this link to social mobility, he

suggests that he does not feel comfortable teaching anything other than what is examinable, which includes teaching the skills required to pass SQA exams rather than the disciplinary practices used by historians, such as evaluating sources, contextualising, and corroborating (Santiago, 2019). This is problematic because it narrowly focuses on exam results as social mobility, rather than the potential of history to align with a social justice approach to teaching and learning.

Talking about the bank of phrases she gives to learners at the beginning of the year, Beth stated:

I don't really see a problem with giving them a bank and being like, right, put that together in the hope that the ones who are going to become critical of things will become critical because that's what they can, kind of, can see it.

The ones who don't, aren't able to do that, aren't going to do that, and I can see how this is a failing.

While it is unclear if Beth sees this as a failing specifically on her part, she does reflect on the reality of this system and how she contributes to the results-focused exam culture by functioning within it, thus reinforcing the access paradox. She outlines how she teaches to the test, acknowledges that not all learners will make the connections beyond what is required to pass the exam, and recognises this as a shortcoming.

Further, Michael stated:

Unfortunately, for certificate-level history, and this will go for all subjects, but certainly for history, you need to teach kids how to answer, not just what to know or what to think [...] if you want to get these marks you're going to have to do these things. And what I really don't like about, I mean, it's got to be done.

Similarly to Beth, Michael reflects on the reality of the system as something that needs to be done, thus reinforcing the access paradox. By expressing dissatisfaction with it, Michael also demonstrates a misalignment between what is required to pass SQA exams and the practices of historians. He then circled back to a results-focus by stating:

I'm no fan of the SQA, but to support the kids to get the results that they get and, as I say, if you look at results, you'll see that we really do get them, I mean, we put the time in. It's not fun, but it's got to be done.

Here, Michael speaks about results in a competitive way and reiterates how results are the focus.

Regarding disciplinary practices, Michael stated, "a good historian isn't going to look at every causal, sort of series of events, whatever, and then decide, well, in this case that was the most important because, it's just not what you would do". Here, Michael calls out the SQA for requiring learners to determine a most important factor leading to an event, which is just not what historians do. This indicates a misalignment between the skills required to pass SQA exams and the disciplinary practices of historians. Here, Michael's identity as a historian is in tension with his teaching practice, in that the ways in which he reports teaching history are at odds with the disciplinary practices he knows as a historian. In a strong indication of his feelings towards the awarding body, Michael stated, "I would not shed a tear if somebody told me tomorrow we'll get rid of [the SQA] and start again". This demonstrates a clear dissatisfaction with the SQA.

Shannon mentioned national exam boards in Wales, Northern Ireland, and England, and wondered, "How can we include actual historical skills?". Catherine reiterated this comparison by saying, "If you look at, like, the comparison between the Scottish exam system and then the English one, we've got a lot less academic [...] approach". Catherine then said, "We don't engage with sources in the same way. We really look at sources from an information point of view, and a provenance point of view second". Here, Shannon and Catherine, using their own experiences of assessment outwith Scotland, make comparisons to other ways of assessing in the UK, indicating that Scotland's method of assessing in history is not in line with what is done in Wales, Northern Ireland, or England, which, according to Shannon and Catherine, are more strongly aligned with the disciplinary practices of historians.

Anne also acknowledged this misalignment, stating, "I suppose the difficulty

that I see as a historian is that sometimes the way that we're teaching this skill or the question actually undermines what the question is actually asking in terms of a historical sense". Like with Michael, this suggests there is tension between Anne's identity as a historian and her teaching practice. This also indicates tension between the skills required to pass SQA exams and the disciplinary practices of historians. Relating this tension to teachers' role in reinforcing the access paradox, Anne went on to say:

Teachers have tried to make it accessible to pupils, so that we become quite formulaic in the way that they answer it, which is important, but then, I suppose, sometimes we're guilty of not giving them *why*, the reason why we look at the usefulness of a source.

Here, Anne indicates that teachers play a role in boiling down the skills in an effort to meet SQA requirements, and thus attainment, parsing out disciplinary practices for the sake of exam results. Not only is it essential for teachers to teach learners why it is important to consider the usefulness of a source, it is also important to teach learners to look for the "why" themselves, because this encourages critical consciousness, which is a key element of SJE (Agarwal et al, 2010; Dover, 2013a, 2015; Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2016; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004b). This can be linked to Beth's comment about some learners making connections beyond the exam while others will not make those same connections. This is problematic because it lacks criticality and therefore does not align with a social justice approach to teaching and learning and works to stifle the transformative potential of the discipline of history, all of which stands to contribute to a results-focused exam culture in Scotland.

Further, Carrie stated, "Sometimes I see a really great answer from a child that I think shows depth of insight and it's not going to get any marks because it's not jumping through the hoops". This shows how answering exam questions in the SQA style has more value to the exam system than genuine disciplinary practice. Carrie went on to say, "Sometimes I find the exams are very binding and restrictive. I work within them because I have to, for the young people. But, history shouldn't

be taught the way to pass an exam". Here, Carrie reinforces the access paradox by working within the system, disagreeing with it, but doing it anyway. With content and disciplinary practices being shoehorned by the SQA, "For many history teachers in Scotland, the [SQA] remains not just the accountability mechanism by which their performance is judged, but also the only available conceptualisation of historical knowledge" (Smith, 2019b, p. 27). This means that what is taught and learned in history is dictated by the SQA and adhered to through the choices made by teachers. This is problematic because it limits the experience learners have of history, including its transformative potential, which aligns more strongly with a social justice approach to teaching and learning than an exam-focused approach. As a result, a social justice approach to teaching and learning is stifled and learners are exposed to a watered-down version of history that reflects a limited understanding of social justice and signifies that participants in this study see that their role in the classroom is to teach to the test, which has implications for their teaching practice. This also seems to suggest that these teachers are unaware of the sociopolitical consequences of their choices, that is, in relation to maintaining power relations and certain ideologies.

### **5.2.3 Phases Disconnect**

In addition to outlining several choices that place national exams at the centre of teaching and learning and describing a misalignment between the skills required to pass SQA exams versus the actual disciplinary practices of historians, participants also detailed a disconnect between the phases of Scottish secondary education by commenting on the differences between BGE, Senior Phase (specifically National Five and Higher), and Advanced Higher. Firstly, participants reported introducing exam skills in BGE. This is a clear misalignment with the vision of the CfE, which affords a broad and general education up to S3 across several intersecting or interdisciplinary curriculum areas (Education Scotland, n.d.), and confirms the concerns over exams as outlined by the recent OECD report (2021). Beginning at age three, the BGE phase lasts until S3 and is designed to offer a broad,

general education. In addition to differences between BGE and Senior Phase, participants expressed strong feelings about the effectiveness of the Advanced Higher course, taken in S6, and how this course is much more realistic in terms of studying history compared to National Five and Higher.

For example, with regards to BGE, David stated:

You don't want to worry them in S1 and S2 about exams and stuff because it's years away. What we usually do, we get a wee bit cheeky, [...] we may introduce a National Five-style skill, but just sort of, not dumb it down, that's the wrong word, but make it more accessible to S1 and S2.

David went on to say, "So then, what they're doing in the BGE is they are doing the skills they need for National Five but it's under the guise of BGE, so they're learning exam skills without knowing that they're doing it". Here David indicates that he teaches exam skills in BGE. As previously explored, it is clear that the skills required to pass the SQA history exams do not realistically align with the disciplinary practices of historians. Therefore, introducing exam skills in BGE significantly hinders the exposure of learners to the study of history and also runs counter to the vision of the CfE and the purpose of BGE. Anne was open about this issue, stating, "When you look at the Curriculum for Excellence, and then Nat Five, like, they don't link up realistically". Further, the 2021 OECD report found that preparation for Senior Phase courses often takes place in S3, "effectively shortening the time allocated to their broad general education due to the narrowing effect of National Courses on learning in the Senior Phase" (p. 62). Further, according to Shapira et al. (2023), subjects "are geared to subject selection (as taster subjects) and assessment demands (the learning of narrow skills) for future Senior Phase study, rather than the educational purposes of the BGE phase" (p. 28). This means that time is being taken away from BGE to prepare learners for exams they may never sit. This becomes extremely concerning when considered alongside progression statistics for history ([Table 10](#)). While SQA exam skills are being taught to learners in BGE, only an average of 15,200 learners across the country will sit the National Five exam in history (P. Di Mambro, personal communication, August 26, 2021). Less than half of



those learners (an average of 7,040) will move on to sit the Higher exam, and of those learners, only an average of 1,267 learners will sit the Advanced Higher exam (P. Di Mambro, personal communication, August 26, 2021). This is problematic because the narrow exam skills that do not realistically mirror the actual discipline of history are being taught to learners from a very early stage in their secondary school experience, and for an exam they are not likely to sit. This means that time is being dedicated to exam preparation rather than a social justice approach to teaching and learning, which more realistically mirrors the discipline of history. As a result, learners get an incomplete experience of the discipline of history and miss out on its transformative potential. Additionally, this appears to contradict the vision of the CfE and stifles the purpose of the BGE phase in Scottish secondary schools. In their recent report on Scottish education, Shapira et al. (2023) found that, “BGE provision is shaped to a large extent by a backwash effect from the Senior Phase, meaning that subjects tend to mirror senior phase choices” (p. 21). Importantly, learners may choose not to take history because of the nature of the subject in Scotland’s exam-focused context, including all of the choices participants reported making to tailor their teaching practice to exams.

Similarly to David’s approach to introducing narrow SQA exam skills in the BGE phase, Anne stated:

We started off not doing that when the [CfE] came about. We were all singing, all dancing, all pupil-centred, they choose, everything’s fantastic, and then they got to S4 and we were [like], you can’t do this, why can you not do this? So, we realised, actually, we had to take it much back, so we put it right back into S1, S2, S3. Each year we introduce a different source skill that they then start to answer using the formula and hopefully understand why they’re doing it, but, to be honest, probably not.

Anne went on to say:

I suppose it's difficult, because you need them to start to use the language that they're going to have to use. That is what will give them credit. We stopped, so we took out, kind of, them having to write it, so that instead it's

mix and match sentences that they have to put. To try and make it so that it's a bit more fun, so it's not as though we're just making them sit and write an exam-style. But, even that, for some of your lower-level kids that will probably go on to do Nat Four, they struggle with it anyway, so then accessing that at S1, S2 is not ideal. And then the ones that are doing it and understand it, just see it as, kind of, pointless, like, why are we doing this? But I suppose that's because they can't see. We always sell it as, it's the progression, and this is the foundation skills, and make it as positive as you can, sing and dance, music, but at the end of the day, you're teaching them to answer a *how useful* question in S1, S2.

Here, Anne recognises the misalignment between the CfE and the nature of SQA exam demands. She also indicates sacrificing the vision of the CfE in favour of teaching to the demands of SQA exams, despite disagreeing with it. In this way, the demands of SQA exams dictate classroom practices, leading to a results-focused exam culture in Scotland.

Beth reiterated the notion of teaching to the test in BGE, stating, "I teach SQA stuff rigorously and with religious fervour. From day one of your S1 journey, you should have the SQA lurking in the back of your mind". Later in the interview, she stated:

We just do [*Free at Last? Civil Rights in the USA*] at S3 and I like to call that their SQA training. So, the [workbook] question you gave me, I've done that question with S3 because it's, I think it's good to give them the SQA questions as early as possible. And they will suck at them and I'm kind of okay with that. But they need to be able to recognise it and become familiar and confident with seeing these questions as early as possible.

Here, referring to her workbook, Beth demonstrates teaching to the test, thus contributing to a results-focused exam culture and reinforcing the access paradox. More specifically, in her workbook, she wrote, "Feelings don't come into it. I phrase it to students that this is the way the SQA does exams and so we need to be able to do this under time, with detail and with accuracy." These sentiments might be

problematic with regards to SJE because they limit notions of social justice in that they equate exam success with social mobility and thereby diminishes teaching and learning to exam preparation. This potentially limited understanding of social justice also fails to recognise the transformative potential of history where learners can, for example, learn about oppression, inequitable conditions, and justice-seeking movements throughout history, and develop the skills and dispositions to identify and challenge oppression and transform inequitable conditions in society today.

This disconnect between phases contributes to a results-focused exam culture because it allows teaching and learning to revolve around exams early in a learner's secondary schooling. This demonstrates a clear misalignment between the vision of the CfE and the reality of a system that places high value on exams. According to the OECD report (2021), 51% of school leaders surveyed reported subject choices being made in S2, despite the BGE phase being intended to last through to S3 (p. 53). Further, Smith (2019b) reported, "many schools styled their compulsory junior phase curriculum around the demands of the SQA examinations in the optional senior phase" and used "'watered-down' versions of examination syllabi" (p. 24). Based on his findings, Smith (2019b) put it simply, "To most schools in this study, the compulsory phase (S1-S2) is not seen as a historical education in itself, but as a prelude to studying the subject in the senior phase" (p. 26). Further, according to Shapira et al. (2023), "The general picture is one of BGE provision that essentially mirrors senior phase subjects, and which constitutes both preparation for the senior phase qualifications" (p. 28). This trend was also made evident by participants in this study. Further, 86% of schools report history becoming optional after S1 or S2 (Smith et al., 2021, p. 1). This can also be seen in England where survey data show that schools are reducing the amount of time spent on their Key Stage 3 curriculum (Harris, 2021a, 2021b). All of this means that, early in the secondary school experience, the teaching and learning of history revolves around exams. This is problematic because it appears to run counter to a social justice approach to teaching and learning and offers learners a very limited and incomplete

experience of the discipline of history when it could instead capitalise on the vision of the CfE, which affords a broad and general education from S1-S3, where history teachers could expose learners to more diverse representations and experiences of history and introduce the disciplinary practices of historians that exams stifle. For example, topics covered in the BGE could include topics, perspectives, and time periods that are not included in course specifications ([Table 9](#)).

Interestingly, and in contrast, participants sang the praises of the Advanced Higher course, which can be taken in S6. Participants acknowledged how this course is much more aligned with what it means to study history and draws more strongly on disciplinary practices. Based on how different the National Five and Higher courses are compared to the Advanced Higher course, this alludes to a significant amount of unlearning for those who take the Advanced Higher course. Chris lamented, “that lack of progression and lack of integration between the different stages of the SQA is, I think, a real shame”. Michael reiterated this by saying, “moving into Higher and Advanced Higher, it is a bit better in that you are able, far more, to give credit for nuance”. Catherine shared Michael’s thoughts: “Higher and Advanced Higher are different. Higher kind of brings in a little bit more of that independent thinking, and Advanced Higher is excellent”. Shannon also discussed the differences between the National Five, Higher, and Advanced Higher courses, stating, “That is what I would like to see coming through with the SQA because historians are talked about for the first time, really, as something that’s a key component for an essay until Advanced Higher”. Linking this back to the skills disconnect, Shannon expresses dissatisfaction with the courses failing to incorporate adequate disciplinary practices across phases and it is not until the Advanced Higher course that the disciplinary practices of historians, such as nuance in authorship, are really considered. This more strongly aligns with a social justice approach to teaching history than the rote, exam-focused approach participants described in their teaching of National Five and Higher because “historical inquiry, in focusing on evidence and authorship, may help students reconsider their notion that historical narratives are singular and linear” (Santiago, 2019, p. 97). This means that, through

historical inquiry, learners will be better able to dissect representations of history and determine who benefits and misses out by particular representations of history.

Participants disagreed, however, on when this shift takes place, with some saying that it is not until the Advanced Higher course, while others saw merit and more space for nuance in the Higher course compared to National Five. This disagreement among participants suggests that there might be more merit to the Higher course compared to the National Five course. However, the versions of history over which they disagree are still very limited and neither of the courses realistically mirror the discipline of history and this has implications for social justice in that learners miss out on the transformative potential of history. The 2021 OECD report, however, states, “The Senior Phase, and especially the Higher courses, do not appear to be fully aligned with CfE intentions in aims, content, pedagogy and assessment” (p. 63). This suggests that the Higher course is indeed limited compared to the Advanced Higher course.

Anne, for example, brought up the difficult transition from Higher to Advanced Higher, stating:

The transition from Higher to Advanced Higher is quite difficult for a lot of candidates in that it's no longer teacher-led, it's mainly student-led because it has to be for the kids to understand, to then be able to do their dissertation, their essays, and the source skills, I think, are, probably they are the benchmark of the source, how you would look at a source in history.

Here, much like Shannon, Anne indicates a misalignment between phases as well as skills.

While concerning on its own, the Advanced Higher course being considered to be the only course that realistically mirrors the discipline of history becomes especially alarming when considered alongside progression statistics ([Table 10](#)). As previously explored, and according to statistics provided to me by the SQA, less than half of learners move on from National Five to Higher and 17% of those learners will move on from Higher to Advanced Higher (P. Di Mambro, personal communication, August 26, 2021). In all, only 8% of learners who sit National Five move on to

Advanced Higher. These numbers are consistent over five years ([Table 10](#)) (P. Di Mambro, personal communication, August 26, 2021). This is problematic because these statistics suggest that very few learners are exposed to the course that most realistically mirrors the discipline of history and this has implications for social justice in the form of missed opportunities to engage with discipline-specific practices that can be used to explore and interrupt wider societal issues.

Concerningly, while history is not always taken beyond the BGE phase, there is also a 50% chance that a learner will not be taught BGE history by a history specialist (Smith, 2019b, p. 21). This means that learners might be taught history by someone who has little or no training, and/or interest, in the discipline. This can happen as Social Subjects departments are made up of history, geography, and modern studies specialists and each specialist teacher might be responsible for their own BGE class(es). For example, Smith (2019b) found that most schools reported approaching BGE with one teacher teaching one class all three social subjects. Some schools reported teaching social subjects in short, rotating blocks with a specialist teacher for each block and very few schools reported teaching each of the three social subjects as separate classes with specialist teachers (Smith, 2019b). This is not limited to Scotland, as Harris (2021a) reports that, in England, “non-specialists are deployed to teach history, particularly in the Key Stage 3 years” (p. 106). Additionally, only around 50% of learners in Scotland move from BGE to National Five. This means that half of learners are beginning exam preparations for an exam they will never sit (Smith, 2019b, p. 24). Further, this approach has the potential to turn learners off the subject entirely. So, half of learners move on from BGE to the National level, and the ones that do not choose to take history are likely only to have exposure to the discipline through a non-subject specialist who might be even more inclined to teach to the test based on their level of comfort with or commitment to teaching history. Altogether, these progression statistics are problematic because they indicate that very few learners get to the point where history in the classroom appears to more realistically mirror history as a discipline. Further, according to Shapira et al. (2023), “educators reported that young people

who wanted to continue with Higher courses for the learning experience were withdrawn [from the class by the school] if they were unlikely to pass” (p. 31). This indicates a mechanism of creating records of high attainment and means that the majority of learners miss out on any real exposure to the discipline of history and the real-world applications it has in identifying and disrupting hegemonic structures in society.

Further, it is not uncommon for Advanced Higher not to be offered in some schools, though learners can take it elsewhere. Limited access to the Advanced Higher course can be due to staffing or small numbers of learners looking to take the course. According to the Historical Association Survey of History in Secondary Schools in Scotland (Smith et al., 2021), thirty-five out of seventy schools surveyed reported teaching Advanced Higher “regularly”, fourteen reported teaching it “occasionally”, and fifteen reported not teaching it at all (p. 19). While there may be several reasons for this, including resources and staffing, it does indicate that access to Advanced Higher courses is not always available. Therefore, access to the course that most realistically mirrors the discipline of history is limited to very few learners in Scotland and learners who have succeeded in learning the formulae that get them that far in the context of the SQA exams.

Year	National Five	Year	Higher	Year	Advanced Higher
2015	15,777	2016	7,277	2017	1,349
2016	15,942	2017	7,245	2018	1,343
2017	15,073	2018	6,902	2019	1,181
2018	14,475	2019	6,842	2020	1,124
2019	14,735	2020	6,935	2021	1,338
Average	15,200	Average	7,040	Average	1,267

Table 10: Progression Statistics (Source: GTCS) (P. Di Mambro, personal communication, August 26, 2021)

Altogether, this disconnect between phases contributes to a results-focused exam culture because it establishes a schooling experience that revolves around test-taking from early on, despite a misalignment with the vision of the CfE and the purpose of the BGE phase. It also indicates a challenging transition from Higher to Advanced Higher, or a leap from the formulaic, rote norm of National Five and Higher, to the more nuanced, discipline-specific study of history in Advanced Higher. While challenging, this transition is only experienced by a small number of learners in the first place. The information provided by the participants in this study indicates a results-focused exam culture that is sustained by choices that create and reinforce disconnects between skills and phases in the Scottish context. As reported by participants, the decisions that create and reinforce skills and phases disconnects are choosing to teach exam mechanics, techniques, and strategies explicitly and through rote learning, choosing not to teach certain disciplinary practices, choosing topics based on how easy they are perceived to be in relation to exams, and choosing not to include historical perspectives that are not included on SQA course specifications. In this way, participants indicated that their role in the classroom is to teach to the test and this reflects a limited understanding of social justice and SJE, which has profound implications on their reported teaching practice. Importantly, all nine participants spoke about the nature of the SQA and reported tailoring their teaching practice to exams in the same way, regardless of their age, experience, education level, and whether they were a classroom teacher or head of department/faculty at the time ([Table 2](#)). Based on the reporting of the participants in this study, this suggests a heavily ingrained exam culture in Scottish education. In light of this culture, the following section explores how participants blame the system for the choices they reported making in their teaching practice.



### 5.3 Blaming the System

The previous section indicated the existence of a results-focused exam culture in Scotland. This section builds on that notion by identifying how participants reported placing blame for this culture on the system. In this way, participants showed that they are aware of the exam culture, yet remove blame from themselves while simultaneously acting complacent with the system, thus contributing to the results-focused exam culture and associated access paradox. This section explores how participants blamed the SQA for the ways in which they teach, how they recognised that the system is problematic, how they rationalised the system, how they reported working within the system, and how only two participants reported taking action against the system. In this way, participants indicated that their role in the classroom is to teach to the test and this, while running counter to the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021), has serious implications for their teaching practice and for social justice. Importantly, though, this seems to reflect the wider context rather than teachers as individuals (Hayward, 2007; McCluskey, 2021).

Participants recognised that the status quo of a results-focused exam culture is inadequate but placed blame on the system, suggesting that there is nothing they can do about the system other than work within it by teaching to the test. The ways in which they reported working within the system, however, do not challenge the system and therefore reinforce and perpetuate the access paradox. There is a difference between working within a system and adhering to it. Working within a system suggests some form of resistance against it, including “going underground” (Dover et al., 2016) or “camouflaging” (Picower, 2011) to incorporate justice-oriented teaching into a restrictive, neoliberal system. On the other hand, simply adhering to a system reinforces the status quo and goes against what Sachs (2003a) calls an activist teaching profession, which “can act as a change agent to improve the quality of education provision, student learning outcomes, and the status of teaching as a profession” (p. 54). In this way, teachers can resist a restrictive system. This is important in relation to social justice because it could lead

to change, for example, in assessment, which would allow for a social justice approach to teaching and learning rather than the more rote, banking approach that participants reported. However, for the most part, participants did not report resistance, so it cannot be said that participants are working within the system; they are instead adhering to it.

Michael was upfront about his feelings towards the system, the SQA, stating, “I would not shed a tear if somebody told me tomorrow we’ll get rid of [the SQA] and start again”. Here, Michael expresses dissatisfaction with the system, but says nothing to suggest that he can play a hand in changing it, despite the SQA being made up of teachers. In other words, he would not be upset to see the system change, but does not indicate that he can or will contribute to changing it. He implies that that is the responsibility of someone else, but does not indicate who that may be. This rhetoric sets the tone for how all nine participants talked about the SQA.

Throughout the interviews, participants placed blame on the system, in this context, the SQA (5.3.1), recognised that this system is insufficient (5.3.2), and rationalised the ways in which the system is set up and their choice to adhere to it (5.3.3). Most participants did not report taking any steps to challenge or resist the system, therefore acting complacent in it (5.3.4), but two participants did (5.3.5). Their actions, though, did not appear to lead to any change. All five of these trends are discussed in turn.

### **5.3.1 Blaming the SQA**

Several participants blamed the system for why they teach to the test. In doing so, they remove responsibility from themselves for catering to the system and this can be seen as an excuse, justification, rationalisation, or simply an explanation for teaching to the test. In this way, they did not see their approach to teaching as a choice. For example, Chris admitted to this, saying, “That’s shameful for me, but I have to hold my hand and say that’s not my fault, that is the system that has forced us into that”. By calling it “shameful”, Chris recognises that teaching to the test is

inadequate but blames the system, indicating that he thinks there is nothing he can do about it and that teachers are “forced” to teach in this way. In this way, Chris alludes to wider system pressure driving his teaching practice. Further, Chris stated:

I really like to focus on literacy and trying to teach them a little bit [of] self-reliance and all that kind of stuff, but at the end of the day, like, if someone told me that I had to get rid of all those things because the kids need to pass the exam, you’d have to suck it up because that’s the way that the system is set up.

Again, Chris uses the system to remove blame from himself for teaching to the test, despite disagreeing with teaching in this way, indicating tension between how he wants to teach and how he does teach. Similarly, Beth stated:

Now, here I have to be careful because there is absolutely nothing in the National Five and the Higher History context that says we cannot do that. We can do that if we want [...] I, as a classroom teacher, can be like, right, we’re going to have a discussion point about that today. My clapback to that would be using what time? No. So, you can, if you feel like you’ve got a group of kids who would get something out of that, go that direction. And sometimes it’s okay to do that. There’s nothing that says I’m not allowed to, but there’s no time and I don’t think there’s exam value in it, so I don’t do it. There probably should be more of an element of [discussion], but then the issue becomes, how is that examinable? Well, it’s not, so what’s the point? If it’s not examinable, what’s the point in having it in there at all?

Beth’s statement is revealing. Firstly, by stating that there should be more discussion-based activities, she acknowledges that a system that does not value discussion-based activities is insufficient, and indicates that it is not her fault and that her role in the classroom is to teach to the test. So, in her view, the system is the reason why she is teaching to the test and not going beyond it to incorporate discussion-based activities. Beth does not indicate seeing this approach as a choice. Interestingly, Beth also makes this claim despite “discussion and informed debate” being highlighted in the CfE Principles and Practice for Social Studies as skills to be

developed (Education Scotland, 2014, p. 2). In this way, Beth has seemingly overlooked the guidance as set out by the CfE and this runs counter to the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) in that it seems to lack the commitment to social justice highlighted as key to teaching in Scotland. Alternatively, this statement from Beth could signify pressure from her school or local authority to achieve certain exam results, and, as a consequence, she reports that her practice is driven in this exam-focused way of behaving. Either way, Beth's reporting of her practice does not align with the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021). Importantly, though, she perhaps sees it as important for learners that they are not distracted by approaches that might hamper their success in exams. In this way, she is using what she sees as her professional judgement, which is also important in teacher professionalism, to determine where she focuses her efforts and the efforts of learners (Mockler, 2020). Secondly, Beth's sentiments indicate that, not only is her teaching practice very exam-driven, but she also makes a deliberate choice to teach in this way, citing a lack of time and "exam value" as the reasons why. So, because of exam demands and the limited amount of time she has to prepare learners to meet these demands, she is choosing not to spend time on anything that is not formally assessed, such as the discussion-based activities to which she refers. While this choice might be driven by external pressures from her school or local authority, it goes against Smith and Lennon's (2011) findings that class discussion can improve understanding of content and supports the notion that restrictive mandates result in "survival teaching" where learning is reduced to memorising content (p. 35). Further, Beth's approach reflects a banking model where information is transmitted from teacher to learner (Freire, 1970). Instead, Freire (1970) proposes a problem-posing model that focuses on dialogue and that "dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of 'depositing' ideas in another" (p. 62). It is clear, though, that this is not happening among participants. In this way, a social justice approach to teaching and learning, one akin to Freire's (1970) problem-posing model, is sacrificed in favour of a more rote way of teaching, which does not align with SJE.

Additionally, David reported framing the SQA as the "enemy". This shifts

responsibility from himself and rationalises teaching to the test. This mindset, as reported by participants, reinforces OECD (2021) findings where teachers stated, “We don’t want to do this but the examination/test process makes us do it” (p. 101). This suggests that, despite disagreeing with it, teachers teach to the test because of the way the system is set up and they see themselves as abstracted from the system, meaning they do not think they can change it. This could also suggest that attempting to change the system is too difficult or that there is a lack of commitment to social justice values, and this might be reflective of larger social issues at play. For example, this is a time when teacher retention (Educational Institute of Scotland, 2023), high workloads (Scottish Government, 2020), and conditions of work (Scottish Government, 2023) are increasingly unmanageable. So, despite the policy's construction of teachers as agents of change, the conditions for change and teacher agency are still perhaps not quite there yet. However, as Beth indicates, teaching to the test is a deliberate choice for her. In turn, this contributes to the results-focused exam culture, thus reinforcing and perpetuating the access paradox.

### **5.3.2 Recognising the System is Insufficient**

In addition to placing blame on the system for why they teach to the test, several participants also recognised that the system itself is flawed. In this way, they are both aware that there is a problem with how history is taught and learned in Scotland, and still see teaching to the test as an obligation. For example, Chris stated, “There is a huge amount of rote learning and very, very superficial engagement with sources, but it’s not evaluation in any sense and it pains me to teach it”. So, Chris disagrees with how and what he is teaching, but teaches it anyway. In teaching towards SQA exam demands, Chris is unable to teach history in ways that he wants, whether that be for social justice, or for civic purposes, or for independent thinking (Santiago & Dozono, 2022). Instead, he reports a “superficial engagement” with sources, which does not align with the disciplinary practices of historians. Here, Chris indicates a so-called “values schizophrenia” (Ball, 2003, p.

221) whereby the values of a teacher might not align with the ways in which they are expected to act in a performative, neoliberal context. In this example, this takes the form of the disciplinary practices with which Chris is familiar not aligning with the ways in which history is assessed in Scotland. As a result, his teaching practice becomes tailored to the exams because the results of the exams hold currency in the Scottish context, for example, with regards to employability and university access. He went on to talk about how he teaches lessons each week dedicated to exam preparation:

I try and do it once a week and tell them through it, 'this is the boring lesson, it's boring crap, you're gonna hate it, and I hate it, but you need to pass the exams, so we must do it'.

In this way, Chris sees exam preparation as an obligation and teaching to the test is something that needs to be done. However, to say that it "pains" him and that he "hates" it indicates a significant level of dissatisfaction, yet he identifies it as something that "must" be done. Similarly, David echoed this sentiment, stating, "I don't like this, but at the end of the day, it's more for the exam". This shows dissatisfaction with the system and an awareness that it is not effective while also showing how teachers feel compelled to adhere to it anyway. Further, with regard to straying from SQA course specifications, David stated:

[...] if it ain't coming up in the course I've not got time to go away on a tangent too much. And I could give them extra time, I could say well why don't you go away and do this and do this and do this, but that's to the detriment of their total exam because it's taking away time from other studying for other subjects. [...] that's the driver unfortunately.

For David, this acts as a justification for teaching to the test. By stating that it is "unfortunate", David suggests that he knows it is insufficient and that he is dissatisfied with it. However, like Beth, David is making a deliberate choice to not "go away on a tangent" on something that is not, as Beth put it, "examinable". Like Chris and David, Beth opened up about her feelings towards the system:

I hate doing it. It's boring. I hate it, but you gotta do it. You gotta do it

because that's what they do best in. On the one hand, you want to teach fun history. On the other hand, you want your kids to pass.

As with Chris, Beth's use of the term "hate" indicates a significant level of dissatisfaction with what and how she teaches. Beth also suggests that, not only is it an obligation, it appears to be one or the other. Teaching "fun history" and passing the exam are apparently at odds with each other. While indicating that it is insufficient, Beth also demonstrates how she caters to the system. Michael echoed other participants, stating:

Unfortunately, for certificate-level history, and this will go for all subjects, but certainly for history, you need to teach kids how to answer, not just what to know or what to think. [...] if you want to get these marks you're going to have to do these things. And what I really don't like about, I mean, it's got to be done.

Firstly, Michael's use of the term "unfortunately" indicates that he knows it is ineffective while suggesting that he cannot change it, removing blame from teachers and rationalising the choice to teach to the test. Secondly, a "teach kids how to answer" approach serves a results-focused, neoliberal system in that it places high value on results and offers little or no space for criticality because there is a formula to adhere to in order to earn marks on an exam that will unlock social mobility in the Scottish context. Thirdly, this "it's got to be done" mentality removes blame from teachers and contributes to a results-focused exam culture. Michael went on to say, "We do a lot of skills work because we have to. Not because it's a fun thing to do". Here, he recognises that it is insufficient but does it anyway because that is the way in which the system is set up as he sees it. In this way, he caters to the system. He later added, "You need to drill it because if they can't do it they don't get the marks and it's a real shame". Similarly to other participants, Michael expresses dissatisfaction with the system while demonstrating how he adheres to it. Justifying this approach, Michael narrows in on teaching to the test yet recognises that it is no way to teach history. In this way, participants reported being the messenger rather than being in a position to act on the Professional Standards

(GTCS, 2021) in ways that enact change. To hammer his point home, Michael went on to say: “I think it’s awful”. During his interview, Michael was clear about his feelings towards the system, yet indicated how much he caters to it in his practice. This suggests a misalignment between how history teachers want to teach and how they are able to teach under the confines of the current system. The blame for not making this a reality, though, is placed squarely on the SQA and participants did not acknowledge the part their choices might play in complacency with the broader system. It is, as they see it, the system that needs changing and apparently this has nothing to do with teachers in classrooms, despite reporting to disagree with it and seeing it as flawed and insufficient. So, this might suggest that teachers perceive themselves to be disempowered and lacking the conditions to engage with SJE. However, the reports from participants also construct the SQA as a scapegoat, and, in this way, it might be easier for them to blame the system rather than transform their practice in ways that align with SJE. While this might indicate external pressures imposed onto teachers, it also appears to contradict the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021), potentially indicating the existence of a policy-implementation gap.

Additionally, Carrie suggested similar feelings when talking about straying from the course specification: “It’s completely off course, but we’ll explore that for a little while just because it’s the value of history. But, yeah, no, I think it’s the exam service that does a disservice”. Here, Carrie indicates a misalignment between teaching what is on the SQA course specifications and what is not on the course specifications and blames the system for not being able to explore topics that are not on the course specifications. She explicitly states that it does a “disservice”, indicating, like other participants, that she knows that it is inadequate and that she disagrees with it.

Participants indicated that they are aware that the system is insufficient and clearly communicated that they are dissatisfied with it, yet choose to adhere to this system anyway. This choice contributes to the culture of a results-focused exam culture, reinforcing and perpetuating the access paradox. This appears to align with



Moore et al.'s (2002) suggestion that teachers tend towards pragmatism, "linking it strongly to academic performance and outcomes" (p. 554). This means that teachers adhere to the system and teach to the test because it is an efficient way to get results. Interestingly, though, Smith (2019a) outlines an example of history teachers in England resisting at the macro-level, by refusing changes to the history curriculum with which they vehemently disagreed. Instead of resisting at the classroom or micro-level, which is important, but is not always transformative (Zembylas, 2021), history teachers in England worked together to resist the new policy at the macro-level. This required Sachs' (2003a) transformative professionalism where self-knowledge and collective strategy are required to make change (pp. 14-15). It is these elements that Smith (2019a) argues contributed to their success. As a result, the new curriculum was withdrawn and did not make its way into the classroom. This shows that it is possible for teachers to engage in resistance in order to make systemic changes. However, it is clear that participants in this study did not report engaging in macro-level resistance as history teachers did in England. This is problematic because change will not occur if teachers continue to adhere to the system. This inaction, as reported by participants, does not align with the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021), and is therefore concerning with regards to social justice.

Interestingly, during his interview, Michael mentioned changes happening in England, but appeared to view the situation differently, stating:

Some of the stuff that's been said about English education that may or may not come in, and I do stress English because it just won't happen here because it won't be allowed to because we have a strong unionised body, and also a profession that I don't think would accept it, but to be told what you can and can't teach, to be told that you can't look at anything that can be termed, you know, anti-capitalist, well, goodbye any understanding of the political dynamics of the 20th century, because if you're not allowed to look at what Marx and Engels wrote and why it influenced people then you've not got a hope of understanding anything. Certainly not the Cold War, or the

politics that followed, or, you know, Red Scares in America. You're not going to understand that because you have arbitrarily decided you can't look at this thing. Goodbye most novels. Goodbye most literature. So, it's frustrating.

Michael's sentiment is at odds with the tangible changes that history teachers in England made when faced with changes to the history curriculum with which they disagreed. Interestingly, Michael indicates that restrictive changes to curriculum would not happen in Scotland because teachers would not let it happen, yet it is clear that history teachers have yet to fight back against an already restrictive system that is dictated by the SQA. Importantly, the "strong unionised body" to which Michael refers would firstly have to be invoked by history teachers for change to happen. Michael also demonstrates an awareness of the political nature of history teaching and the importance of understanding the past and its influence on the present (Donnelly & Norton, 2011). However, he also seems to overlook the ways in which the history curriculum in Scotland can be seen as severely limited and lacking in criticality in its current form, through the course specifications set out by the SQA as well as through the limited ways in which participants reported engaging with it. This is something that the "strong unionsied body" could change, yet this has not happened, especially at the macro-level as it did in England.

While participants did not report resistance at the macro-level, they did not report much resistance at the micro-level either, that is, resistance at the classroom-level, for example. Despite expressing dissatisfaction, they did not report navigating restrictive mandates at the classroom-level. For example, according to Dover et al. (2016), teachers can navigate standards by *embracing, reframing, resisting* them. In *reframing*, "To teach for social justice, you don't have to build a curriculum from scratch. But whatever you teach, you must do so critically" (Dover et al., 2016, p. 462). In this way, SJE is seen as an approach rather than a set of strategies. This would seem to allow teachers in Scotland to work within the confines of SQA course specifications to teach in ways that align more strongly with SJE. This would also align with the notion of *integrity*, or "consistent and

uncompromising adherence to strong moral and ethical principles and values” as outlined by the Professional Standards, in that it allows teachers to circumvent the reported tension between their identities as historians and practice as teachers (GTCS, 2021, p. 5). However, it is clear that participants did not report doing this. When it came to *resisting* standards, teachers in Dover et al.’s (2016) study “described their resistance as necessary advocacy on behalf of their students, themselves, and their profession” (p. 463). While participants in this study, like Carrie, reported working within the system so as to best help learners succeed, resisting a restrictive curriculum while advocating for a more effective system would truly be working within the system, rather than simply adhering to it.

It is clear that participants are dissatisfied with the system and it is also clear that they teach to the test anyway, thus adhering to the very system they report to despise. This might indicate wider pressures and expectations placed on teachers around exams. This section outlined how participants recognised that the current system is flawed and insufficient and how they reported simultaneously disagreeing with it and acquiescing anyway. By conforming to this system and not challenging it, they actively contribute to a results-focused exam culture, thus reinforcing and perpetuating the access paradox. This mindset indicates a lack of resistance among history teachers in Scotland. This could suggest that if teachers lack resistance then they cannot be expected to promote resistance amongst learners, thereby diminishing any opportunity to teaching through and for social justice. Therefore, it is pivotal for teachers to engage in resistance if they are to engage effectively in SJE. The Professional Standards in Scotland (GTCS, 2021), which will be discussed in more depth in Section 5.3.5, offer opportunities for teachers to interrupt the status quo. So, there appears to be a misalignment, which might suggest a sense of disempowerment from teachers, alluding to systemic reasons as to why they do not challenge the system. Or, it might instead suggest that framing the SQA as a scapegoat might be the easier option than transforming their practice to align with SJE.

### 5.3.3 Rationalising the Education System

While participants recognised that the system is inadequate, some participants also made excuses for how the system is set up, thus rationalising their decisions. For example, Chris explained:

They do it so that it's a fair comparison and because it would be very difficult to create a holistic [marking scheme] for, you know, the tens of thousands of pupils that sit National Five each year, but I think that [...] there's a huge amount more that could be done in order to make the course more meaningful and more targeted.

Here, Chris rationalises the way the National Five course is set up by saying it is easier to have formulaic exams than assessments that are more subjective but mirror the discipline of history more strongly. In this way, he recognises that the National Five and Higher assessments have room for improvement but does not suggest what could be done instead. Throughout the interviews, it became evident that participants recognised shortcomings in the system but did not offer suggestions for possible solutions. In this way, their criticality of the current system appears more as complaining about the system, which may be seen as somewhat passive, rather than practical critique with regards to what can be done to advocate for change to the current system. A more practical critique could take the form of drawing on the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) to, for example, "critically question and challenge educational assumptions, beliefs and values of self and system" (p. 11). Concerningly, though, Chris supports his statement by suggesting that the number of learners sitting the National Five exam is very large ("tens of thousands") and therefore cannot support a "holistic" marking scheme, therefore the rote marking scheme in place is justified, but, importantly, an average of only 15,200 learners sit the National Five exam in history each year ([Table 10](#)). This could mean that the number of learners sitting the exam is not an issue but it could act as a justification for the current system in place. Further, Beth stated:

You're not teaching them how to put an essay together. You're not. You're teaching them how to get very set marks. [...] and it's boring. That's

wonderful. That is wonderful because you have candidates in that room who would not under any other subject probably wouldn't be sitting at Higher.

Well, because in history we've got this very formulaic structure, you can take a candidate that's perhaps a bit dodge and drag them up to a C.

Here, Beth rationalises the formulaic structure and frames it positively with regards to getting results in a neoliberal context that places high value on the performativity of teachers and learners. In this way, she contributes to the results-focused exam culture, thus reinforcing and perpetuating the access paradox. Beth also suggests the status involved in Higher qualifications, especially status for the subject or department, where the key appears to be output rather than an interest in history or engagement with ideas around social justice. Beth's statement demonstrates the narrowing effects of a neoliberal education system. That is, the implications are not just pedagogical, as evidenced in participants' reported approaches to teaching and learning, or just institutional, as is evidenced by the ways in which the assessment structures are shaped. They are also ideological. In other words, it affects how teachers perceive themselves and their learners, the expectations they have of learners, and their ways of speaking/thinking about learners within a deficit framework. Further, Beth reinforces the previously explored notion that teachers are less resistant to restrictive mandates, instead focusing on "what works" (Moore et al., 2002, p. 561). "What works" in this context refers to the process through which teachers help learners achieve exam results and is therefore heavily constrained by the value system that the national exams perpetuate: results over learning. In this way, we are perhaps able to see how the broader conceptualisation of attainment and the attainment gap (from a deficit perspective) are playing out in tangible ways across pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment. Reinforcing this point, Beth went on to say:

I think, although I'm saying it fails them, on the other hand, it really sets them up for success. Because it goes back to that thing that I said in the first place about building confidence. Because they can do well in that, so when they go and they sit with a guidance teacher or the careers advisor about

their exams, they can quote that they are able to pass Higher history, which is a huge thing, like, that's a Higher! That's a big thing. So, you get kids who are maybe doing badly elsewhere that are not doing badly in my classroom. And I don't think it's down to me, but I think it's partly down to me. But I also think it's due to the way that, how formulaic the questions and the exams are. Removing the stress of how to do the question and just going back onto the facts. So, on the one hand, fails them. On the other hand, amazing, excellent, you get candidates who just love doing it and it's a successful thing for them. Other hand, can they pick up a history textbook? No, probably not.

Here, Beth acknowledges that the qualifications earned through National Five and Higher history do not align with the discipline of history, but they do provide learners with a qualification and thus "success" in the Scottish context, as she sees it. However, what is required for "success" in this context is not necessarily transferable. For example, she indicates that while learners have this qualification, they cannot actually "pick up a history textbook". This suggests that SQA history qualifications do not mirror the discipline of history and Beth frames this in a positive way because the formulaic nature of the exams makes it easier for learners to earn qualifications, and it is the qualification that makes someone successful in the Scottish context. Importantly, being able to "pick up a history textbook" does not define success in the discipline of history, but Beth suggests that there is clearly a misalignment between the discipline of history and the ways in which history is taught and learned in the Scottish context.

Beth went on to say, "I think the exam fails them. The thing that really sets them up for university is the assignment". Beth clearly indicates that she knows the ways in which the system is set up are inadequate but continues to frame it positively. Interestingly, she also indicates that there are elements of the course that appear to work. The assignment is an element of the National Five and Higher courses where learners research a historical question or issue of their choice and write a report under exam conditions. Learners put together a research sheet of no

more than 250 words and use this sheet while they write their report under exam conditions and both the research sheet and the written report are submitted to the SQA (SQA, 2019). Although heavily stifled by time constraints and strict parameters for the research sheet, this element of the course appears to mirror the discipline of history more realistically than the exams. If this is the case, then the courses should have more of this element and less of what teachers report not liking. Importantly, the assignment portion of the courses for the 2021-2022 school year was removed “in response to the disruption to learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic” (SQA, 2022a, p. 1). So, this element of the course was the first thing to go during mid-pandemic assessment, and it has been confirmed that the assignment element will not be a part of the 2022-2023 session either, though the reasons for this change have not been stated (SQA, 2022b). The number of marks for each exam remains the same, but the assignment portion has been removed with nothing to replace it. As a result, there is even greater emphasis on the high-stakes exam at the end of the year and no opportunity for learners to demonstrate their learning through an exercise that more realistically mirrors the discipline of history.

In rationalising the system, Shannon spoke about the SQA as an entity separate from herself:

It just would be quite interesting to see the future of the SQA after [the COVID-19 pandemic] because, I think, from what I've seen this week being involved in history subject leaders' meetings, people are infuriated with, frustrated with, what the webinars have done because, like, the one on [...] sources was like, 'let's try to get through this as quick as possible so we can actually be offline at a reasonable time'. So, I do hope at some stage they actually talk to teachers about it all. That they actually consult what's happening in the classroom.

As with other participants, Shannon indicates that the SQA needs to change, but teachers are not responsible for that. This passive view of the system ensures that it remains in place and maintains its power. This aligns with the essence of neoliberalism in that it lacks criticality (Ramlackhan, 2020). This passive view also

contradicts the nature of critical pedagogy in that it fails to problematise issues of power (Freire, 1970), like, in this example, how teachers, in the view of participants, are seemingly abstracted from the SQA. However, Shannon says that teachers should be consulted, suggesting that teachers are not already consulted or consulted enough by the SQA. Shannon went on to say:

It's quite interesting with it all, because with the whole Black Lives Matter, I feel like that's something the SQA have to revise. There needs to be a question in terms of Scottish involvement in the slave trade. [...] There has to be that discussion because, you know, it is part of our shameful past and we do have to learn about it because, you know, to make sure things like this don't happen again. To make allowances for it, like, it just amazes me at times.

Here, Shannon suggests that changes need to be made with regards to the content included and omitted from SQA course specifications. As in the previous example, she indicates that this is the responsibility of the SQA rather than teachers. In this way, she recognises that the SQA provides learners with representations of history that are incomplete, but does not suggest that she has a hand in changing it. Importantly, Shannon's statement sits alongside moves within education and the history field that are documenting and revisiting accounts of the slave trade and Scotland's complicity in it. For example, the [Anti-Racist Educator](#), [WOSDEC](#), [SCOTDEC](#), [Intercultural Youth Scotland](#), and the [Edinburgh Caribbean Association](#) all provide materials and professional development for teachers. Importantly, some of these organisations also offer professional development opportunities for teachers, and this means that their work rests not only on access to SJE resources but also on teacher education. So, despite these broader moves and transformations, the SQA course specification, and thus the classroom, remains unchanged. Therefore, in this context, it seems as though the SQA needs to revise course specifications for these transformations to be reflected more widely in the Scottish secondary school history classroom. However, in line with the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021), teachers can play a fundamental role in making these changes. So, while the SQA needs to



revise its course specifications, teachers should not wait patiently for it to happen, but instead they should call for change from the SQA and work to incorporate the more accurate representations of history from above organisations creating and disseminating material, for example, into their classrooms. Further, talking about any potential changes in the SQA, Catherine stated:

If it was going to happen it would have to happen in a few years time and have lead up to it and actually have time for people to get used to it before being, like, 'we're changing this next year' because that's what the SQA will do. You'll turn up to a marking meeting and, like, 'oh, well, we didn't like it so we're going to change it'. And you only find that out if you're at a markers' meeting.

Like Shannon, Catherine indicates that it is the SQA that needs changing but that teachers are not involved in that. She does not indicate that teachers need to change or engage in resistance against the system in order to incorporate the wider transformations being made in education and the history field, for example, through organisations such as the [Anti-Racist Educator](#). She also suggests that there is a lack of transparency from the SQA and that only those who mark for the SQA are privy to information about courses. In this way, the SQA is seen to be moving the goalposts, by making changes to marking schemes, for example, and teachers must adapt their teaching to suit the demands of the SQA. Shannon and Catherine's comments suggest that the SQA is not consulting teachers or involving teachers in decision-making. However, the SQA is made up of teachers, so it is therefore not devoid of teachers' input. According to their website, the SQA has 18,000 paid appointees that design and mark exams and at least two years of teaching experience within the last three years in the relevant subject is required to be an appointee (SQA, n.d., retrieved from <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/23566.html>). This means that current and recently practising teachers are designing the exams. Therefore, with this level of involvement, teachers could have influence if they chose to exercise it. Importantly, most of the participants in this study reported marking for the SQA, but did not reveal exercising influence towards change through

their involvement with the SQA.

#### **5.3.4 Working within the system, but taking no action**

Most participants said that they work within the system; however, they did not demonstrate that they were taking steps to challenge the system. Working within a system involves resistance from within, or as Dover et al. (2016) state, “going underground” to challenge restrictive mandates at the micro-level. So, while stating that they work within the system, participants actually demonstrated simply adhering to it, thus reinforcing the access paradox and contributing to the results-focused exam culture. This section focuses more specifically on participants’ reported inaction.

For example, David used the system to remove blame from himself and teachers in general, stating:

The exam is always a problem. We are geared towards this exam. This is how schools are judged. This is how teachers are judged. We need to justify exam results at the end of the year. We need to explain to parents why a particular pupil didn’t get an exam result they were wanting. Universities accept exam results for depending on who gets in and who doesn’t. Schools and employers and graduate schemes, it’s all based on results. So, until there’s a societal shift away from you need to sit in an exam hall for two and a half hours regurgitating things that we tell you, then we can never go into this wonderful detail about actually challenging it. [...] unfortunately, we need to teach it.

In this way, David indicates the way in which he caters to the system, teaching for it while recognising that it is insufficient. In recognising it, though, he does not actively challenge it, and this is problematic because it does not align with the Professional Standards (2021) or a social justice approach to teaching and learning. Further, his understanding of assessment as “regurgitating things that we tell you” signifies just how formulaic the exams are understood to be (Accardi, 2019). Additionally, another use of the term “unfortunately” indicates that participants

disagree with the system and they do not see themselves as connected to it in any way. They seem to act like victims of the system while not only catering to it in their practice but also working directly for it by marking exams.

Similarly, Anne also nodded to systems deemed outwith her control, stating, “I think, with the best will in the world, unless we change how we assess holistically at universities, then I don’t think Advanced Higher, Higher would change much from the exams”. Here, Anne casts blame on universities, abstracting the issue as a problem further down the stream instead of acknowledging that the shortcomings of high-stakes assessment, like SQA exams, could be changed instead. Like David, Anne recognises that the system is inadequate but places blame on the system, thus removing responsibility from herself for not challenging it. Alternatively, David and Anne seem to be bound to the institutionally accepted and valued ways of implementing the curriculum.

Further, Beth describes how she conforms to the system by choosing certain topics, stating:

It’s just boring, [the *Changing Britain* topic], but the kids do well in it because it’s very formulaic. Every other school in the country does it, so I would be doing the kids a misjustice [*sic.*] if I was to then teach *Mary Queen of Scots* at Higher, which are not good essays.

This quote from Beth was previously used to demonstrate choices around topics and how they relate to the perpetuation of a results-focused exam culture. Here, the quote demonstrates how Beth fails to challenge the system by making these choices. By choosing topics based on how easy they are perceived to be, Beth fails to challenge the system with which she disagrees, thus contributing to the results-focused exam culture. Beth suggests that the more formulaic it is, the better learners tend to do. So, she reported choosing topics that are more formulaic. This is another example of a deliberate choice being made that contributes to a results-focused exam culture and a choice against challenging the status quo. She rationalises this by saying she chooses these “boring” topics so that learners are more likely to do well. This reveals what Beth thinks her role is in the classroom: to

get learners to pass exams.

Carrie specifically stated that she works within the system in an effort to support learners, despite disagreeing with it:

I told you that my goal is to help children get through an exam so they have a better life chance. And that is my goal, but that's because of the exam system, you know, that is the way that they have out of poverty, so I work within that system. I don't like that system. I don't think we should be teaching towards exams. I do it because that's the way to help my young people.

This pinpoints a disconnect. Carrie indicates that she believes this is the way she can help learners, despite disagreeing with it. So, her disagreement, and the disagreement shared by others, will always be there if they continue not to challenge it. Further, Carrie's use of the term "get through" suggests that the exam is a tick-box exercise rather than a meaningful learning experience that more realistically mirrors the discipline of history. Carrie went on to say, "Sometimes I find the exams are very binding and restrictive. I work within them because I have to, for the young people. But, history shouldn't be taught the way to pass an exam". Carrie identifies this as her role in the classroom. This passive role, however, while well-intentioned, contributes to a results-focused exam culture, thus reinforcing and perpetuating the access paradox. It is clear that participants dislike the system, but they report that their role is to work within it; however, as explored in the following section, few of them report resisting it, which ensures that change will not occur.

Interestingly, Smith (2019a) states that resistance often occurs at the micro-level, which can be effective, but is not always transformative. Micro-level resistance to neoliberal reforms takes place at the classroom-level and has been described as "going underground" (Deover et al., 2016) or "camouflaging" (Picower, 2011). This is a way that teachers can teach *about*, *through*, and *for* social justice in the midst of restrictive mandates, like exams. So, for example, teachers can teach *about* social justice by incorporating more diverse representations of history that are not included in SQA course specifications. Teachers can teach *through* social

justice by encouraging and empowering learners to take action. Finally, teachers can teach *for* social justice by creating a space where the themes of justice are evident and valued. This type of resistance is important but cannot defeat a neoliberal system alone. While it is not necessarily transformative, Zembylas (2021) argues that classroom-level resistance “should not be seen as unimportant ways in which to divert energy from ‘real’ resistance, but rather as legitimate behind-the-scenes attempts to enact a low-profile resistance that involves the use of tactics ‘born of prudent awareness of the balance of power’” (p. 215). This means that teachers can work at the classroom-level to resist restrictive policies. In this way, “one should look at the mundane, ordinary, everyday, or ‘routine’ forms of resistance that are less visible and often unplanned rather than merely limiting his or her attention to the obvious, collective resistance such as strikes, sabotage or sit-downs” (Zembylas, 2021, p. 214). This might include expanding teaching practice to be more critical of course specifications or choosing different topics, unlike how participants in this study reported choosing topics based on exam efficiency. However, participants did not report many examples of classroom-level resistance.

### **5.3.5 Examples of Action**

While most participants did not describe any ways in which they challenge the status quo, two participants outlined actions they have taken to stand up to the system. The examples reported, however, did not appear to lead to any changes. This action to no effect could lead to a sense of disempowerment among history teachers in Scotland and a belief that it is not worth focusing energy on something if nothing is going to change. For example, Michael stated:

I don't know how many history teachers you'll speak to who have got too much nice to say about the SQA to be honest with you. I'm certainly not one of them. I have a long track record of having had many, many disagreements with the SQA over the years and I have also been in receipt of an apology from them about one thing as well, so I am no defender of the SQA.

Here, Michael expresses dissatisfaction with the system, indicating that he knows it

is ineffective. In doing so, Michael alludes to doing something about it or speaking out against something on more than one occasion. While it is unclear if his actions led to change, it is clear that his feelings towards the SQA remain negative, indicating that changes were not made.

Additionally, Catherine described a time where she tried to get the SQA to include more representation of women in the Advanced Higher *Spanish Civil War* topic, saying she “pitched for it, but it didn’t happen”. It is unclear the extent to which Catherine went to “pitch” her idea, but it is clear that her efforts were unsuccessful. In trying to get more representation into the course, Catherine knows the existing course is insufficient in that it lacks nuance and inclusive representation. She tried to make a change and it did not materialise. It appears, then, that teachers are not being included in decision-making within the SQA in the first place and are also not being listened to when they do communicate their concerns. However, this is challenging to understand because, as previously explained, the SQA is made up of teachers. So, it is unclear from where this misalignment comes. Despite no changes being made, this is an example of action being taken by a participant.

Not being able to get more inclusive representation in the Advanced Higher course points to a hegemonic curriculum, which is canonical in nature and is intended to appear neutral, but actually works to maintain the status quo (Smith, 2019a). Linking this to Beth choosing the *Changing Britain* topic because it is perceived to be easier than other topics, it is easy to see how other teachers may make this same choice, thus creating a canon of topics.

Interestingly, later in her interview, Catherine mentioned Scotland’s lack of representation in the *Atlantic Slave Trade* topic. When asked if she thought the choice to leave Scotland out of the course specification was deliberate, she responded: “I hope not, to be honest, I’m going to give them the benefit of the doubt here”. However, this exclusion is related to systemic issues of power, race, and coloniality, and serves a neoliberal agenda, and, similarly, not questioning it also serves a neoliberal agenda (Ramlackhan, 2020). Here, Catherine makes an excuse

for the system. She went on to say, “I understand it. I don’t think it’s right. But I do understand how Scotland can maybe be left off. But it’s an easy correction to make”. It is challenging to see, though, how one could understand why Scotland continues to be omitted from the course specification, and this does not sit well with those who profess activism and social justice as central to their identity as a person and as a teacher. This suggests a limited understanding of and engagement with social justice from Catherine. Again, Catherine rationalises the system and gives it leeway in choosing to leave Scotland’s role in the slave trade off the course specification and claims it can easily be rectified. However, the course specification has not changed and still fails to mention Scotland’s role in the slave trade. It appears, then, that this is not such an easy correction to make, but this might be dependent on the lengths to which she went to make the change. However, it should not be the case that teachers need to fight particularly hard to have their concerns and ideas considered. While teachers are supported by the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) in challenging systems and are therefore supported in requesting changes to course specifications in ways that reflect more diverse and accurate representations of history, the SQA should also, on its own, reflect movements in the field of history. Failing that, the SQA should be more responsive to feedback from practitioners. All this to say, there are movements in the field of history, and those in charge of the subject within the SQA should be responsive to that. If the SQA lags behind, though, then this should be easily rectified by input from teachers. Linking this back to her asking for women to be represented in the *Spanish Civil War* topic, though, this demonstrates that changes are not easily made within the SQA. It is important to note that many history teachers in Scotland include Scottish examples when teaching about the slave trade; however, the fact that Scotland is not included in the official course specification means that learners could pass the SQA exam without being exposed to anything about Scotland’s role in the slave trade, thus an opportunity to engage with social justice is completely missed. This omission is problematic because it allows for a canonical curriculum consisting of a “singular narrative of important and uncontested facts” (Smith,

2019a, p. 32). It also puts the onus on teachers to include the material. This is problematic because of the perceived time and energy required to develop teaching practices, resources, and curricula, which can be considered burdensome on top of demands around exams, as Beth wondered, “using what time?” This reinforces Sleeter’s (2012) notion that, in a results-focused, neoliberal context, “non-tested curriculum disappears” (p. 577).

Because participants reported so few examples of resistance, it appears that they lack transformative professionalism (Sachs, 2003a). Transformative professionalism requires self-knowledge, or an understanding of self and society, as well as collective strategy (Sachs, 2003a). Further, according to Norman (2022), “Counter conduct is one avenue through which professionals intuitively engage in ethical practice: it operates as a way to do the right thing under challenging conditions of contingency” (p. 2). This means that, while it is difficult to foster transformative professionalism in the confines of neoliberal reforms, it would allow for history teachers in Scotland to resist the system they report disagreeing with, and thus engage with SJE.

Interestingly, the GTCS Professional Standards (2021) incorporate social justice and support teachers in developing transformative professionalism. More specifically, section 1.2 of the Professional Standards (2021) outlines a professional commitment to culturally responsive pedagogies and “critically examining how our teaching impacts on learners” (p. 5). Both of these are important because a commitment to culturally relevant pedagogies plays out in the lack of representation in history content. Further, being able to critically examine the impact of teaching includes examining the choice to teach to the test and how this may contribute to a results-focused exam culture. The Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) also outline integrity as one of the professional values (p. 5). There are several more examples ([Table 11](#)) across sections two and three of the Professional Standards (2021) that support teachers in acts of resistance. For example, the Professional Standards (2021) support teachers in challenging professional practice (Standard 2.1.2). The Professional Standards (2021) encourage teachers to bring a questioning attitude to



the profession (Standards 2.2.1 and 3.3.1). Standard 3.1.2 summarises the essence of SJE in that education should be transformative and that the role of the teacher is to enact this transformation. Finally, the Professional Standards (2021) encourage teachers to be courageous in their practice (Standard 3.3.2), which greatly stands to support teachers in resisting the confines of the current system with which they disagree. So, teachers are supported by the Professional Standards (2021) in challenging structures. Specifically, the Professional Standards provide opportunities and advocate for teachers to challenge system improvement. Therefore, teachers would be supported in resisting the current results-focused exam culture, including the limited ways in which history is taught and learned, but it is clear that participants are not doing this. It could also be said that the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) oblige teachers to challenge problematic structures, and, therefore, teachers arguably failing to do this can be seen as unethical. Participants, however, did not report measuring up to these Standards, and this signifies a policy-implementation gap. Alternatively, it could also be said that there are pressures around performativity imposed on teachers from the wider system, for example at the school, local authority, or national levels that interfere with engagement with the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021).

Standard 2.1.2	Teachers “have an enhanced and critically informed understanding of research and engagement in practitioner enquiry”, including “to challenge and inform professional practice” (p. 7).
Standard 2.2.1	Teachers “have an enhanced and critically informed understanding of education systems”, including the ability “to actively consider and critically question national and international influences on education policy, practices and systems development” (p. 8).
Standard 3.1.2	Teachers “critically and effectively utilise pedagogical approaches and resources”, including the ability to “create opportunities for learning to be transformative in terms of challenging assumptions and expanding the world views of learners” (p. 9).
Standard 3.3.1	Teachers “engage critically with literature, research and policy”, including being able to “critically question and challenge educational assumptions, beliefs and values of self and system” (p. 11).
Standard 3.3.2	Teachers “engage in reflective practice to develop and advance career-long professional learning and expertise”, including being able to “show professional courage and judgement to support and challenge system improvement” (p. 11).

The literature points to teachers making changes at the micro-level (Dover et al., 2016; Picower, 2011), and Smith (2019a) outlines an example of history teachers in England resisting at the macro-level, but participants did not report engaging in any resistance. This is interesting considering the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) clearly support and encourage teachers in challenging the status quo. This, combined with the fact that they report being clearly dissatisfied with the system would suggest some sort of action needs to be taken by history teachers in Scotland. However, this is not happening. This appears to circle back to the results-focused exam culture. Despite there being disagreement with it, everything, for the participants in this study, revolves around the SQA. Challenging the status quo might jeopardise exam results for learners. But at the same time, the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) offer support in fighting the SQA or at least not uncritically adhering to it. This, then, reflects their understanding of social justice and therefore they see their role in the classroom is to teach in this way. This section and the previous section explored the notion of a results-focused exam culture in Scotland and how participants reported acting passively in this system. This suggests a limited understanding of social justice and indicates that participants believe their role in the classroom is to teach to the test. For example, participants fail to include any sense of criticality to their reported teaching practice, and this is pivotal to SJE (Agarwal et al., 2010; Dover, 2013a, 2015; Freire, 1970; Kumashiro, 2000; Parkhouse & Massaro, 2018; Reagan et al., 2016). This is, in the context of the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021), unethical and does not sit well with those who profess activism and social justice as central to their identity as a person and as a teacher. So far in this chapter, Sections 5.2 and 5.3 set the scene of a results-focused exam culture, as reported by participants, as well as how participants reported complacency within this culture. The following section explores the ranging definitions of *social justice* that participants reported, which is limited, and these limited definitions from participants serve the narrow, neoliberal scene they

described and reported acting complacently in.

## 5.4 Ranging Definitions of Social Justice

While the previous two sections identified, explored, and set the scene of a results-focused exam culture in Scotland, including the ways in which participants reported teaching to the test and blamed the system for why they teach in this way, this section analyses the definitions of *social justice* that participants provided during their interviews. The limited definitions as reported by the participants in this study are positioned well within the neoliberal context they described and with which they reported complacency. However, it is important to note that the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) do support teachers in advocating for change. This, though, might be difficult for teachers to do alongside the pressures potentially imposed on them at the school, local authority, and/or national levels. This section also explores the extent to which participants reported challenging the status quo and making content relevant and relatable, which are two key elements of teaching for social justice.

Participants provided definitions of social justice that range in sociopolitical emphasis (Dover, 2015). Several of their definitions link social justice to access and equality, while simultaneously reinforcing a results-focused exam culture. However, some participants lack clear definitions altogether. More specifically, three participants did not articulate clear definitions of social justice (Section 5.4.1), while four participants provided definitions that register lower in sociopolitical emphasis (Section 5.4.2) and two participants provided definitions that register higher in sociopolitical emphasis (Section 5.4.3). Several participants, though, reported engaging with social justice by making connections between social justice and history content, and this demonstrates the utility of history content in a social justice approach to teaching and learning. That is, history content can be used to teach *about* social justice. As explored in Section 2.8, there can be different approaches to teaching history. To name two examples, history in schools can be taught for social justice (Salinas et al., 2012) and history can also be taught for the purposes and encouragement of civic participation (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Endacott & Brooks, 2018; Wineburg, 2016). Importantly, though, the participants in

this study, while having varying definitions of social justice, all described their own practice as teaching for social justice. More specifically, they reported seeing teaching for exam results, and the social mobility that can accompany them, as teaching for social justice. So, the examples of their practice, as reported by the participants in their interviews and workbooks, are considered in relation to SJE and the varying sociopolitical emphases that teaching for social justice can have.

Definitions of social justice that register higher in sociopolitical emphasis tend to focus more on action and challenging the root causes of injustice, whereas definitions that register lower in sociopolitical emphasis tend to focus on celebrating and accepting diversity (Dover, 2015). This is important because the understanding teachers have of social justice impacts on their teaching practice (Dover, 2015). Importantly, understandings of social justice that are unclear or limited are likely to translate into practice as unclear and limited. Similar to the micro-level resistance discussed in the previous section, approaches that register lower in sociopolitical emphasis, while useful, do little to address the roots of systemic issues (Zembylas, 2021). Further, the *container* approach, in which potentially controversial issues are taught from a distance, (Kitson & McCully, 2005) is akin to an understanding of social justice that is lower in sociopolitical emphasis and is limited because “it cannot be assumed that students will transfer understanding from one context to another” (p. 35). This, in turn, stifles the transformative potential of history and SJE. Approaches that register lower in sociopolitical emphasis are insufficient with regards to SJE because they do not challenge the roots of systemic issues.

Struthers (2015) outlines ways in which teachers can teach *about*, *through*, and *for* human rights, stating each of the three elements are “complementary and any single one in isolation would be insufficient” (p. 56). Similarly, teachers can teach *about*, *through*, and *for* social justice. Teaching *about* social justice focuses on content knowledge, such as teaching about justice-seeking social movements of the American civil rights era. Teaching *through* social justice acknowledges the lived experiences of learners by creating a space where learners and teachers are respected and themes of justice are evident and valued, for example, teachers can

model a particular way of being. Teaching *for* social justice encourages activism, for example, by empowering learners to take action when they see an injustice. This complementary approach as outlined by Struthers (2015) is important because teaching *about* issues of justice is not enough on its own and teaching *through* and *for* social justice can only take place with an understanding of social justice. In other words, teaching *about*, *through*, and *for* social justice work in conjunction to promote activism and social justice in the way one lives. In their definitions, however, participants mostly described teaching *about* social justice rather than *through* and/or *for* social justice.

Picower (2012b) outlines six elements of social justice curriculum design that build upon each other sequentially and are not arranged from lower to higher levels of social justice like Dover's (2015) framework of sociopolitical emphasis. The six elements are: (1) self-love and knowledge; (2) respect for others; (3) issues of social injustice; (4) social movements and social change; (5) awareness raising; and (6) social action. Importantly, like Struthers' (2015) approach, all six elements are required because by "understand[ing] how oppression operates both individually and institutionally, [learners] are better positioned not only to understand their own lived experiences but also to develop strategic solutions based on historical roots" (Picower, 2012b, p. 8). So, like teaching *about*, *through*, and *for* social justice, each element should be utilised for a more effective approach. However, according to Picower (2012b), teachers tend to be more comfortable with the first two elements, but should not stop there because this creates a more celebratory than emancipatory approach or a "shallow 'heroes and holiday'" approach (p. 3). Further, teaching about social movements (element four) but not about issues of social injustice (element three) might leave learners with an insufficient understanding of why social movements took place, leading to an approach that registers lower in sociopolitical emphasis. This is problematic with regards to SJE because it fails to incorporate explicit instruction about oppression, prejudice, and inequity, which is a key element of teaching for social justice (Agarwal et al, 2010; Dover, 2013a, 2015; Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2016; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004b).

### 5.4.1 No Clear Definition

When asked what social justice is and what it might look like in their classroom, three participants did not articulate clear definitions. This suggests a limited understanding of social justice. For example, Beth did not provide a clear definition, but indicated that there is a perceived lack of guidance for teachers when it comes to social justice. She said, “It's not clear where it really fits in, so that means that it ultimately is up to you as the classroom teacher.” This demonstrates a hugely limited understanding of social justice, and her belief comes despite the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) being clear on what social justice is and outlining it as one of the values at the heart of the profession. According to the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021), social justice is “the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities now and in the future” (p. 4). In this way, social justice cannot be seen as an add-on and encourages teachers to take a social justice stance. However, Beth suggests that incorporating social justice adds content on top of course specifications, stating:

So, in terms of social justice in the historical [*sic*] classroom, it's a right balancing act and it's a bloody nightmare because you're not entirely sure where you're going to get it in. It's not clear where it really fits in, so that means that it ultimately is up to you as the classroom teacher. So, the best way that I can describe it is you've got to use your personality.

Here, Beth indicates that social justice is an added element rather than something that is woven throughout or integral to her practice or way of being. The idea that a social justice approach adds content is not uncommon (Lee, 2011); however, it is clear that history content is well-primed for a social justice approach to teaching (Picower, 2011; Dover et al. 2016; Parkhouse, 2015; Nowell & Poindexter, 2018). For example, topics that are commonly taught in Scotland, such as the *Atlantic Slave Trade*, the *Industrial Revolution*, and the *Civil Rights Movement in the USA*, offer several opportunities to examine oppression and justice-seeking social movements. In this way, social justice cannot be seen as an add-on. Beth also said, “I like to

consider myself quite social justice, not quite full social justice warrior that would annoy me on the Internet”. So, while it is clear that Beth considers social justice to be part of her way of being as a person, it is unclear how this translates to her practice and this does not align with her reported view of social justice in the classroom, that it is an add-on, rather than something that is integral to her practice. Therefore, this reflects a limited understanding of social justice and impacts her reported teaching practice in that she seemingly fails to see social justice as something that is woven into her practice or integral to her responsibility as a teacher, according to the Professional Standards (2021).

Similarly to Beth, Len’s response lacks a clear definition and also indicates that social justice is an added element:

I think that within the subject, I think it would be to always, kind of, point them towards those bits of the course, the bits of the topics that aren’t necessarily in the course. And even if you’re literally just transmitting it, you know, they are still going to hear it.

While suggesting that social justice is an added element rather than something that is integral to the course, Len also indicates using a banking model of teaching (Freire, 1970) to “transmit” this perceived additional content to learners. This suggests that the course specifications are incomplete and offer a narrow representation of history, and, as a result, teachers must incorporate additional content if they are to engage in teaching for social justice. He used the *Atlantic Slave Trade* topic as an example, where he said, “Scotland’s role is very reduced”. For clarification, Scotland’s role in the slave trade is more than “reduced”; it is completely omitted from the topic. For example, the course specification cites Bristol and Liverpool as relevant ports but does not include Glasgow (SQA, 2021, p. 11). Including Scotland-specific examples to the official course specification would demonstrate an attempt at reckoning with Scotland’s role in the slave trade. Continuing to omit it from the course specification demonstrates an unwillingness to confront uncomfortable pasts. Importantly, there are movements in Scotland around including more accurate representations of history ([Anti-Racist Educator](#),



[SCOTDEC](#), [WOSDEC](#), [Intercultural Youth Scotland](#), and [Edinburgh Caribbean Association](#)), but the SQA course specification fails to reflect this, which allows for perspectives to continue to be excluded, unless teachers include the excluded content themselves. This is problematic because, as Len went on to say, if it is not on the course specification, then it will not come up on the exam, and therefore there is no time to cover it. This indicates that he teaches to the test and that the conditions where teachers need to do this can be at the expense of SJE. This might indicate pressures imposed onto teachers to deliver exam results. Interestingly, Len then talked about exam results and social mobility. He talked about starting a history film club because he thought:

Maybe some of the kids are going to get, like, they'll remember something from that. And even if they've not got, like, a granda that will tell them stuff about Martin Luther King, like I did when I was studying the Nazis with my granda who was fascinated by World War II, they would have a, from a teacher in the school, some sort of, like, cultural background input that would, kind of, eventually and hopefully, produce a stronger academic outcome when it came to exam time.

Len makes a strong link to exams in this statement, and this shows more about his understanding of social justice than his lack of definition above, as well as how he contributes to a results-focused exam culture by teaching to the test to help learners access qualifications. While Len makes interesting jumps between time periods and historical figures, this statement also ignores the notion that learners are not blank slates, as they each bring their own experiences and knowledge to the classroom, which may be different to that of Len (Kumashiro, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2009). In this way, learners “do not come to class as a tabula rasa” (Chapman, 2021, p. 11) and teachers should “take greater account of students' own starting points” (Kitson & McCully, 2005, p. 33). Len’s attempt to fill a cultural knowledge gap reflects a limited understanding of social justice and reproduces the notion that neoliberal education is underpinned by a deficit understanding of young people (Evans et al., 2020; Harmon, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017; Paris, 2012). This is

problematic because it fails to value the experiences of learners, which is foundational to SJE (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Finally, Michael did not articulate a clear definition of social justice either, but he did make explicit links to content:

I suppose there is an implicit kind of underlying expectation of it, and I think where it becomes a more interesting thing to talk about, I suppose, is when it's made explicit. Now, social justice can, I mean if we're thinking about history teaching, then it comes in very, very clearly in things, like, the Civil Rights Movement we're looking at prejudice, we're looking at tyranny, and we're looking at the development of these things.

It is clear that Michael does not provide a definition of social justice, but he does link history content to social justice. This contradicts what Beth and Len see as social justice being additional content, as he later stated, "[...] all history is social history, essentially. And all social history is, in some sense, drawing on the absence of or the drive towards social justice". Michael's attempted definition incorporates Picower's (2012b) third element of teaching about issues of social injustice. However, this in isolation is problematic because it can create a sense of hopelessness in learners, in that they have not learned about ways to respond to injustice.

When asked, these participants did not provide clear definitions of social justice. They also did not mention the highlighted role social justice plays in the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021). This indicates that their understanding of social justice might be limited. This is problematic because social justice is one of the professional values within the GTCS Professional Standards (2021) and participants reported practice does not appear to align with this, suggesting a policy-implementation gap. It is clear, though, that social justice can be seen by the participants as additional content or something that is done on top of the curriculum or course specifications. However, through this approach, they restrict themselves to the formal curriculum. These three participants' definitions indicate that they focus predominantly on teaching *about* social justice, whether that be

through “additional content” or not, rather than teaching *through* and *for* social justice and this demonstrates a limited understanding of social justice and SJE. However, these understandings of social justice might instead (or also) suit the nature of the results-focused exam culture that the participants of this study described in the previous two sections of this chapter.

#### **5.4.2 Lower Sociopolitical Emphasis**

While three participants did not articulate clear definitions of social justice, four participants provided definitions of social justice that register lower in sociopolitical emphasis. This means that their definitions, and how their definitions translate into teaching practice, might not be as transformative as they could be, when compared to approaches that register higher in sociopolitical emphasis. Participants with lower sociopolitical emphasis reported definitions that were (1) celebratory, or (2) linked to access but not challenging or questioning systemic issues. Importantly, linking social justice to access but not challenging or questioning systemic issues resonates with their reported complacency within a results-focused exam culture. Interestingly, unlike the three participants who lacked clear definitions of social justice, none of the four participants who provided definitions of social justice that register lower in sociopolitical emphasis made explicit links to history content.

For example, Shannon’s definition focused on equality and appears to be more celebratory than emancipatory, meaning there is more of a focus on celebrating diversity rather than working to interrupt the root causes of injustice, thus registering lower in sociopolitical emphasis:

Social justice, for me in the classroom, is, it’s having a classroom that is transparent. It’s having a classroom which acknowledges that everyone is different, everyone has different points of views, from different backgrounds, whether that be social, economic, whether that be in terms of learning experiences, or having barriers to learning too as well. But you’re making that transparent and you’re making sure, as a teacher, that you’re treating

everyone as equal, you're promoting that pupil voice, and that you're spending time as well, targeting, doing active intervention on people that have been shown in insights or in terms of your school improvement plan as a group that are failing. So, particularly with us at [name of school], like, we've noticed that EAL [English as an Additional Language] students aren't performing that well. So, in terms of social justice, what can we do in order to provide more scaffolding, to make sure that we are helping them meet their potential in terms of development as a young person, also in terms of academic achievement too as well?

Shannon's definition is more akin to teaching *through* social justice, or teaching in ways that acknowledge the lived experiences of learners. While this is important, she could also bridge the gap from teaching *through* social justice to teaching *about* and *for* social justice by incorporating the explicit teaching of social issues as well as opportunities for activism to her understanding of social justice. This would shift her definition from a celebratory position to a more emancipatory position. Further, Shannon's definition focuses on Picower's (2012b) element two of respect for others, which is insufficient in isolation because it fails to incorporate issues of social injustice, social movements, and action. While demonstrating a deeper understanding of social justice than the participants who did not provide clear definitions, when compared to the data that demonstrate how participants train learners in exam mechanics, techniques, and strategies, Shannon's definition can also be read as a means to appropriate learners into the dominant ways of knowing, thinking, and doing in order to be successful in the Scottish context and this raises questions about how culturally responsive her approach is. So, although Shannon's response is stronger than the participants who did not provide clear definitions, it still suggests there is significantly more work to be done with regards to SJE.

Further, in building relationships with young people, Shannon identifies a pastoral role: "Students need to have an adult in the classroom that they feel that they can equate to, that they can respond to, that they can approach." Shannon seems to be saying that learners should be able to trust teachers and feel supported

by them. She also describes how she gets to know the young people in her classroom: “I take an interest to find out, you know, do they like history, what subjects do they like, what’s happening in their life outside of the school environment”. She went on to say,

You’re acknowledging them as an individual in the classroom. You’re spending some time trying to get to know them [...] It’s developing those personal relationships, helping them on their personal journey as well, to be competent and confident, and to find their voice too as well with it all.

Shannon took this further to include parents and carers, which is an important relationship in SJE (Dover, 2009; 2013b; Reagan et al., 2016):

In terms of social justice, it has to be this monogamous relationship between that of the parent, teacher, and also the student as well. That we actually, for social justice, have to bring the parents into the fore to make sure that they are engaged as well.

Building relationships is a key element of SJE because it contributes to “academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 480). Importantly, it is also highlighted in the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021), which have a strong focus on social justice. Based on her reported teaching practice, this focus can be seen as an attempt at cultural competence through relationship-building and within the constraints of the existing system. It is clear, though, that building relationships is something that Shannon values in her teaching practice and this suggests an approach akin to teaching *through* social justice. However, Shannon’s approach registers lower in sociopolitical emphasis than it could because it has too much of a celebratory rather than emancipatory aim and this is limited because it fails to challenge or resist the roots of systemic issues. Shifting from a celebratory to a more emancipatory aim includes explicit teaching about issues of social injustice, social movements, and activism (Gorski, 2018; Kumashiro, 2000; Picower, 2012b).

Similarly to Shannon, Catherine’s definition revolves around acceptance and appears to be more celebratory than transformative:

In the classroom, I suppose, just about teaching tolerance, teaching, ugh, tolerance is such a terrible word because it doesn't really encompass what you want it to do. Tolerance just is, like, putting up with, and I don't think that's what we want. It's more like teaching acceptance is a bit more of what you want to do, and acknowledgement that we have differences, and an acceptance of them, and seeing the benefits of these differences.

Here, Catherine recognises that the term "tolerance" is not suitable for her understanding of social justice, but she does not take it much further, settling on "acceptance". While this limited terminology could allude to a stunted or limited understanding of social justice, it could also allude to a more celebratory interpretation of social justice, thus registering lower in sociopolitical emphasis (Dover, 2015). Catherine's definition also stagnates at Picower's (2012b) elements one and two, which is a problematic place to stop. Teaching for social justice should "[move] beyond teaching tolerance or accepting diversity", yet Catherine and Shannon's definitions of it narrow in on these elements (Agarwal et al., 2010, p. 238). This works to maintain the status quo, as "one can be inclusive and diverse and yet not engage in an analysis of power and liberation" (Santiago & Dozono, 2022, p. 5). Stopping at a celebratory approach is insufficient with regards to SJE because it often emphasises stereotypes and fails to interrupt deeply rooted systemic issues. Instead, moving towards an analysis of power and liberation matters because it works to interrupt hegemonic practices that maintain inequity in schools and society. In this way, approaches to SJE that register lower in sociopolitical emphasis, while well-intentioned, can instead work to reinforce inequity.

Anne and Carrie provided definitions that differ from Shannon and Catherine's celebratory interpretations, but also register lower in sociopolitical emphasis. For example, Anne focuses on equality of access, saying:

I suppose social justice in my classroom is kind of about equality of access for the pupils. For me it's about them being able to complete work to the best of their own abilities, regardless of if they're epic at writing beautiful

sentences, or if, for them, just putting full stops and capitals in the right places is their sense of achievement.

Signifying “just putting full stops and capitals in the right places” as an “achievement”, Anne’s definition of social justice misses a key principle of SJE, which is having high expectations of learners (Dover, 2009, 2013a, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009). Anne’s definition also focuses on equality of access for learners but does not address challenging or interrupting root causes of injustice, and is more like teaching *next to* or *around* social justice rather than *about*, *through*, or *for* social justice. The term *equality* is problematic in this context because it does not seek to meet the needs of individual learners, thus reinforcing inequity, or an imbalance in conditions for learners. Instead, an approach revolving around *equity* would be more strongly aligned with social justice because it would more fully meet the needs of individual learners (Gorski, 2018). In this way, Anne’s definition lacks the action featured in understandings of social justice that register higher in sociopolitical emphasis.

Finally, Carrie’s definition of social justice links strongly to Picower’s (2012b) elements one (self-love and knowledge) and two (respect for others). She said, “It means about children thinking about their own values and considering how other people treat them and then how they treat other people, their peers, their family members, and then wider society”. While this is a useful start, this definition of social justice registers lower in sociopolitical emphasis because stopping at elements one and two is insufficient (Picower, 2012b). Carrie could, then, go beyond this to include explicit teaching about issues of social injustice and social movements as well as opportunities for activism to her definition of social justice in order to increase the sociopolitical emphasis, and thus impact, of her understanding of social justice.

#### **5.4.3 Higher Sociopolitical Emphasis**

While three participants did not provide clear definitions of social justice and four participants provided definitions of social justice that register lower in

sociopolitical emphasis, two participants provided definitions of social justice that register higher in sociopolitical emphasis. This means that their definitions link more strongly to action, the lived experiences of learners, and challenging the status quo (Dover, 2015). Unlike the previous definitions, which register lower in sociopolitical emphasis, these definitions link more clearly to challenging the status quo. For example, Chris provided a definition that focuses on inequity, inequality, and systemic issues. His definition is more akin to teaching *for* social justice. He also made links to literacy and history content, stating:

I think it means that it's trying to give young people an understanding of their place in society and so that those that have been granted opportunities that maybe the majority haven't can see that they have an advantage and those that haven't been granted that advantage can understand that their failures aren't their fault to a large extent, and that they have been dealt a poorer hand, and so I think that for me some aspect of teaching for social justice is explaining to people the reality of life. And so it's maybe trying to give some of them an awareness that the A's that they got across the board, perhaps aren't entirely down to their talent, but are down to their family circumstances and the fact that the pupils that didn't do so well that again that that is not down to always necessarily their fault, and that it is a lot to do with just kind of the roll of the dice or your family or where you grew up, who served you, that kind of stuff.

This definition suggests a deeper understanding of social justice and is more akin to teaching *for* social justice because it demonstrates an understanding of privilege and the barriers or lack of barriers learners might face. Importantly, this definition moves beyond Shannon, Catherine, Anne, and Carrie's definitions, which register lower in sociopolitical emphasis because they revolve around celebratory views of social justice, or acceptance without challenge or resistance.

Similarly, David made links between social justice and being able to challenge injustice and the status quo, stating, "Social justice is about, for me, is about kids making sure that they don't need to follow along with something that they believe is



detrimental or not right". While still limited in that it does not explicitly state how he might encourage learners to engage in activism, this definition demonstrates deeper understanding of power issues than the definitions registering lower in sociopolitical emphasis, therefore, his definition registers higher in sociopolitical emphasis. Importantly, David later made links to history content, providing examples of how he encourages young people to draw on history to challenge injustice when they see it. For example, he recalled a time when learners were trying to make changes to a school policy and he encouraged them to draw upon peaceful protest strategies used during the civil rights movement in the USA, such as sit-ins. Because David's understanding of social justice links more strongly to action, it registers higher in sociopolitical emphasis. Interestingly, David was the only participant to report teaching social movements and social change and linked it to encouraging social action, Picower's (2012b) elements four and six. He said: "It's not just about sort of teaching and testing and things like that, it's about trying to get them to stand up" (p. 3). In this way, of the participants, David provided the strongest definition of social justice and demonstrated teaching *about, through, and for* social justice. However, this statement about *not just teaching to the test*, contradicts the ways in which he reported teaching to the test throughout his interview as well as several comments he made about the importance of teaching to the test for the sake of results. This suggests tension between the ways some teachers understand social justice and the conditions under which they are able to teach and therefore how they are able to enact their understandings of SJE.

#### **5.4.4 Challenging the Status Quo and Encouraging Activism**

So far, in this section (5.4) I have discussed the definitions of social justice that participants provided during their interviews. In this subsection (5.4.4) and the following subsection (5.4.5), I discuss key elements of SJE that came up across interviews, including several missed opportunities to engage with these elements. This subsection explores the extent to which participants reported challenging the status quo and encouraging activism, while the next subsection explores the extent

to which participants reported making content relevant and relatable for learners. I have included these two subsections in the theme of *Ranging Definitions of Social Justice* because they work to demonstrate further the participants' understandings of social justice and SJE in the Scottish context.

The literature points to a structural component of SJE, that is, explicitly teaching about inequity and systemic oppression (Agarwal et al., 2010; Au, Bigelow, & Karp, 2007; Dover, 2013b; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Picower, 2012b; Reagan et al. 2016; Tilley & Taylor, 2013). This, linked with action or activism, are key elements of SJE (Agarwal et al., 2010; Au, Bigelow, & Karp, 2007; Dover, 2013b; Picower, 2012a, 2012b; Wade, 2007). Both are pivotal to SJE, but rarely appeared in participants' reported practice. However, during her interview, Shannon reported preparing learners to challenge the status quo, stating:

I am teaching them respect towards in terms of gender, in terms of those that classify themselves as gender neutral, in terms of how we just can't stereotype what a man and what a woman can do, in terms of jobs, and how to deal with sexism and racism in the classroom and in the work environment as well, because, you know, when they go into a workplace, that they have that experience as well, and you want to have them feeling confident and equipped that they can challenge those stereotypes taking place.

Here, Shannon indicates that she endeavours to prepare learners to challenge issues of injustice. However, in simply listing areas of social injustice she implies that there is no sense of a depth of understanding, for example, that the issues are all the same or that they are dealt with in the same way, or that we are at the same point in the evolution of tackling them, and this may be one reason as to why participants report not going further in their teaching of these issues. In this case, a lack of understanding might indicate an unwillingness or inability to take their social justice approach to teaching further and in more transformative or emancipatory ways. In this way, there are several missed opportunities for activism, as reported by participants. Participants often drew connections between content and social

justice, including activism, but tended to stop short of encouraging activism.

Catherine provided a strong example of this, saying:

When George Floyd happened, when he was murdered, [...] I used that as like a springboard to talk about it more and so say, like, well, there's this pretty awful thing that's happened, talk about police brutality. But I couldn't then say, so you should now go and join protests.

Here, Catherine reported stopping herself from encouraging learners to join protests. Further, her link only to protests demonstrates a limited understanding of social justice in that it fails to include other methods of activism and resistance, such as petitioning, community organising, fundraising, campaigning, voting, letter writing, volunteering, or craftivism. This is a missed opportunity and is problematic with regards to SJE because this example of racial injustice seems to only be presented, looked at, and included within the confines of the classroom walls. And, even within these walls, learners seem to be at the receiving end, as passive recipients, rather than actively participating in the discussion and the consequent transformative work. Therefore, this is a missed opportunity to link history content to current events and encourage learners to challenge problematic issues of power.

Catherine also said:

I wouldn't discourage them if they were like, I'm going to go off and do that. I'll be like, wow, that's really great that you're showing your, you know, you are standing up for yourself in a way that's legal and, you know, you're totally entitled to do that, but in terms, I couldn't be like, oh guys, I heard that there's this protest on, do you want to go? That's the difference. It's like, if they come to it themselves, and then we can talk about it and I can be positive about it. But, I mean, but then again, if they were like, we're going to go to a right-wing protest, like, I can't be like, you shouldn't do that. As much as it would pain me, like, if they were going to, like, a Britain First protest. I can't because they can do what they want in that instance. And if I was to say you should go to this, you know, Greta Thunberg protest for, you know, strike for change for kids, but you can't go to the Britain First UKIP one,

then that would be making a really clear political stance, and, yeah, I like my job.

Here, Catherine describes herself shying away from politics and current events in the classroom, including how she actively avoids encouraging learners to engage in activism. Interestingly, she says this is something she “can’t” do and not something she “does not want” to do and this is important because it places blame on external systems rather than seeing it as her choice. Further, Catherine does not report identifying encouraging active participation as her responsibility as a teacher. Importantly, the CfE Principles and Practice for Social Studies (Education Scotland, 2014) state that “the promotion of active citizenship is a central feature of learning in social studies as children and young people develop the skills and knowledge to enable and encourage participation” (p. 3). The policy document goes on to say, “Practitioners will plan opportunities for children and young people to become involved in their local communities and the wider world to support them in considering and developing their roles as active and informed citizens” (Education Scotland, 2014, p. 3). So, not only is Catherine supported in encouraging participation, it is outlined as her responsibility within the CfE. Therefore, her reported avoidance of it in the classroom does not appear to align with the education policy in Scotland. Further, as previously explored, it is well within the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) to encourage learners in this way. Interestingly, though, she links this to a fear of losing her job. Altogether, this can be seen as a missed opportunity for activism where appearing to be apolitical feigns neutrality. This is to say that avoiding political or potentially sensitive topics in the classroom is not neutral, but, on the contrary, reinforces problematic issues of power. As with Shannon’s example, it is what Catherine does not say or do that implies a limited understanding of social justice.

Similarly, Anne reflected on the perceived risks involved in encouraging activism in the classroom:

I always kind of give them information in the sense of, like, you can get in touch with your MP or your MSP. And they’ve wanted to do debates and

protests. Like, the pupils themselves have wanted to protest. And then politely I've had to say, well, I understand that you might want to protest but within school time that might not be the best use and whether our Head Teacher would support that. But, I mean, we've done assemblies, like, some of my students have run assemblies that are talking about, for example, American politics and about President Trump, which came from them, not from me, because I'm very much, I have to be balanced. So, I have to give positives and negatives to everyone. So, I'm keen not to force them to be my own political opinion, if that makes sense. But I never directly suggest that they do it because I'm always mindful of the fact that that could come back to bite me professionally.

Similarly to Catherine, Anne describes shying away from politics and current events in the classroom, aiming to be “balanced” and citing a fear of professional repercussions. This, however, is at odds with the CfE Principles and Practice for Social Studies (Education Scotland, 2014) and the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021). She also appears to remove blame from herself for not encouraging activism among learners, saying the Head Teacher of the school would not support them.

Further, David described a fear of “ruffling feathers” and linked this to a desire to move up the ladder where he thinks he can be more impactful:

I think naivety plays a big part at the start of teaching careers. I think a lot of people go into it and think they're going to change the world, and they think that they're going to flip education on its head. I think now that the experience that I've had and the colleagues that I've worked with and some of the decisions that I've seen made by councils and I think a lot of it is a lot of people are very career-focused and they want to move up the ladder and they don't want to ruffle feathers and they don't, they want to keep councils happy.

David went on to say:

I know it goes against what I've been saying for the last forty minutes or whatever, but sometimes I think I need to hold back on the things that I

maybe comment on and the things I usually do, because if I want to make a bigger impact and I want to change things, then need to be higher up the totem pole.

The literature suggests that teachers tend to stop short of encouraging activism and shy away from politics or potentially sensitive or controversial topics for several reasons, and a fear of losing their job is one of them (Byford et al., 2009; Dover, 2013b; Leeman, 2017; Smith & Lennon, 2011). Participants appear to fall into this category as well, despite this being advocated by the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) and the CfE Principles and Practice for Social Studies (Education Scotland, 2014). However, “all aspects of the social studies curriculum are inherently political, and discussion of controversial political issues are never too far removed from one’s instruction” (Jounrell, 2018, p. 169). In this way, history teachers should be well-placed to explore this content with learners, including ways to effect positive change in the world. Further, “Teachers are political beings, and it is unreasonable to expect them to completely censor their political identities once they enter their classrooms” (Journell, 2018, p. 175). This means that teachers should not be expected to separate themselves from their beliefs and, given the nature of history content and disciplinary practices, it is something that teachers and learners should be able to navigate together. However, it is clear that participants did not report doing this. Importantly, according to Mockler (2011), teacher identity is made up of three overlapping dimensions: personal experience, professional context, and external political environment. So, as all three of these dimensions contribute to teacher identity, it is unlikely that teachers can separate themselves from any one dimension and, for example, leave politics at the door. Further, history teachers in Scotland are supported by the CfE Principles and Practice for Social Studies (Education Scotland, 2014) as well as the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) in encouraging activism, so the idea that they are supposed to be neutral in the classroom, as Catherine and Anne indicate, is seemingly unfounded and might suggest, instead, that there is an unwillingness or inability to take their engagement with SJE further due to a limited understanding of social

justice and/or activism. Alternatively, this might also link back to pressures, perceived or real, imposed on teachers at the school, local authority, or national level to achieve exam results, and, thus, teaching practice is driven with this in mind at the expense of the vision of, for example, the CfE (Scottish Executive, 2004), the Principles and Practice for Social Studies (Education Scotland, 2014), and Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021).

Explicitly teaching about inequity and encouraging action are key elements of SJE (Agarwal et al., 2010; Au, Bigelow, & Karp, 2007; Dover, 2013b; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Picower, 2012b; Reagan et al., 2016; Tilley & Taylor, 2013; Wade, 2007), yet this is something that was clearly missing from most participants' reported practice. This is concerning because teachers are supported by the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) and the CfE Principles and Practice for Social Studies (Education Scotland, 2014) in encouraging activism among learners, yet they did not report doing that, so there appears to be a policy-implementation gap. It might be the case, however, that teachers do want to engage more deeply in teaching for social justice but are hindered in doing so because of the constraints of the system, as they see it. Kumashiro (2004), for example, explains, "when [teachers] do wish to depart from commonsensical discourses, they often confront institutional demands, disciplinary constraints, and social pressures that significantly hinder their ability to bring about change" (p. 2). However, participants did not appear to make this connection, instead linking their inclination to teach to the test to social justice. In other words, participants indicated that, in their view, preparing learners for exams is teaching for social justice, and this aligns with their reported understanding of social justice.

#### **5.4.5 Making Content Relevant and Relatable**

Like challenging the status quo and encouraging activism, making content relatable to the lives of young people and relevant to the world around them is also a key element of SJE (Au, Bigelow, & Karp, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Further, "Teaching for social justice has multiple points of alignment with social studies

curriculum and pedagogy” (Dover et al., 2016, p. 458). In this way, history teachers are uniquely positioned to handle issues of injustice and potentially sensitive topics (Goodson, 2011; Kitson & McCully, 2005). All participants cited examples of making connections between history content and the lives of learners as well as current events, which utilises history “as a guide for acting now” (Donnelly & Norton, 2011, p. 9). This is important in relation to their understanding of social justice and SJE because it demonstrates the utility of history content in a social justice approach to teaching and learning. For example, Chris stated:

Having a kind of link to certain things that you’re interested in, like, so, you can talk to some of the kids who are interested in football about certain things, and you can, obviously in Glasgow that has a very particular resonance with specific historical events and various political beliefs and religious beliefs and things like that, so you can bring that in and then you can compare that to kind of different historical periods as well, so that can be a very good jumping off point but that’s true of any kind of thing that you’re personally involved in.

Here, Chris is “[using] the energy of their connections to drive through [...] the content” (Christensen, 2007, p. 49). In this way, Chris makes connections between the content and the lives of learners in an effort to make history relatable, though this might be limited to learners with an interest in football and/or who are aware of the social context of football in the west of Scotland. Similarly, in an effort to make content relevant, Beth described how she uses current events to teach history:

I frequently make jokes about how Trump was actually the best thing that ever happened to classroom teaching. [...] But they all hated him and suddenly they got it, because here was somebody who stood up and hated everybody else, so, therefore it was very easy to point as an example of someone who hates everybody else and start from there.

Similarly, Michael also reported drawing on the rise of Trump-era politics as a resource in the classroom:

I use Donald Trump’s ascent rather a lot when we look at the rise of Fascism



in Germany. I also use it a lot in the American Civil Rights topics, in particular when we look at hostility towards immigrants, because you can sort of, when we were looking at in the 1920s, it's happening in the 2020s, you know. So, there are these parallels that you can bring in, but I think also just generally speaking, it can be storytelling, I think a huge part of history teaching is being able to bring the kids into the narrative.

In this way, Beth and Michael use current events to make history relevant for learners. While useful, this is also limited in that it is akin to Kitson and McCully's (2005) *container* on the risk-taking continuum. The *container* might teach parallel topics that are potentially sensitive or controversial but that are not too close to home. While this is more useful for SJE than avoiding potentially sensitive or controversial topics altogether, it is still limited because "it cannot be assumed that students will transfer understanding from one context to another" (Kitson & McCully, 2005, p. 35). Additionally, Michael described how he does both, making connections between the content and the lives of learners as well as current events:

Well, I think we'll just stop there and we'll have a little bit of a dig into this and actually discuss the reality of it. So you do find often you have dropping off or jumping in points that come up through the, kind of like, the discourse of the lesson which aren't planned, which you run with, and that can certainly be the case. We did a lot on the toppling of the Edward Colston statue and the renaming, potentially, of Colston Hall. A little bit of talk about David Hume Tower, obviously, since it's Edinburgh-based.

So, here Michael recognises this current sociopolitical event for its pedagogical utility. Despite the internal contradictions and the sometimes fuzzy talk around social justice evident in his attempted definition of social justice, Michael seems to be making SJE moves within the confines of the classroom and the broader, dominant, ideologies within Scottish education. These discussions bring current events in as well as relating content to the city in which learners live. In this example, Michael describes an approach akin to the *risk-taker* (Kitson & McCully, 2005), where the social utility of history is embraced.

Len reported making links between cosmetics and skin whitening in relation to Black Power: “So I was able to kind of try and hook some of the girls in the class based on that because you’re kind of making it contemporaneous”. Len reported that this helps him to “get them to see that, kind of, echo of history in contemporary society”. Len provided another example, this time drawing on old Disney cartoons: “So there’s a Disney film where there are black crows as characters that have very, like, almost like ‘blackface’ voices. So, to try and get them to see how that was even kind of referenced in Disney films.” Additionally, Len referenced using Childish Gambino’s *This is America* music video in class:

I think it’s trying to think of things that they’ll probably already know and tell them, well, this is where this comes from. This is the link between a contemporary music video and, like, racial injustice in history and why we’re studying it. I think making connections makes things click.

In these examples, Len reports making content relevant and relatable, albeit in relation to American history, therefore aligning more with the *container* than *risk-taker*, but still more useful to SJE than the *avoider*.

Shannon tied current events into her teaching and reported designing an elective period around it:

I built an elective period in which we’re having a look at Black history, and racism, and exploring the roots to it all, and asking these questions, no, how do you overcome this systematic racism that has occurred throughout centuries? And it gets students to think about it in terms of, you know, white privilege and, you know, there’s a great book, you know, *What Do White People Know About Racism*, and you want to try to make sure, in particular in terms of Scotland as well with the capacities of learning, about responsible citizenship, and being an effective contributor in society, that young people are prepared, in terms of, to tackle racism when they see it in society. So, I think particularly with history it’s trying to emphasise to students, yes, you’re going to be learning about the past and its impact on the present, but we want you to think about these thematics that take place in the subject,

where your role is, and do you feel that you're equipped to challenge that. Importantly, Shannon ends with a call to action. This is a pivotal element in SJE, yet it is something that few participants mentioned and this might be because participants demonstrated limited understandings of social justice. Interestingly, Shannon indicates that this course she designed is an elective. This means that it is likely separate from qualifications-based courses. So, while useful to those who have access to this elective, it is also pertinent that this material and approach are integrated into all of the classes she teaches. This would, therefore, more strongly align with a social justice approach to teaching than having an isolated elective course.

Catherine talked about choosing topics that make history relevant to the lives of learners and helping them to make connections to events happening around them: "I kind of went out of my way to choose topics that I can teach that will show, well, this is where this has all come from and this gives you a better understanding." Catherine also provided an example of a local event and how she used that to discuss Jim Crow laws in America: "And we had a whole thing with a local tie and that made it really, much more, they kind of understood it better because they could see the example from their own situation, their own lives and society, and where the history of that came from."

Further, Carrie stated: "I think it's important to have that dialogue, because if you censor everything and you don't expose children to it, and then they come across it in the world, then they don't know how to handle it". In a similar vein, Catherine said, "I think we do children a disservice if we completely shy away from it". This demonstrates that participants try to make connections; however, this becomes stifled when they fail to encourage activism beyond the walls of the classroom, as presented previously. These examples are akin to teaching *for* social justice and show that participants make moves towards social justice within their classrooms. This demonstrates the use of "small openings" to incorporate a social justice approach to teaching and learning within the confines of a results-focused exam culture (Groenke, 2009). While these moves reported by participants might

be small and limited and are not often linked to action, they do demonstrate the potential use of history content in teaching for social justice.

All participants reported making content relevant and relatable and this is a key element of SJE (Au, Bigelow, & Karp, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Here, participants use content to teach *about* and *for* social justice. Despite participants providing varying definitions of social justice, several mentioned the role content has to play. Not only did their definitions range in sociopolitical emphasis, but some participants lacked a clear definition altogether. None of the participants reported definitions of social justice that incorporate teaching *about*, *through*, and *for* social justice, or that incorporate all six of Picower's (2012b) elements. This is concerning because it appears as though participants' understandings of social justice are incomplete because none of these elements can happen effectively in isolation. Importantly, many of their definitions circled back to a results-focused exam culture and the social mobility and benefits associated with being successful in the SQA. As explored in the previous section, participants acknowledged that teaching to the test is inadequate. However, teaching to the test to help learners earn qualifications reflects their limited understanding of social justice. Therefore, they see their role in the classroom is to teach in this way, thus contributing to a results-focused exam culture and reinforcing the access paradox theory and contradicting the sense of social justice as defined in this thesis.

While participants provided definitions of social justice that range in sociopolitical emphasis, elements of social justice in participants' reported teaching practice emerged throughout the interviews. Importantly, several missed opportunities to engage in SJE also appeared throughout the interviews. Similar to their definitions, elements of SJE that appear in participants' espoused teaching practice range in sociopolitical emphasis. Much like their definitions, participants also linked history content to social justice and used content to present, and, in limited cases, encourage activism (to an extent). There were, however, missed opportunities for activism and the reasons why include neutrality being seen as apolitical and there being potential professional repercussions for not appearing

neutral. The following section extends this by exploring the different views participants reported on their personal and professional identities in relation to social justice.

## 5.5 Differing Views on Personal and Professional Identities

While the previous three sections explored the results-focused exam culture in Scotland (5.2), how participants reported complacency within this culture (5.3), and their limited definitions of social justice (5.4), which seemingly align with the culture they describe, this section explores how participants reported on their personal and professional identities as a necessary component and locus of investigation for enabling SJE. Firstly, participants reported differing views of their identities as teachers. They also reported differing views on their personal and professional identities, with two participants explaining how they keep their personal and professional identities separate and four participants describing considerable overlap between their personal and professional lives. This section ends with an exploration of the activist teacher identity and suggests that none of the nine participants in this study report being activist teachers, despite this being well-supported and advocated by the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021).

Importantly, the aim of this study is to explore how secondary school history teachers in Scotland engage with social justice, if at all. This includes an exploration of what participants see as their role in the classroom and how this might emerge in their reporting of their practice. Importantly, Mockler's (2011) framework helped me to interrogate the ways in which the identities of the participants in this study are tied to issues of SJE. For example, with regards to the dimension of *personal experience*, each participant constructed an identity chart, where they outlined elements of their personal and professional lives, including their hobbies, interests, and roles inside and out of the classroom. This led to conversations with participants about if and how any of these elements intersect with their teaching practice. With regards to the dimension of the *professional context*, each participant detailed their journey into teaching, reflecting upon their motivations and the people who inspired them to become teachers. These journeys are seen in the form of vignettes in Chapter Four of this thesis. Finally, with regards to the dimension of the *external political environment*, throughout the interviews,

participants discussed the impact of exam demands on their teaching practice, as well as the politicised nature of content selection in the history classroom.

While there are challenges in defining identity, identity formation is an ongoing and dynamic process (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Further, Darvin and Norton (2015) see identity as “multiple, changing, and a site of struggle” (p. 36). Norton (2013) defines identity as, “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 45). Participants reported different views on their identities as teachers and this is explored in Section 5.5.1. Participants also reported differing views on the crossover of their personal and professional identities and this is explored in Section 5.5.2. Interestingly, and despite support from the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021), no participants reported identifying as activists and this is explored in Section 5.5.3. More specifically, none of the participants used the term activism in their identity chart or described their practice in their interview with the term activism.

### **5.5.1 Identities as Teachers**

Participants reported differing views on their identities as teachers. More specifically, some participants identified as a *teacher* before a *history teacher*. For example, Beth considers herself to be a *teacher* first and then a *history teacher*, and she mentioned this at two different points during her interview, saying, “I don’t really consider myself a history teacher first and foremost. I consider myself a teacher first and foremost. That’s because that’s the bit I know I’m good at. I don’t actually know if I’m very good at history”. Beth went on to relate this to her experience of imposter syndrome, which she included as an element on her identity chart. This might be limited with regards to a social justice approach to teaching because it calls into question the extent to which she is able to see the potential of history as a route *through* and *for* social justice. This means that the social utility or transformative potential of history might be overlooked if she does not consider herself to be “very good at history”. Combined with the ways in which she reported

teaching to exam demands, the way in which Beth identifies here can be seen as limited in relation to SJE.

Similarly, Carrie identifies in the same way as Beth and mentioned it multiple times during her interview. When someone asks her what she teaches, she responds to them by saying, "I teach children". She went on to say, "I know that some history teachers are really passionate about history, and I'm interested in history, well, I suppose my passion is helping young people". She added, "It's probably a bit of a confession to say I'm not as passionate about history as some teachers. But maybe I'm a bit more passionate about caring for young people than some teachers are". Like Beth, Carrie identifies as a *teacher* more readily than as a *history teacher*. However, their responses differ in that Beth considers herself to be good at teaching but not good at history, and Carrie does not seem to factor in her perceived skill but does indicate that her passion for the two are unequal. As it translates to their practice, this might suggest that neither of them are able to translate the social utility or transformative potential of history into their classrooms in ways that a teacher with a stronger affinity for history might and this has implications with regards to social justice, as their approach to SJE might, for example, register lower in sociopolitical emphasis (Dover, 2015). Further, the ways in which they reported acting complacently within the culture of exams also suggests that their identities as teachers are limited with regards to SJE in that their practice revolves around exam demands and they teach to this, which, like their reported lack of passion for history, is limited.

Interestingly, according to Smith (2018a), "the introduction of the CfE - which emphasises interdisciplinary learning, citizenship and transferable skills - coincided with a weakening of teachers' subject identities" (p. 19). As is the case for Beth and Carrie, this means that a discipline-specific identity might appear less prominently than a more general *teacher* identity and, according to Smith (2018a), this might be reflective of the interdisciplinary focus of the CfE. With the average years of experience among the participants in this study being around eight years, and all but one participant undertaking their initial teacher education after the



implementation of the CfE, the views on teacher identity expressed by Beth and Carrie align with Smith's (2018a) findings that "the CfE cohort hold weaker subject identities" (p. 18). However, Carrie has nearly twenty years of teaching experience and considers herself to have an identity that links more strongly to the pastoral side of teaching than her subject specialisation. Further, Biesta et al. (2015) found that participants in their study identified a shift in the role of the teacher, "from that of a deliverer of knowledge to that of a facilitator of learning, and from a subject specialist to a teacher of children" (pp. 631-632). This also aligns with how Beth and Carrie identify and see themselves in the classroom. Interestingly, though, in *Teaching Scotland's Future: Report of a Review of Teacher Education in Scotland* (Donaldson, 2011), Donaldson indicates that twenty-first century teachers should have "deep understanding and enthusiasm for their subject" (p. 12). The report also makes a recommendation that teachers have access to subject-specific continuing professional development as a way to strengthen this understanding and enthusiasm (Donaldson, 2011). This means that teachers should not lose sight of their specific subjects. Importantly, disciplinary expertise is fundamental to social justice because teachers can use this expertise to, for example, engage in decolonising work (Gabi et al., 2023). In the history classroom, this might take the form of teachers drawing on recent Black Lives Matter rallies as a way to trace and interrogate problematic issues of power from and since the slave trade. This might mean teachers making explicit links between the industrialisation and colonisation of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and climate change today. That is, helping learners to explore how industrialisation in Britain and much of Europe, for example, led to a desire for new markets and raw materials, and thus the exploitation of countries in Africa, exemplified through the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 and the so-called *scramble for Africa*. However, participants did not report drawing on their discipline-specific expertise in this way, instead seeing their role as a more general *teacher of children*.

This notion of a so-called weakened subject identity, or a shift towards a more general "teacher of children" reflects the interdisciplinary focus of the CfE

(Smith, 2018a). However, participants' responses around their approach to the BGE phase suggest that they do not engage with interdisciplinary teaching, as they reported spending considerable time in the BGE phase teaching skills for SQA exams. So, this identity, as reported by Beth and Carrie, does not seem to reflect the interdisciplinary focus of the CfE, but instead might suggest that Beth and Carrie adhere to a system where teaching a watered-down version of history for the sake of exams is a form of social justice because it is more likely to lead to better exam results. This identity, as reported by Beth and Carrie, also aligns with Scotland's Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) policy, which aims to "provide all children, young people and their families with the right support at the right time [...] so that every child and young person in Scotland can reach their full potential" (Scottish Government, n.d., retrieved from <https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/>).

Concerningly, it is questionable as to whether it can be said that they are doing this if they fail to offer a broad and general education and spend considerable time teaching to the test at the expense of a social justice approach to teaching and learning. However, GIRFEC highlights the pastoral role of teachers and aligns with the ways in which Beth and Carrie reported identifying as teachers. GIRFEC utilises eight interconnected wellbeing indicators, often referred to as SHANARRI (safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible, and included). The wellbeing indicators are reflected in the ways Beth and Carrie spoke about their teaching practice. For example, Beth spoke at length about supporting learners in classroom routines as a precursor to studying history, which she described as "success in small things first" and this aligns with the *nurtured* and *achieving* indicators:

On my identity [chart] I wrote strict about the small rules, you know, I mean it. I mean, see the big rules, like, the big things? I don't really care. I don't really care about the big things. Did you not do well in that test? Meh. But see the small rules about, like, yeah, you will have a sharp pencil before you sit down. Yeah, you will make sure to wear the right colour of laces. That's the kind of thing that I find best, so in the classroom what I like to do is, I like

to foster success in small things first. So, yeah, I've nailed little small things, yeah, I've done this, I've sat down, I know where the jotter is, I know where these things are, I can do the small tasks. I do the tasks at the start where you do the whiteboard thing, raising the whiteboards, tiny baby questions, you always make sure you do basic questions and the harder questions for your, the ones that are going to stretch themselves.

Similarly, when I asked Carrie what her goals are as a history teacher, she spoke about caring for young people and supporting them through their exams, specifically as a way out of poverty, stating:

I think a big part of it is, it's child-focused. So, we know that the SQA have exams, and if the children want to be successful in life, education is a route out of, I told you about the deprivation that quite a lot of our children are in, I think education is a route out of that. As a history teacher, my goal really is to help the children get as good exam results as they possibly can. And I know that sounds, like, a bit 'ticky the boxy' for exams, but, really, the long-term goal is if these children can get good qualifications, they can get themselves up the ladder, they can work their way out of poverty, so my ultimate goal is to help the children in my care get good qualifications to improve their lives. So, I'm quite aware of what they need to do in history, so I mark for the exam board. I know all the SQA hoops that they have to jump through.

Here, Carrie uses the essence of GIRFEC to rationalise her results-focused approach to teaching and learning. While her goals as a history teacher are well-intentioned and revolve around improved social mobility for learners, her mindset is wrapped up in a limited understanding of social justice, yet an understanding that reflects the high-stakes nature of the results-focused exam culture in Scotland. In a way, Carrie, as well as other participants, have conformed their practice to a limited view of social justice that exists within the confines of the results-focused exam culture. This stands to reinforce and perpetuate neoliberal trends because it fails to challenge problematic power relations. The extent of this can be seen in how, for

example, Carrie identifies as a teacher with a pastoral focus that narrows in on exam-related success and she has found support for this approach in policies such as GIRFEC. While policies, such as GIRFEC and the CfE aim to support learners and encourage a social justice approach to teaching and learning, they appear to be at odds with the realities of SQA exam demands in that tailoring teaching practice to the narrow demands of exams diminishes the possibilities that GIRFEC and the CfE offer in relation to social justice.

Interestingly, Carrie spoke about the amount of deprivation in the local authority in which she teaches. It is important to note that participants represent a range of local authorities across Scotland, as well as both the state and independent sectors, and they all spoke about teaching to the test as a way towards success and social mobility with the same fervour and conviction. In other words, participants who teach in schools in more deprived areas did not talk about teaching to the test any more or less than participants who teach in schools in less deprived areas. This suggests just how ingrained a results-focused exam culture might be in Scotland as participants from varying local authorities and sectors spoke about it in such similar ways. Importantly, Shapira et al. (2023) found evidence to suggest that there is a socially stratified trend of learners from more deprived areas being entered into fewer qualifications in S4 and in a narrower range of subjects compared to learners in less deprived areas. This means that learners in more deprived areas of Scotland have less access to the number of qualifications required for university entry, while learners in less deprived areas have more access, which “allows students at these schools to meet the expectations of Higher Education entry requirements more readily, in a context where many Universities expect that qualifications at a certain level are attained in one year (i.e., in one sitting)” (Shapira et al., 2023, p. 24). So, while there might be differences in the number of qualifications for which learners are entered, according to Shapira et al. (2023), it is clear that participants in the present study spoke about and reported teaching to the test all the same, regardless of local authority.

While Beth and Carrie reported having weaker subject identities, Catherine

described having more than one subject identity. Catherine teaches more than one subject, taking on a teaching qualification in history after her qualification in teaching English because when she moved to Scotland “most of the jobs that were available were in history and I thought, well, yeah, all right, I'll do history”. She reported identifying as a *history teacher* now over an *English teacher*, though she did not state the reasons for this shift. She is also a faculty head and indicated tension between her roles, stating, “If I can't get any more history on my plate I think I'll end up just going back to being a classroom teacher”. Unlike Beth and Carrie, Catherine reported identifying with the subjects she teaches rather than the general term *teacher*. The CfE has a strong focus on interdisciplinary learning, and having a more general *teacher* identity rather than a strong discipline-specific identity might create opportunities beyond rigid subject boundaries, potentially creating more opportunities for a social justice approach to teaching and learning. In this way, teachers, for example, could work across subjects to make connections to the lives of learners. However, participants did not report teaching in this way or indicate drawing on their identity as a more general teacher than discipline-specific teacher in ways that capitalise on the potential for SJE through the CfE. At the same time, a diminished discipline-specific identity might lead to learners missing out on the utility of certain disciplinary content in relation to SJE. In the case of history, this could mean missing out on the justice-seeking potential found in the practices of historians, such as critically analysing sources, in favour of more general or less critical practices.

Michael and Anne talked around their identities as historians without necessarily indicating that they identify as a *history teacher* more readily than a *teacher*. Instead, they cited tension between their training as historians and the ways in which they reported teaching to narrow exam demands. For example, Anne said, “I suppose the difficulty that I see as a historian is that sometimes the way that we're teaching this skill or the question actually undermines what the question is actually asking in terms of a historical sense”. Also indicating tension, Michael said, “a good historian isn't going to look at every causal, sort of series of events,

whatever, and then decide, well, in this case that was the most important because, it's just not what you would do". This means that, even if Michael and Anne report a stronger association with the discipline of history compared to Beth and Carrie, the version of history that they report teaching, that is, a narrow, exam-focused version, does not align with SJE. Importantly, this might indicate a "difficult transition" (Thompson, 2023, p. 853) for teachers as they shift from engaging with their discipline at higher and/or more specific levels to distilling the discipline into a wider, more generalised version that suits the nature of the secondary school classroom. This might include making changes to accommodate or appeal to certain groups of learners, the time allotted to the subject within the wider school timetable, and/or the pressures imposed on teachers at the school or local authority levels to achieve exam results, which might lead to the tailoring of teaching practice to narrow exam demands. In turn, this might shape the nature of history in the secondary school classroom, including the ways in which content is selected and disciplinary practices are taught, which can be seen as a form of epistemic socialisation (Smith, 2018a).

### **5.5.2 Personal and Professional Identities**

Beth, Carrie, and Catherine specifically discussed their identities as teachers in relation to history. Other participants described their identities inside and out of the classroom, reporting different views when describing any crossover of their personal and professional identities. More specifically, two participants described having two different personas, while four participants described an overlap between their personal and professional identities. Three participants did not specifically discuss this overlap.

Shannon and Anne reported having separate identities, with Anne likening it to wearing "different hats". Anne teaches at an independent boarding school where her role extends beyond the classroom and into the boarding house. In this way, she interacts with learners in various settings. Similarly, Shannon compared teaching to acting. She said, "I could rival Meryl Streep as an actress because you

do have these two entities in terms of [Shannon] the person and [Shannon] the teacher". Demonstrating this separation, she recalled a time when she was experiencing difficulties in her personal life. She reported throwing herself into work as a distraction, stating, "kids smell fear". During this time, teaching was a distraction for Shannon from what was going on in her personal life, and she did not let what was going on in her personal life crossover into the classroom because she did not want it to impact upon her practice. In this way, Shannon reports having a separate teacher persona that is distinct from her personal life.

On the other hand, some participants reported overlap between their personal and professional identities and this reflects Mockler's (2011) framework of three overlapping dimensions, (1) personal experience, (2) professional context, and (3) external political environment, that contribute to teacher professional identity. For example, David talked about his Glaswegian accent and how he uses it in the classroom to build relationships with learners. He said, "That's the sort of side that I feel sort of best in my teaching is the personality side". In this way, David draws on his personal experience in the classroom. He also talked about his working class identity and his experiences with colleagues. He reported that he and another colleague are the only working class teachers in the school and that they have a strong relationship. Here, David locates himself within a marginalised position, with working class and non-standardised linguistic identities. Reflecting on the external political environment, this linguistic identity presents as political, for David, because it does not adhere to his perception of societal norms. Importantly, he identifies this "personality side" as a key feature in his practice, yet reported tension in his professional life because of it:

I have had feedback from schools saying that my degree and my level of education isn't enough for jobs that I have applied for as well, so I need to take that next step of being a bit more, I don't want to say the word sophisticated, but smarter in the way that I maybe deliver things.

He also reflected on his experience as a university student and how this has carried into his professional life, as he sees it, in the eyes of employers:

I was a terrible university student. I was awful, I went to school, I went to uni early, I went straight from sixth year to uni, totally not prepared for it. So, eventually plodded my way through, and I did get my honours degree, 2:2, which is fine. I was lucky I got that, but I have applied for jobs and obviously you get feedback from jobs and people have told me that the 2:2 degree isn't good enough. Let me rephrase that. They haven't specifically said that, but what they said was that your degree is an issue. Now I'm assuming that the degree is an issue because it's a 2:2. Obviously, the big push in education nowadays is trying to get that master's, and more and more staff and colleagues are doing it. That's going to be difficult for me because who's paying for it first? I have a four-month-old son running about, so where am I getting all this extra time?

Here, David describes external pressure to obtain certain degrees that have become the perceived norm in the teaching profession in Scotland. In doing so, he expresses frustration over the time and financial pressures adhering to these norms take, seeing family and financial commitments as issues in this. David reflects on his personal experience, or the elements of his personal life “that exist outside of the professional realm”, which, in this example are his accent and social class (Mockler, 2011, p. 520). He also reflects on his overlapping professional context and the perceived value and importance of a master's degree in the teaching profession. In this way, David indicates feeling tension between his personal experience and his professional context, recognising the constraints he feels in achieving what he calls “the big push” of obtaining a master's degree.

Similarly to David reporting overlap between his personal and professional identities, Chris described the importance of bringing his personality into the classroom, stating, “Allowing your personality to come out of your teaching is kind of essential”. Further, Beth described using her personality in the classroom, stating, “you don't have two separate personas”. She talked about bringing different elements of her life into the classroom and how she uses her personality to build relationships with learners. For example, she has a keen interest in gaming, to the



point where she included it as an element on her identity chart, and brings that into the classroom to teach about battles. In talking about the overlap between personal and professional identities, she said:

Children find things out. I think people who imagine that they're going to be two different people, I will have a classroom persona and I will have my, no, no, no, no, no, no. Children, they will find any way they can to not do work. One of the things that they know is if they talk about your life, you get excited about it.

Likewise, Carrie also describes how elements of her personal life crossover with her professional life. Like Beth, Carrie identifies as a *teacher* before a *history teacher* and has a focus on developing young people. Carrie talked about her faith and how it not only guided her in becoming a teacher, but also how it appears in her practice. She said, "From a Christian point of view, I might say that God was directing my path without me even really being aware of it". She said that her faith is "part of my person and therefore it's who I am when I come into the classroom". She related this to her focus on teaching young people:

From a faith perspective, I guess, you know, the Lord Jesus taught that you should do to other people what you want, you know, them to do to you, and love your neighbour. So, from a teacher perspective, I guess, I care about young people, and I want them to care about each other and love their neighbour, which I think is a good, kind of, morally upright way to live and help people. So, I guess that's the kind of me that would be in the classroom, hopefully helping children to feel that they're in a safe place and that they're cared for. So that's where my Christianity, I think, would come in the classroom, but it wouldn't normally come in conflict with being a history teacher because I don't think it has to.

Carrie's response here is in tension with her other responses in which she talks about her role in the classroom as teaching to the test so that learners do well on exams and thus unlock opportunities and social mobility in the Scottish context. It is clear that she has a passion for working with young people and her intention is to

help them to be successful. However, doing this without simultaneously advocating for change in the system ensures that the inequitable system remains in place, and this is not in the best interests of young people. This is at odds with the goals of SJE, as well as Article 3 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which states that “In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration” (United Nations, 1989, p. 4).

Importantly, Carr (1993) posits that teachers are responsible for communicating values to learners. As such, teachers should have “strong and definite value commitments on the basis of reasonably mature moral reflection” (Carr, 1993, p. 205). Further, not only should teachers hold strong moral values, they should also hold “an aspiration towards good” and a “desire for improvement” (Carr, 1993, p. 205). This means that teachers should actively work towards improving conditions for learners and this aligns with a social justice approach to teaching and learning and the activism that is central to effective SJE. However, Carrie, for example, did not report advocating for change to the current system and this indicates little crossover between her reported faith values and professional values, both of which have the potential to align strongly with SJE. The following section builds on this notion and that participants in this study did not identify as activists, nor did they report many examples of engaging in activism.

### **5.5.3 The Activist Teacher Identity**

Interestingly, none of the participants identify themselves as activists and did not allude to activism in their practice. David did, however, describe linking content and activism in the school by encouraging learners to draw on the peaceful, nonviolent methods of protest from the Civil Rights Movement in the USA when they were seeking change to a school policy. This is an example of drawing on history content to teach *about*, *through*, and *for* social justice. So, David reported teaching *about* social justice by teaching about the peaceful, nonviolent methods of

protest during the Civil Rights Movement in the USA. He reported teaching *through* and *for* social justice by creating a space where themes of social justice are valued and by empowering learners to take action. He also went on to discuss tension between how he wants to teach and how he wants to be promoted. This so-called “values schizophrenia” (Ball, 2003, p. 221) indicates tension between how David wants to teach and how he thinks he has to teach so that he can be promoted. In this way, conformity to perceived expected behaviour might be required for someone seeking promotion and therefore might influence their practice. Participants also reported missed opportunities for activism, as Catherine described actively avoiding encouraging learners to go to Black Lives Matter protests. This might reflect how they see themselves as teachers, what they see as their role in the classroom, and their understanding of social justice. Dover et al. (2016) found that social studies teachers in their study “described their resistance as necessary advocacy on behalf of their students, themselves, and their profession”, revealing a sense of agency and strong professional identity (p. 463). Participants in this study, however, did not report resistance or advocacy, therefore not necessarily identifying it as something that is integral to their teaching. Further, according to Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), “What may result from a teacher’s realization of his or her identity, in performance with teaching contexts, is a sense of agency, of empowerment to move ideas forward, to reach goals or even to transform the context” (p. 183). However, this does not appear to be the case among participants as they reported very few examples of action or steps towards challenging the system with which they disagree. This suggests that the participants in this study might lack and/or be prevented from engaging with an important component of SJE, that is, an activist teacher identity, and, as a result, this limits the extent to which they can effectively engage with SJE. This, however, is in line with their arguably limited understanding of social justice, or perhaps an understanding of social justice that suggests potential institutional pressures related to exam results and attainment which might enable passivity in teachers, and the ways in which they reported teaching.

Picower (2012a) explores teacher activism and identifies three commitments of teacher activists and defines teacher activists as “educators who work for social justice both inside and outside of their classrooms” (p. 562). Picower’s (2012a) three commitments of activist teachers are (1) reconciling the vision of a socially just world, (2) moving toward liberation, and (3) standing up to oppression. Reconciling the vision of a socially just world includes teachers’ understanding of justice and what their role is in the classroom (Picower, 2012a, p. 565). For the participants in this study, this includes teaching to the test as a way for learners to access social mobility. Moving towards liberation includes a “commitment to prepare their students to develop understandings of how injustice operates so they, too, could learn how to take action for social change” (Picower, 2012a, p. 566). This is done by supporting learners in their personal development, building relationships, creating democratic spaces, and helping learners to develop a questioning attitude. This could also include utilising the social utility of history, or drawing on the Principles and Practice for Social Studies (Education Scotland, 2014), which support teachers in “the promotion of active citizenship”, “enabl[ing] and encourag[ing] participation”, and helping learners in “considering and developing their roles as active and informed citizens” (p. 3). Finally, standing up to oppression relates to what activist teachers do outside the classroom by working collectively and entering the policy arena, which is done “for their own sustainability and to increase their impact” (Picower, 2012a, p. 570). Participants in this study did not report engaging in any of these three commitments of activist teachers. This is problematic because it indicates that they do not engage in activism and this, in turn, limits how they engage with SJE. That is, any engagement with SJE and issues of social justice in the classroom are severely hindered and register low in sociopolitical emphasis and therefore are limited in impact (Dover, 2015). Importantly, participants in this study did not provide any examples of activism outside the classroom and this suggests that they might not engage in activism outside the classroom, or if they do engage in activism outside the classroom, they do not relate this to their teaching practice. Considering their reported dissatisfaction with the SQA and assessment,

participants could very well engage in Picower's (2012a) third commitment involving policy, but examples of this were not reported.

Building on this notion of teachers working together to impact upon policy, Smith (2019a) provides an example of activist history teachers in England working collectively to oppose a new curriculum. This shows that it is possible for teachers to work together to change mandates with which they disagree at both the micro- and macro-levels. However, participants did not report identifying or behaving in this way. This comes despite support from the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021), which not only outline social justice and integrity as professional values, but explicitly state that teachers have the ability to "create opportunities for learning to be transformative in terms of challenging assumptions and expanding the world views of learners" (p. 9). This demonstrates how participants describe and understand their personal and professional identities in the classroom, including what they understand their role in the classroom to be, any crossover of their personal and professional identities, and the impact this understanding may have on their teaching practice. It also demonstrates how participants understand social justice and SJE. Few examples of activism from the participants indicate an understanding of social justice that is limited and/or lacking.

Sections 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4 of this chapter explored a results-focused exam culture and the ways in which participants reported acting complacently in this culture based on their limited definitions and understandings of social justice. This section explored the different views on identity that participants reported and problematised the reported lack of activism among participants. Participants described their identities as teachers in different ways, with some identifying as a more general *teacher* than as a *history teacher*, and others indicating tension between their training as historians and the ways in which they report feeling compelled to teach to narrow exam demands. Concerningly, none of the participants reported identifying as an activist, nor did they indicate understanding of it as their responsibility as supported by the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021). This has implications for social justice because activism is a necessary component

for enabling SJE and the data suggest that the participants in this study are not teaching for social justice and do not engage in activism or encourage activism from learners. The following and final section of this chapter explores the problematically narrow representations of history that participants reported.

## 5.6 Narrow Representations of History

Sections 5.2 and 5.3 of this chapter set the scene of a results-focused exam culture, as described by the participants in this study, and presented the ways in which participants reported acting complacently in this culture. Next, Section 5.4 of this chapter presented participants' definitions of social justice and explored how their limited definitions serve the context outlined in sections 5.2 and 5.3. Then, Section 5.5 explored participants' identities as teachers and the concern that none of them identified as activists, which, like their limited definitions of social justice, serves the culture they described and reported passivity. This section, the final section of the Findings and Discussion Chapter, explores the narrow representations of history, as reported by participants, and problematises these representations in relation to SJE. However, as with participants' definitions of social justice and their lack of activism, this narrow approach to history teaching serves the exam culture they described and reported complacency in, which suits a neoliberal agenda.

While participants did not indicate a strong sense of history teacher identity, they all have degrees in history at either undergraduate or postgraduate levels. This means that they are all trained in the disciplinary practices of historians. Participants, like Michael and Anne, though, reported tension between the disciplinary practices that they know and are trained in and how they feel compelled to teach history in narrow ways that revolve around exam processes and results, including omitting elements, such as *type* or *purpose*, in source evaluation. Despite reporting a weak identity with the discipline of history, many participants, however, were quick to discuss the role of history content in relation to teaching for social justice. This section explores how history content is represented in the history classroom in Scotland, as reported by participants. This is pertinent because the same few topics appear to be taught frequently across Scottish secondary schools (Smith et al., 2021), and participants reported severe dissatisfaction with how many of these topics are represented. While participants spoke with conviction about their dissatisfaction with the ways in which historical topics are represented on SQA course specifications, they did not report taking steps towards changing this. While

this is in line with their lack of activism explored in the previous section, this is problematic for a social justice approach to teaching and learning because it provides learners with an incomplete experience of history and learners miss out on the transformative potential and social utility that the discipline of history has. This also continues the trend seen throughout this study of participants not reporting taking many steps to change the system with which they disagree, thus failing to embody an activist teacher identity.

Because of a results-focused exam culture, teaching history, in the case of this study, is hindered by narrow representations of history where participants reported little time or space to stray from narrow SQA course specifications. Zinn (2007) looks to history as a way to “understand and do something about the issues that face us in the world today” (p. 179). He takes issue with the narrow ways in which history is represented in American schools, stating a “glaring problem has been the emphasis in teaching American history through the eyes of the important and powerful people, through the presidents, the Congress, the Supreme Court, the generals, the industrialists” (Miner, 2007, p. 179). While Zinn was referring to American history and American schools, history in the Scottish context appears no differently. SQA course specifications are narrow in scope and offer perspectives that are limited and lack equitable representation and inclusion. For example, the National Five course specification for the *Atlantic Slave Trade* topic fails to mention Scotland. This is problematic because it fails to provide accurate and inclusive representations of history, thus placing value on and privileging certain narrow representations of history that celebrate and foreground people and systems that oppressed or benefited from the oppression of others while minimising, silencing, or omitting the experiences of oppressed people. Participants mentioned representation as an issue in SQA course specifications but also described adhering to course specifications and choosing particular topics based on how easy they are perceived to be. This is problematic because they are aware that the ways in which the SQA represents history is insufficient but they have not demonstrated taking steps towards resisting or changing this. As a result, learners continue to be



exposed to incomplete representations of history. This has implications for social justice in that, at the classroom-level, learners are denied access to multiple perspectives of history and are exposed to narrow narratives of the past. At a wider, societal-level, learners are denied opportunities to take what they learn in history and use it to identify oppression and challenge problematic issues of power in society.

Catherine, for example, reported asking the SQA for more representation of women in the Advanced Higher *Spanish Civil War* topic. Her request, however, was denied and the content included on the course specification did not change. This is an example of an action being taken by a participant, but it shows that changes within the SQA are not easily made and this severely impacts upon the representations of history to which learners are exposed in the history classroom in Scotland. It is unclear, however, the extent to which she lobbied for change in this instance. With participants reporting little time or space to stray from SQA course specifications in an effort to teach to SQA exams, learners are seemingly not often exposed to perspectives that are not included on the SQA course specifications. The nature of teaching and learning in Scottish history classrooms, that is, teachers abiding by or adhering to the content included on course specifications, as reported by participants, makes the problematically narrow course specifications even more concerning.

Santiago and Dozono (2022) identify three purposes of history education. Firstly, history education should have a social justice approach where “historical inquiry [...] has the potential to analyze the contexts in which injustices develop and thrive” (Santiago & Dozono, 2022, p. 7). Secondly, history education should prepare learners for civic participation (Santiago & Dozono, 2022, p. 7). Finally, history education should develop independent thinkers. In this way, history education should enable learners to be “critical consumers of the past”, and this is something that needs to be learned, emphasising “*how to analyze*” rather than “*what to think*” (Santiago & Dozono, 2022, p. 8, emphasis in original). However, participants did not report teaching history in this way and, instead, reported teaching directly for exams

rather than in critical ways, thus, ignoring the potential history has as a discipline for working towards a more equitable society, which is problematic given the limited nature of the content included on SQA course specifications.

Making content relevant and relatable is a cornerstone of teaching for social justice (Ladson-Billings, 2009). This makes history an ideal vehicle for a social justice approach, as “teaching for social justice has multiple points of alignment with social studies curriculum and pedagogy” (Dover et al., 2016, p. 458). However, these ideals can be lost in an exam-focused approach. This can be seen through both skills and content. Firstly, as demonstrated by participants, exam skills are prioritised over disciplinary practices. For example, participants described the ways in which they explicitly tailor their practice to exam demands, including teaching learners how much time to spend per mark, providing learners with a bank of phrases to use in their responses, and using mnemonics to teach particular processes for each question type. Participants also reported omitting certain exam skills, such as considering *purpose* or *type* in evaluating the usefulness of sources, with Chris saying, “it’s just not worth it”, and David referring to attempting to teach all of the exam skills as a “fool’s errand”. Beth summarised this trend, as demonstrated by participants, by saying, “they will pass the hell out of that one exam”. In this way, it is clear that participants are teaching watered-down versions of disciplinary practices for the sake of exams.

Secondly, the SQA course specifications (SQA, 2021) offer representations of history that are often narrow and incomplete. This has been demonstrated by participants and can be seen in the course specifications ([Table 9](#)). For example, the SQA has several set topics across three sections (*Scottish, British, and European and World*), and teachers choose one topic per section. The topics set by the SQA are often repetitive and dominated by narrow perspectives. For example, the so-called *European and World* section of the National Five course includes ten topics from which teachers choose one. One of these topics covers mediaeval history (*The Cross and the Crescent, the Crusades 1071-1192*) while the other nine topics cover modern history. The earliest of the modern history topics begins in 1774 (*Tea and*

*Freedom, the American Revolution, 1774-1783*) and this is the only topic included from the eighteenth century. Only one topic takes place in the nineteenth century (*USA 1850-1880*), and seven of the nine topics covering modern history take place entirely or mostly in the twentieth century. Further, of the nine modern history topics, six are Eurocentric and three are American. Altogether, the SQA offers an alarmingly narrow interpretation of the term *world* as it sets out in the title of this section of the course and covers a relatively short period of time. This is problematic because learners are therefore denied exposure to wider and more inclusive representations of history, unless teachers choose to stray from “what’s examinable”, as Beth put it. Further, with the current SQA course specifications, in an increasingly diverse Scotland, it becomes more and more unlikely that learners see themselves represented in the content. In the English context, Harris (2020) reports that “students from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are less likely to study history than their majority-ethnic peers” (p. 16). In this way, it can be easy to see why someone would not want to study history when they do not see themselves represented in history (Harris, 2020). Concerningly, the ways in which the SQA limits representations of history and the ways in which the participants in this study reported not expanding on the content included on course specifications for the sake of exams might be a factor in the steep drop off in progression from National Five to Higher and then to Advanced Higher ([Table 10](#)), especially for learners who do not see themselves represented in what is included in each topic.

The topics and content included in each of the topics, set out by the SQA, narrows the content that will appear in the exam and creates a canon of topics. Further narrowing this scope, the participants in this study reported choosing the same few topics based on how easy they perceive them to be in relation to exams. So, within the several topics set out by the SQA, individual history departments and teachers tend to choose the same few topics. According to the Historical Association Survey of History in Secondary Schools in Scotland (Smith et al., 2021), the *Atlantic Slave Trade* topic (British section of the course) is the most commonly taught topic at National level, with the *Civil Rights in the USA* (European and World

section) and *Migration and Empire* (Scottish section) topics closely behind. This means that a significant number of learners in Scotland are being exposed to these topics, all of which have social utility. Therefore, it is important that the course specifications for these topics, and, indeed, all topics, are critical and culturally responsive, and align with the social justice values evident in the CfE and Principles and Practice for Social Studies (Education Scotland, 2014). However, while it is important that these justice-oriented topics, like the *Civil Rights in the USA*, are being chosen, this is limited if they are being engaged with through a *container* approach (Kitson & McCully, 2005). In this way, “It cannot be assumed that students will transfer understanding from one context to another” (Kitson & McCully, 2005, p. 35). That is, there is a risk that learners are only presented with opportunities to engage with issues of civil rights, for example, from afar. In the English educational context, Sandhu et al. (2023) explain, “Many students in England study Black Civil Rights in the US, rather than in Britain, thereby implying this is an issue pertinent to the American, rather than the UK, context” (p. 5). This means that presenting issues of civil rights from afar, that is, civil rights as an issue in the USA, might allow history teachers to claim they engage with SJE but this instead protects them from actually engaging with issues of social justice that are also present outwith the context in which they teach them, notably, civil rights as an issue in Britain as well as in the USA. So, while it is promising that teachers, in this study and those who responded to the Historical Association Survey of History in Secondary Schools in Scotland, report teaching the *Civil Rights in the USA* topic, the impact might be limited unless it is engaged with in ways that embrace its social utility and work to problematise and challenge issues of power more locally (Dozono, 2021; Kitson & McCully, 2005).

No respondents to the Historical Association Survey of History in Secondary Schools in Scotland reported teaching the *Crusades* topic (Smith et al., 2021, p. 17). This means that the *European and World* section of the National Five course, outlined above and in [Table 9](#), is strictly limited to Eurocentric and American topics between 1744 and 1989. Altogether, the topics in general are dictated by the SQA, but of these topics, teachers choose the same few, further narrowing the topics to

which learners are exposed. For example, Beth and Chris both reported choosing topics based on how easy they perceive them to be for learners. This links to a results-focused exam culture and contributes to a canon of narrow topics in the history classroom in Scotland. This is problematic in relation to social justice because it severely limits the history content to which learners are exposed, thus offering a limited worldview.

Further, perspectives within the canon, as set out by the SQA and history teachers, are limited. For example, WWI is taught as a Scottish topic. This means that any response in an exam must explicitly link to Scotland. Correct answers that do not link directly to Scotland do not get a mark, despite being historically accurate. This is problematic because it reduces wider historical inquiry to exam mechanics, that is, answers are only considered to be correct if they link directly to Scotland, and thus, the wider context of the war is not considered. Additionally, the content included in the *Atlantic Slave Trade* topic is overwhelmingly narrow. Not only is Scotland's role in the slave trade completely absent from the course specification, topics covered include "fear of revolt", overtly portraying a white, hegemonic version of resistance against slavery (SQA, 2021, p. 11). With the *Atlantic Slave Trade* and *Civil Rights in the USA* topics being two of the most commonly taught topics, concerningly, the Black experience is "narrowly focused on two traumatic periods" (Smith et al., 2021, p. 17). In this way, "for white people, the past gets to be a fascinating exploration, but for Black people, the past gives evidence to a sustained experience of racial difference through oppression" (Dozono, 2021, p. 1). Further, referring to history in the English educational context, Sandhu et al. (2023) explain that there is "an incessant focus on white history, or where there is a Black presence in the history studied, this is invariably from the perspective of victimhood" (p. 5). So, while Scotland's role in WWI is heightened and foregrounded, its role is completely omitted from the Atlantic Slave Trade. Further, according to Sobande and Hill (2022), there is a "glaring absence and inadequacy of Black Scottish history taught at schools" (p. 37). They go on to say that the inadequacy in recognising "Scotland's involvement in the enslavement of

Black people illustrate[s] a denial of how aspects of its present-day economy have been made possible due to the profits of slavery that were pursued in the past” (Sobande & Hill, 2022, p. 84). Participants reported being aware of this discrepancy and are dissatisfied with it yet did not report doing anything to change it. For example, with regards to the *Atlantic Slave Trade* topic, Shannon stated:

There has to be that discussion because, you know, it is part of our shameful past and we do have to learn about it because, you know, to make sure things like this don't happen again. To make allowances for it, like, it just amazes me at times.

Shannon’s sentiments here do not appear to be linked to action. In this way, it is clear that Shannon reports dissatisfaction with the ways in which slavery is represented by the SQA but she does not report on her potential role in advocating for change to the course specification. As previously explored, this non-action does not align with an activist teacher identity (Sachs, 2003a) promoted by the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) and might indicate pressures teachers are under that might lead to teaching practice that revolves around performativity and/or exam results. Or, this might suggest that these potential institutional pressures related to exam results and attainment have, perhaps, enabled passivity in teachers. This seems to contradict the notion of teacher agency that education policy in Scotland seems to promote (Priestley et al., 2015). In other words, within the disjuncture between the CfE and the SQA, and the value-systems that seem to inform them, the policy intentions toward SJE are dismantled. Similarly, in talking about how narrow the course specifications are, combined with exam demands, Chris stated:

[...] especially in the fourth year course, that there’s no, there’s no space for that, for kind of different interpretations it’s all just kind of history as fact, and so, if you’re introducing ideas about certain more debatable perspectives then and including them alongside when you’re teaching facts about the Great War or facts about the slave trade over whatever, certain, kind of, key dates and then you throw in some of your political opinions, then

I think that's problematic and really should be avoided.

Interestingly, "throw[ing] in some of your political opinions" could actually be seen within the discipline as analysing, evaluating, and being critical of sources.

Sacrificing or avoiding this disciplinary practice to teach to exam demands instead leaves learners with an incomplete experience of history and the disciplinary practices of historians. This is problematic because history teachers, according to Dozono (2021), have a responsibility to interrupt these limited representations of history, otherwise they contribute to perpetuating them, and this demonstrates to learners which representations of history are valued in society.

With regards to the narrow scope of SQA course specifications, WWI was the most discussed example among participants and participants reported discontent with this because, in order for marks to be earned, every response must specifically be linked to Scotland. In this way, Anne, for example, feels that Scotland is "shoe-horned" into the topic. However, many participants still reported choosing to teach this topic, and this is linked to exam demands. Chris demonstrated this by saying:

I don't like teaching the Great War topic because it is ridiculously constrained by the SQA guidelines, which tell us that we can only use Scottish examples for a huge number of the things because it's part of the Scottish course. I think they're getting too political. I think the inclusion of the Great War course in the Scottish section was insanely stupid. It is a pointless piece of politicking that was done by somebody who has no grasp of history and really wanted to make a political point and, it's just, it's awful, I mean, if you're teaching about something like tactics and World War I, or conditions on the front, or new technologies, or tactics of the Suffragettes, or the decline of industries, all of these things are British. They are British effects, and you can't understand them in isolation. There wasn't a Scottish element in World War I, there were some Scottish units, yes, but I mean, there wasn't a Scottish Suffragettes campaign, the Scottish Suffragettes were part of the wider British campaign, you can't understand these things in isolation and

trying to understand them in isolation is insane. But we do that course because it's easy and that means that we can do the Migration and Empire course at Higher, which is also, because Higher is harder, and that's the easiest thing to do at Higher.

This statement from Chris is very telling. Not only does he suggest intense dissatisfaction with the narrow scope of the topic, he also indicates that topics are chosen based on how easy they are perceived to be. In this way, if the topics are considered to be easier, learners will perform better, thus achieving better results. Clearly, he disagrees with the way in which the topic is presented but teaches it because it is considered to be "easy". This circles back to the notion of a results-focused exam culture and indicates that Len is making decisions that are unhelpful to social justice. Putting exam demands aside, this statement also demonstrates just how contestable history education is and the role the selection of content has to play, as, because of the amount of history content, "tough choices" are made in selecting content, and "any choice of what to teach is inevitably underpinned by a set of political and cultural assumptions" (Kitson, 2021, pp. 37-38). Len shared a sentiment similar to Chris:

I do feel it's a bit laudatory of the war in that they don't get as much of a... they don't get as full a view as if you looked at the war all around. I also think that those courses are quite difficult because the SQA now wants, like, facts to be from a Scottish context not a British context. So, for example, there was a kid who had found how many people were employed as kitchen porters in the British Army, but they couldn't put it in an answer because they didn't have a Scottish breakdown of it, which just seems daft.

In addition to a narrow perspective on WWI, which many participants spoke about, the SQA offers a narrow representation of the Atlantic Slave Trade. Similarly to the *WWI* topic, the narrowness of the *Atlantic Slave Trade* topic also came up repeatedly throughout interviews. The Atlantic Slave Trade is taught as a British topic and the course specification fails to mention Scotland at all. While teachers can, and do, often include a Scottish perspective (Mullen, 2020), this means that



learners can successfully complete the course without learning anything about Scotland's role in the slave trade. This is problematic because it removes Scotland from the official narrative, unless teachers choose to include it. So, according to Mullen (2020), "While it seems unlikely that many teachers completely omit Scottish content, it seems reasonable to conclude that material on England is prioritised" (p. 31). Further, according to Harris (2021a), teachers "shape what parts of the curriculum students encounter, the depth in which different aspects are studied, the type of knowledge that is developed", and this "has an impact on how students see and understand the world in which they live" (p. 99). This is in contrast to Scotland seemingly being put on a pedestal in the WWI topic. To illustrate this, Len stated:

Some of the things, I think, that the focus on Scottish content in some other courses, like the Great War, almost, kind of, inverts what the narrative is about that conflict. So, we go from wasn't this needless and futile and a waste of life to wasn't this terrible but look how brave some men in kilts were, you know?

Removing Scotland from the slave trade, as beneficiaries of enslavement, and attempting to emphasise Scotland's role in WWI, as part of a saviour narrative, demonstrates the social utility of history. Presented this way, the silencing of Scotland's role in the slave trade, with a focus on an English perspective, for example, through the impact of the slave trade on ports in Bristol and Liverpool, "serv[es] to perpetuate an *It Wisnae Us* culture" (Mullen, 2020, p. 30). Similarly, presenting WWI from a strictly Scottish perspective suggests that Scotland's role in the war was unique and, when presented without the contextualisation of other countries, contributes to a saviour narrative, which, then, cannot be contradicted by the wrongdoing left out of the *Atlantic Slave Trade* topic. Importantly, "While Scots were under-represented in the eighteenth-century transatlantic slave trade, they were disproportionately over-represented in Caribbean slave-ownership and as overseers, planters and merchants across the British West Indies and North America more broadly" (Mullen, 2020, p. 29). It is this material that must be included in the SQA topic to offer learners more complete representations of history that account

for Scottish involvement in the slave trade, especially when this period of history has direct links to wealth and power relations today. If the topic was represented in a more culturally responsive way, then it would provide opportunities to identify and examine oppression within and outwith that time period. That is, in ways that work to understand the experiences of enslaved people, critique the ways in which people in Scotland benefited from the slave trade and enslavement, and trace the wealth and resulting power relations from that time period to today. In this way, the *Atlantic Slave Trade* topic can be “accountable to racialized experience” by “help[ing] students to uncover how history made us ‘other’” (Dozono, 2021, p. 6). So, this would be a means for exploring the notion that, “the impact of slavery and its commerce was proportionately greater” in Scotland than in England because “Scotland had a smaller economy than England yet industrialised faster” (Mullen, 2020, p. 31). This suggests that the impact of the slave trade on Scotland is important and, therefore, should not be excluded from the course specification.

Additionally, Michael felt strongly about historical representations and the need to acknowledge and learn about and from potentially uncomfortable truths and historical events. Citing several examples, Michael said it should not be problematic or political to teach these more accurate representations of history. He said:

If it is left-wing politics to be suggesting that young people should not be racist, should not be homophobic, should understand that the British Empire is more than waving a flag about and getting lots of, you know, Sahibs to say thank you. If it's actually looking at the reality of it, if it's looking at the fact that more Indians died under British rule of famine in India than Jews died in the Holocaust under the Nazi rule. Just because you don't like it doesn't mean it's not true. And if that is left-wing politics, then I don't know what to say, but I don't think it is, I just think it's truth and uncomfortable truth. And I think a lot of history teaching does have to be acknowledging that some truths are uncomfortable. We are conditioned to see ourselves as the goodies and I'm sure it's the same case in America as well. We're always the

goodies because we fought the Nazis. We're the goodies. We're the goodies. And you think, well, you're dealing with a, let's say six or seven year period of time in an entire nation's history, which encompasses, you know, to pick things at the drop of a hat, the Opium Wars, or indeed really any imperial expansion in Africa. If you look at the, you know, forced Westernization inverted commas of Aboriginal people, you know, we're not short of examples. You know, empires are not, the British Empire is not unique. Any empire that is built is built at the expense of other folk to make money for those building the empire. It has ever been us and it shouldn't be controversial to say that.

Here, Michael outlines several "uncomfortable truths" and identifies acknowledging them as pivotal to history education. Certain representations of history paint events of Empire in patriotic and unproblematic ways, which, according to Michael, "conditions" or positions people to avoid these uncomfortable pasts. This, too, demonstrates the contestability of history education and just how important it is to select content that is inclusive and representative, content that focuses on the experiences of everyday people rather than strictly those who benefited from oppression. Otherwise, these narrow representations of history that Michael identifies lead people to be uncritical of severely problematic pasts. Also, this opens opportunities for Boler's (1999) pedagogy of discomfort where teachers and learners lean into the potential discomfort as a way to question their beliefs and values. However, this cannot take place in a setting where most of the time is spent teaching to exam demands. Michael's comment here indicates that he understands the social utility of history and the relevance of it with regards to present-day power relations. However, this does not appear to translate into his exam-focused approach to teaching.

Because of the results-focused exam culture, participants reported having no time or space to stray from specifications to include what is not on the course specification. Teachers can include information that is not on course specifications, but participants reported not having any time or space to do so. However, this is

something that can be done. Problematically, though, it does not appear to be happening. All of this links back to a results-focused exam culture. As a result, learners miss out on a more complete and critical experience of history, which is concerning because it denies learners opportunities to engage with social justice and offers a version of history devoid of its transformative potential. Altogether, participants demonstrated that the ways in which the SQA requires teachers to assess are problematic and this impacts upon how they teach. This is problematic because it provides learners with an incomplete experience of history. Participants also demonstrated that the content in the history classroom within an already problematic results-focused exam culture is narrow and this too is of great concern.

## Chapter 6 - Conclusion and Recommendations

### 6.1 Summary of Findings and Discussion

The previous chapter presented and discussed the findings of this study through five themes. This chapter summarises these findings in relation to the research questions of this study (Section 6.1) and presents three recommendations based on these findings (Section 6.2). Finally, Section 6.3 of this chapter outlines the implications for social justice in the context of the history classroom in Scotland and offers concluding thoughts. This study sought to explore the following research questions:

1. To what extent do history teachers in Scotland engage with teaching for social justice?
  - a. What do they understand by social justice and social justice education?
  - b. In what ways does this understanding impact upon their reported teaching practice?
2. In relation to the Scottish educational context, what do history teachers see as their role in the classroom and how does this emerge in their reporting of their practice?

The data indicate that history teachers in Scotland describe and understand their professional and personal identities in different ways and this might reflect on what participants' see as their role in the classroom. Beth and Carrie, for example, reported identifying with the term *teacher* more than the term *history teacher*, and this aligns with Smith's (2018a) finding that Scotland's CfE has led to a weakening of subject identities and Biesta et al.'s (2015) indication of a move away from teachers as specialists in their subject to a "teacher of children" instead (p. 632). However, this contradicts a call from Donaldson (2011) that teachers should have "deep understandings and enthusiasm for their subject" (p. 12). While this indication of a weakened subject identity may reflect the interdisciplinary focus of the CfE, it is clear that participants did not report utilising the BGE phase for interdisciplinary learning, instead describing how they introduce SQA exam skills. Altogether, this suggests that the participants in this study see that their role in the classroom is to

teach to the test to ensure that learners do well in exams, and this is reportedly done at the expense of the actual discipline of history and a social justice approach to teaching and learning. Participants were split, however, when it came to the crossover of their personal and professional identities, with Anne and Shannon seeing separation between their lives inside and out of the classroom, likening it to acting or wearing different hats. On the other hand, David, Chris, Carrie, and Beth not only saw crossover between their personal and professional identities but reported drawing upon them in the classroom as a way to build relationships with learners, which is a key element of SJE.

In relation to Scotland's education system, participants indicated that their role in the classroom is to teach to the test and this impacts upon their reported teaching practice. So, in indicating that their role in the classroom is to teach to the test, participants reported teaching to the test, or teaching exam mechanics, techniques, and strategies explicitly and through what they described as rote learning rather than history-specific disciplinary practices. This includes training learners to complete exam questions in a particular amount of time and providing learners with formulas, phrases, and mnemonics to successfully complete exam questions. In this choice, they reported actively omitting discipline-specific practices for the sake of exam results. Participants also reported choosing topics based on how easy they are perceived to be in exams, introducing exam skills in the BGE phase, and covering problematically narrow representations of history. These representations of history are, according to the teachers in the present study, limited by SQA course specifications and then further narrowed by individual departments or teachers choosing the same few topics because they are perceived to be easier and thus, according to participants, result in higher exam results. Concerningly, participants reported disagreeing with this approach but described doing it anyway, thereby highlighting a potential lack of activism among history teachers in Scotland. This comes despite the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) advocating activism through the professional values of *social justice* and *integrity*, and requiring teachers "show professional courage and judgement to support and

challenge system improvement” (p. 11). Participants’ responses indicate a lack of activism and this suggests that there is a gap between their reported teaching practice and the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021). This is concerning with regards to social justice because their reported behaviour, thus, contributes to a results-focused exam culture and reinforces and perpetuates the access paradox.

The data also suggest that the history teachers in this study engage with teaching for social justice in limited ways, which might reflect a limited understanding of social justice and SJE and/or institutional pressures related to exam results, attainment, and/or promotion that potentially enable passivity in teachers. For example, participants unanimously reported seeing teaching to the test as teaching for social justice, and teaching in this way aligns with what they see their role in the classroom to be, that is, to teach to the test to ensure that learners pass SQA exams. In this way, they are confined by results and preparation for high-stakes testing. However, this is positioned well within their description of the nature of the Scottish educational context where they reported that exam results lead to social mobility, and, in this way, an approach to teaching that is geared towards exams is justified. So, participants understand social justice and SJE to be inextricably linked to exams, as they have reported a trend of using exams as a mechanism towards social justice, leading to a status quo of a results-focused exam culture in Scotland. In other words, their version of teaching for social justice is teaching to the test. Within this line of thinking, teaching to the test results in learners doing well in exams, learners then earn qualifications as a result of their exam results, and then use these qualifications to unlock opportunities in Scotland, and thus, social mobility is assured. This, however, is limited and lacking in that it serves a neoliberal agenda that is focused on performativity and economic productivity and lacks the focus on criticality that SJE offers. This is problematic for social justice because learners get a limited and incomplete experience of history, missing out on the discipline’s transformative potential as described throughout this thesis. This understanding of social justice impacts upon participants’ reported teaching practice by severely limiting the content and disciplinary practices that

learners are exposed to, thus ensuring an incomplete experience of history. Further, this understanding allows them to be complacent in the access paradox and justifies their approach to teaching and learning revolving around exams rather than exposure to the real and complicated practices of historians, a process that aligns strongly with SJE. This means that the disciplinary practices of historians can be used to teach for social justice in that, for example, they encourage learners how to be critical of sources. This, in turn, can help learners to approach problematic issues of power in critical ways.

Altogether, the data indicate a concerning landscape for SJE in the history classroom in Scotland. As a discipline, history has the potential to be transformative in both learning about oppression and justice-seeking movements throughout history, as well as equipping learners with the skills to identify and challenge oppression in society today. As a discipline, history aligns strongly with a social justice approach to teaching and learning. However, this is severely hindered by participants' reported adherence to a results-focused exam culture in Scotland. Problematically, participants reported disagreeing with how history is taught and learned in Scotland, but did not indicate taking many, and in several cases, any, steps towards changing it. Importantly, teachers are well-supported by the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) to challenge and interrupt this culture, yet most participants did not report challenging it. Those who did report taking steps towards challenging the SQA, specifically Catherine and Michael, did so in limited ways and were unsuccessful in their endeavours. This, in turn, leads to the perpetuation of a results-focused exam culture and ensures learners have limited experiences of the transformative potential of history.

While all nine participants in this study shared similar responses, this study is limited in that it has a small sample and, therefore, it is difficult to make generalisations about the population at large. However, as explored in Section 3.5 of this thesis, the sample is relatively reflective of the demographic characteristics provided by the GTCS and Education Scotland. Additionally the findings of this study align with several recent reports about the state of education and national



qualifications in Scotland (Hayward, 2023; Muir, 2022; OECD, 2021; Shapira et al., 2023; Stobart, 2021). Therefore, while more research may be needed, this study adds to the growing body of research calling for change to the nature of assessment in Scotland. More specifically, this study contributes new knowledge to the field by including the voices of history teachers and taking a more in-depth look into the impact of current assessment practices on history as a subject in the secondary school classroom in Scotland, rather than a broader exploration of assessment practices in secondary schools in Scotland.

Throughout this study, especially during the data analysis and writing up stages, I became keenly aware of and concerned by the nature of the analysis and the potential impact this might have on participants. On several occasions, I voiced concerns to my supervisors about how the participants might feel about the analysis of the statements they made and practices they reported in their workbooks and this led to thoughtful and productive discussion about the data and subsequent analysis. Throughout this process, while reviewing and discussing early drafts of the analysis, my supervisors encouraged more criticality of the data. For example, as referenced in our meeting minutes, they encouraged me to “read more into the findings” (December 13, 2022) and “be bolder in criticality” (March 21, 2023). With this advice in mind, along with several steps in place, each described below, I grew more confident in my analysis, its potential to paint a portrait of the realities of engaging with SJE in an education context stymied by high-stakes exams, as reported by participants, and the potential for this study to contribute to a wider and ongoing conversation around education and assessment in Scotland.

Alongside discussions with my supervisors about criticality and the nature of the analysis, I utilised my critically reflexive journal, described and exemplified throughout Chapter 3, throughout the data collection and analysis phases to navigate any tension that arose. For example, an entry in my journal reads, “At times, analysing the data has made me feel sad and frustrated. It is reassuring that participants seem to be confirming each other. I think this is quite revealing and certainly gives me a lot to think/write about.” In this way, critical reflexivity and

journaling, alongside discussions with my supervisors, helped me to untangle the messiness of the data analysis process and develop in my criticality as a researcher.

Further, as mentioned in Section 3.4.4, member checking was an important step following data collection. For example, I sent each participant their transcript to check and approve before anonymising. During this step, several participants redacted statements, which have been omitted from the transcript and subsequent analysis. This means that each participant had an opportunity to approve, alter, and/or redact what they said in the interview before the data was anonymised and analysed.

I also utilised narrative vignettes as a way to humanise the participants. Importantly, people live gendered, classed, and racialised lives and are situated in power relations, and this might impact one's understanding of and investment in SJE. Each participant volunteered their time to this study as well-intentioned and passionate educators. They all demonstrated having learners' best interests at heart in their teaching practice, and, importantly, the similarities in their responses seem to offer a critique of larger systems at play, and, thus, this study seeks to highlight, explore, and problematise that alongside the ongoing discussion around assessment practices in Scotland.

Additionally, in working through tension between the analysis and the potential impact on participants, I discussed the data and the nature of the analysis with a colleague. She bluntly stated that the participants said what they said and they each provided several examples of their reported practice, through their interviews and their workbooks, which do not appear to align with the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021). It therefore follows that the information provided by participants is analysed and considered in the Scottish educational context. Further, in preparation for a presentation, I shared the data and early analysis with a group of history teachers at a school in which I temporarily worked during this study. The group of history teachers spoke out in agreement with the data and this led to thoughtful discussion about the potential limitations of the current system.

After considerable time engaging with this data and reading it against several recently published reports, all of which were published after data collection, it is striking how strongly the statements made by participants align with the recently published reports. As all nine participants expressed disaffection towards the current system, especially with regards to history teaching, it is my hope that participants see their collective responses and my analysis of them as an indication that there might be wider dissatisfaction among history teachers in Scotland and it is my intention that this study and the statements made by participants be used specifically as a way forward for the teaching of history in Scotland and also in a way that contributes to the larger ongoing discussion around assessment in Scottish education (Hayward, 2023; Muir, 2022; OECD, 2021; Shapira et al., 2023; Stobart, 2021). This thesis and the statements made by participants contribute new knowledge to the field and offer insight into an ongoing conversation around assessment in Scottish education and the voices of these history teachers offer important insight into the realities of engaging with SJE in a neoliberal context.

This section summarised the findings of this study in relation to the research questions and outlined the steps taken with regards to the criticality of this study. The following section draws upon a recent example that further demonstrates the nature of SQA exam results in Scotland before making three recommendations as a way forward towards social justice.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

### **6.2.1 #NoWrongPath in a Results-Focused Exam Culture?**

Shortly before SQA results day in August of 2022, Twitter became flooded with messages telling young people there is #NoWrongPath. The irony of a social media campaign, within a results-focused exam culture, to remind young people that they are not defined by their exam results seemed to be lost on many (Figures [7](#) and [8](#)). The well-intentioned Tweets came from within the education sector, including from teachers, schools, charities, and educational organisations. The campaign spread to include messages from official NHS and Police Scotland

accounts, as well as several other organisations across Scotland. In short, Twitter users told of their struggles, setbacks, and altered timelines, ending with a toxically positive *but things are great now!* outlook. It is not surprising that this rhetoric came from the same society that dished out rounds of applause for healthcare workers instead of fair wages, effective PPE, and safe working conditions in the height of a global pandemic. These messages are well-intentioned yet hypocritical and performative in that they ignore the larger systems at play.

This #NoWrongPath discourse is dangerous because the reality is that these qualifications still act as a form of currency in Scotland and will continue to act as such until the results-focused system is changed. It is clear that Scotland exists in a results-focused exam culture, otherwise, there would be no need for a Twitter campaign telling young people that their exam results do not define them. In this way, the social media campaign makes it seem as though non-qualification-based routes are just as valuable while also saying they are valued less than qualification-based routes. In other words, this is not something that would need to be said if society treated them in the same way. Further, the timing of the campaign, just days before results were released, suggests that exam success is the first choice and so-called alternative paths are the backup plan. Young people should not be told that there is #NoWrongPath while simultaneously maintaining a system that relies on inequitable and unfair high-stakes testing.



Figure 7: (DYW Scotland, 2022)



Figure 8: (SQA, 2022c)

In light of the data from this study and the omnipresent exam culture demonstrated above and described by participants, I will now make three recommendations that aim to pave a way forward, incorporating a stronger social justice approach to teaching and learning history in Scotland. Firstly, an overhaul of the assessment system in Scotland is required. Secondly, there needs to be a stronger focus on social justice in the history classroom. Finally, increased activism from history teachers should be encouraged. Each of these three recommendations will now be discussed in turn.

### 6.2.2 Overhaul the Assessment System

Firstly, to promote social justice, there needs to be an overhaul of the assessment system in Scotland. This move will be difficult in a culture that is defined by success in exams. However, this move will pave a path towards a more equitable system than one that relies on high-stakes, one-size-fits-all exams. An overhaul of the assessment system will also create space for more of a social justice approach to teaching and learning where time is not spent teaching to narrow exam demands, but instead, in the history classroom, for example, engaging with the disciplinary practices of historians, exploring multiple perspectives, and making

history relevant to the lives of young people in the present. It is important to note that the SQA is currently under review and this recommendation coincides with the findings and recommendations of several recent reports regarding the current state of education in Scotland, including assessment through national SQA exams (Hayward, 2023; Muir, 2022; OECD, 2021; Shapira et al., 2023; Stobart, 2021). This means that the sentiments expressed by the participants in this study are not completely unfounded and appear to reflect on-going dissatisfaction with the nature of SQA exams and indicates the need for change to the current high-stakes assessment system.

Based on the responses of participants, it is clear that the Senior Phase does not align with the vision of the CfE because it narrowly focuses on preparation for high-stakes national exams. This misalignment was also outlined in the OECD (2021) report. As such, one of the recommendations set out by the OECD (2021) report is for the adaptation of the Senior Phase to match the vision of the CfE. According to the OECD (2021), “the alignment between the learning aims and objectives and the four capacities in the Senior Phase is limited by the type of assessments and subsequent learning practices imposed by restrictive coursework to prepare for national qualifications” (p. 49). This means that preparation for exams hinders the vision of the CfE, and, “as a result, the learning approaches designed in CfE are not fully realised in secondary schools” (OECD, 2021, p. 52). Additionally, participants in the present study reported utilising time in the BGE phase to introduce exam-specific skills and this contributes to the rift between the vision of the CfE and the reality of SQA exam demands in the history classroom in Scotland. This approach, then, “[creates] considerable tensions and obstacles for realising the intentions of CfE” (OECD, 2021, p. 61). Further, *Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education* (Muir, 2022) echoes the recommendations of the OECD (2021) report, calling for the establishment of a new qualifications body. Similarly, in their report, *Choice, Attainment and Positive Destinations: Exploring the Impact of Curriculum Policy Change on Young People*, Shapira et al. (2023) call for a shift towards more continuous assessment in place of

national exams. A shift away from one-size-fits-all exams will align more strongly with the vision of the CfE, including the four capacities (confident individuals, successful learners, effective contributors, and responsible citizens). This shift will also align more strongly with a social justice approach to teaching and learning because it would take the focus away from teaching to the test explicitly and through rote learning, allowing for a more in-depth exploration of history content and the disciplinary practices of historians. In turn, this will offer learners a more complete experience of the transformative potential of the discipline of history, which aligns strongly with a social justice approach to teaching and learning.

While it is clear that the ways in which learners are assessed in Scotland are not aligned with the vision of the CfE and participants reported spending a considerable amount of time teaching to the test, it is unclear what specifically should replace the high-stakes exams currently in place. However, building on the OECD (2021) and Muir (2022) reports, the interim report of the *Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment in Scotland* (Hayward, 2023) calls for a reduction in external examination as well as a leaver's certificate. In this way, the Hayward (2023) review builds on the earlier reports, acknowledging change to the current assessment system is required, and goes further to suggest changes that respond to the issues raised in earlier reports. According to the review, "although never the intention of those who designed the qualifications, learners report narrow, often formulaic experiences in national qualifications where learning feels distanced from life" (Hayward, 2023, p. 4). While this suggests that the current assessment system is not designed to be "narrow" and "formulaic", learners report experiencing it in this way and this is in line with the ways in which the history teachers in the present study reported the nature of assessment. A reduction in external examination and the introduction of a leaver's certificate would aim to offer a method of assessment that does not rely on a high-stakes exam at the end of the school year. In turn, this approach to assessment aligns more strongly with the vision of the CfE and SJE, where themes of social justice are valued and learners feel empowered to see learning as part of a commitment to social justice.

In the search for a more effective and realistic way to assess learners in the history classroom in Scotland, I find it challenging not to draw upon my own experiences as a learner and teacher in Massachusetts, where history is not externally examined. This is where the scale between my insider voice and my outsider voice, explored in the introduction of this thesis, leans towards the outsider voice. While often designed at the departmental level, assessment in history typically involves an essay, which is internally marked. This essay ([Appendix J](#)) is reminiscent of the assignment in the history classroom in Scotland, though the version with which I am familiar is much more open-ended and is not completed under the perils of exam conditions. In my experience as a learner, I found this to be a useful exercise that allowed me to develop a historical argument over time and support it with sources, rather than regurgitate information that I crammed the night before the exam and most definitely forgot the moment after the exam. Further, as a teacher, I was able to work with learners throughout the process of researching and writing their essays, providing feedback along the way and encouraging them to be critical of sources, drawing upon the disciplinary practices we honed since the beginning of the year. In turn, by continuously engaging in historical inquiry, learners mostly produced essays that were well-planned with arguments that were well-supported. This essay, along with their homework, classwork, tests, quizzes, and participation averaged out to a final grade for the course. So, through this assessment approach, tests are still involved, but have much lower stakes than the current system in Scotland. For learners, this process reflects a range of assessment types over a period of time, allowing for feedback and growth, as well as the ability to explore different ways of assessing and being able to play to their strengths throughout the school year. This stands in stark contrast to a one-size-fits-all exam regimen. Further, for teachers, this means there is more time and space for a social justice approach to teaching and learning because they are not spending time teaching to narrow exam demands. This shift, in turn, would provide an opportunity to align their practice to more strongly mirror the discipline of history in that they can help learners engage more fully with



historical inquiry, such as evaluating sources, contextualising, and making evidence-based claims (Stantiago, 2019).

A shift from a one-size-fits-all qualification system to something akin to a diploma-based system, potentially similar to the one I grew up in and have taught in, and currently being explored by the ongoing *Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment in Scotland* (Hayward, 2023), would be a drastic change for a society that seems to revolve around high-stakes exams. It would, however, more strongly align with the vision of the CfE and allow learners to show what they know in more realistic ways and under more realistic conditions. With regards to a social justice approach to teaching and learning, this would be a more effective approach to assessment than high-stakes exams.

### **6.2.3 Stronger Focus on Social Justice**

Secondly, in addition to an overhaul of the assessment system, there needs to be a stronger focus on social justice in the history classroom in Scotland. Otherwise, history content is wasted without this focus. While there will be opportunities for this to occur through an overhaul of the assessment system, importantly, changes must also be made to the current system so that learners in the classroom right now are provided with opportunities to engage with SJE in the history classroom. So, the strengthening of social justice as something that is integral, rather than added, to the history classroom can be done by not only overhauling assessment, but by allowing for more inclusive content to be incorporated within the current assessment model rather than just the narrow and limited perspectives currently present on SQA course specifications. Eventually, this shift towards wider representation in history content and a stronger focus on the disciplinary practices of historians would replace the current focus on teaching and learning exam skills. With less time spent teaching to the test, more time can be spent exploring social justice content and developing the critical disciplinary practices of historians, which are integral to identifying and challenging oppression and contribute to the transformative potential the discipline of history has.

Importantly, Parkhouse (2018) states that the literature around SJE is often seen by teachers as “conceptual” and offers “little guidance on how the theory speaks to their daily instruction” (p. 281). This means that teaching for social justice might be considered complex by some teachers, or it might be considered inaccessible on top of other demands. This indicates a need for social justice to be a stronger focus in schools so that it is no longer considered to be an out of touch approach. In the meantime, therefore, while the current system is under review, content on existing SQA course specifications needs to be revised and expanded to include more representation of marginalised voices. While there is scope for this now, as teachers are not required to teach only the content present on course specifications (Mullen, 2020), it is clear that participants did not report going out of their way to incorporate content not included on course specifications, with several participants citing a difficult balance between including social justice content, which many perceived as additional content, and preparing learners for exams. These reported time constraints are due to teaching to the test, including teaching exam mechanics, techniques, and strategies explicitly and through rote learning, and covering the narrow perspectives on course specifications. Therefore, the SQA must revise existing course specifications to offer more inclusive representations of history. For example, with regards to the frequently taught *Atlantic Slave Trade* topic, the SQA should revise the course specification to include reference to Scotland. Scotland’s role is currently omitted from the course specification, despite its integral role in the British Empire’s nearly 300 year endeavour in human trafficking and forced labour. Further, the SQA should revise the course specification to be more sensitive to the Black experience during this time period. For example, the existing course specification represents uprisings on plantations from a white, enslaver perspective, titling this section of the topic as *Fear of Revolt* (SQA, 2021, p. 11). Instead, this section could be reframed as *Opportunities for Freedom*, for example, and seek to more effectively incorporate the stories and voices of enslaved people. A shift away from narrow and limited representations of history would enable a stronger social justice approach to teaching and learning, thus providing

learners with a more complete and realistic experience of history as a discipline. Firstly, they would be able to engage with the complicated, yet important disciplinary practices of historians, and this engagement in historical inquiry will help learners understand that history is important because “storylines do not just exist; people create them. As such, alternative narratives can also be constructed” (Santiago, 2019, p. 97). Secondly, they would have more time and space to explore the non-dominant representations of history to which the current course specifications have limited them. Importantly, “Diversifying the curriculum is important, but [...] teachers and students need to engage in a type of analysis that raises questions about whatever is included” (Kumashiro, 2004, p. 52). This means that, while incorporating multiple and more inclusive representations of history is important, it is also vital for learners to engage in historical inquiry to question the dominant narratives in history with which they are currently presented. This builds upon Santiago’s (2019) notion that representations of history are constructed and learners should be equipped to interrogate them. Thirdly, they would have more time and space to engage in activism, applying what they learn in history beyond the walls of the classroom, and this is paramount to a social justice approach to teaching and learning. It would also align strongly with the CfE’s capacities of *effective contributors* and *responsible citizens*. Revising and expanding the representation on current SQA course specifications is something that can be done in the short term while the wider assessment model is redesigned (or ideally abolished). As a result, learners will have greater access to more inclusive representation in history topics and, ideally, the inclusion of often marginalised voices in history. Additionally, history teachers will be able to teach in ways that align more strongly with the discipline of history, which is something that participants, like Anne and Michael, reported finding tension in the current system.

Importantly, there has been increased activity and interest in anti-racist education (CRER, 2021), recent policy developments in LGBT-inclusive education (Education Scotland, 2022) and children’s rights (Education Scotland, 2023a), as well as increased visibility of decolonising work in Scotland (EIS, 2022; NASUWT, 2022).

However, at the same time, there is ongoing denialism (Sewell et al., 2019), which is inherent to Scotland's politics, as well as being imported from England and the USA. This means that, while there is movement on this front, there continues to be pushback in favour of the confining neoliberal educational context that lacks criticality. Further, based on the responses of participants in this study, it does not seem likely that they will go to great lengths to incorporate this alongside the ways in which they reported teaching to SQA exams across the BGE and Senior Phase. Therefore, while increased engagement from individual teachers is a positive and necessary step towards SJE, a stronger focus on social justice needs to come from the SQA in this context because it is the SQA designing the courses to which the participants in this study report tailoring their practice across phases. Further, impact at only the micro-level is not as transformative as it could be at the wider, societal-level, with changes from the SQA, for example (Zembylas, 2021).

#### **6.2.4 More Activism from Teachers**

Finally, and also within the existing system, history teachers in Scotland need to engage in more activism on behalf of the discipline and learners. In this way, they need to “make things happen rather than let things happen” (Sachs, 2003a, p. 144). An activist history teacher embraces a version of SJE that registers high in sociopolitical emphasis (Dover, 2015) and is a *risk-taker* in the classroom who embraces the social utility of history (Kitson & McCully, 2005). This means that activist history teachers teach *about*, *through*, and *for* social justice to help learners learn about examples of oppression and justice-seeking movements throughout history and incorporate opportunities for learners to identify and challenge oppression in society today. In this way, and in line with the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021), history teachers in Scotland “create opportunities for learning to be transformative in terms of challenging assumptions and expanding the worldviews of learners” (GTCS, 2021, p. 9). Additionally, an activist history teacher embodies the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) in that their practice is underpinned by social justice values and integrity, and they are able to use “professional courage” to

critically analyse and challenge systems not fit for purpose (p. 11). Importantly, the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) support teachers in activism and risk-taking, and, based on examples of disengagement with the standards, as reported by the participants in this study, there is scope for more engagement from the GTCS in holding teachers accountable to the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021). Further, the activist history teacher in Scotland fully embraces the possibilities set out by the CfE Principles and Practice for Social Studies (Education Scotland, 2014), including promoting citizenship, encouraging participation, and helping learners to “[consider] and [develop] their roles as active and informed citizens” (p. 3). While this description does not describe the participants of this study, based on their reported practice, it does describe what an activist history teacher can and should look like, as supported and advocated by current policies in Scottish education. Therefore, history teachers in Scotland should shift their practice to align more strongly with these policies rather than the narrow, exam-focused practice as reported by the participants in this study.

Activism is a key component of SJE (Agarwal et al., 2010; Carr, 2008; Dover, 2013a, 2015; Nicol et al., 2019; Picower, 2012a; Ramlackhan, 2020; Sachs, 2001, 2003a; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004a, 2004b). There is already scope for this in the Scottish context, as it is well within the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) for teachers to question and challenge the existing system. For example, Standard 2.2.1 states that teachers “have an enhanced and critically informed understanding of education systems”, including the ability “to actively consider and critically question national and international influences on education policy, practices and systems development” (GTCS, 2021, p. 8). This stands to support teachers in using their experiences of teaching history for the sake of narrow and limited national exams to question its utility and advocate for change. Further, Standard 3.3.2 states that teachers “engage in reflective practice to develop and advance career-long professional learning and expertise”, including being able to “show professional courage and judgement to support and challenge system improvement” (GTCS, 2021, p. 11). This standard supports teachers in advocating for change.

Importantly, it acknowledges that it takes “courage” to do so. In a way, it recognises how entrenched certain practices are in Scottish education, suggesting that advocating against them might feel like “going against the grain” (Cochran-Smith, 1991, p. 280). According to Sachs (2003a), an activist teaching profession “is an aspiration that works strongly in the interests of students and the communities in which schools are located” (p. 134). This means that learners stand to benefit from their teachers' activism, which aligns strongly with a social justice approach to teaching and learning. Learners benefit because they are exposed to a more realistic version of the discipline of history, which they can then apply to their lives outside the classroom. Teachers benefit because they are able to teach in ways that align more strongly with the historical inquiry in which they were trained. This would mitigate the tension that participants, like Anne and Michael, reported between their teaching practice and training as historians.

The participants in this study made it clear that they are dissatisfied with the current system and recognise that it is problematic; however, they reported very few examples of taking steps towards changing it. Increased activism from history teachers in Scotland would also be in line with the previously explored examples throughout the literature of teachers engaging in activism at the micro- and macro-levels (Dover et al., 2016; Picower, 2011; Smith, 2019a). Increased activism from history teachers in favour of a more equitable system aligns strongly with a social justice approach to teaching and learning and would impact positively upon the experiences learners have of history as a discipline. It is clear that the ways in which the SQA assesses are problematic. It is also clear that the content within those assessments is problematic. Participants reported dissatisfaction with all of this but reported very few instances of taking steps towards changing it, instead, explicitly teaching to it and across phases. With support from the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) already in place, history teachers in Scotland should exercise their “professional courage” (Standard 3.3.2) to take steps towards changing the current system with which they report dissatisfaction.

### 6.3 Implications and Concluding Thoughts

Participants in this study have suggested the existence of a results-focused exam culture in Scotland and demonstrated the ways in which they reported acting passively in this system despite reporting that they disagree with it. Participants were unanimous in how they spoke about the nature of the SQA and the ways in which they teach to the test explicitly and through rote learning. For example, participants reported several examples of the formulas, banks of phrases, and mnemonics they use in an effort to support learners in exams. They also reported introducing exam skills in the BGE phase to maximise the amount of time learners have to hone their exam skills, even though only around half of learners progress from BGE to National Five (Smith, 2019b). Despite a relatively small sample size of nine participants, the demographics of the sample are relatively reflective of the wider population of history teachers in Scotland. However, there is scope for more voices to be heard, and for voices to be heard in different ways. For example, due to the limitations of data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic, this study did not explore or observe actual classroom practice. As such, the data in this study is a snapshot of participants' reported practice. Future research could build upon the findings of this study through observations of classroom practice, and/or through more in-depth interviews or focus groups. The responses of the participants in this study, though, align strongly with the findings and recommendations of both the OECD (2021) and Muir (2022) reports, both of which were published after the data was collected for this study. The findings of this study combined with the findings of the OECD (2021) and Muir (2022) reports overwhelmingly suggest the need for change in the ways in which learners in Scotland are assessed as a matter of social justice. Abolishing high-stakes national exams is a matter of social justice because high-stakes exams serve a neoliberal agenda where the focus is on individual performance and does not take into consideration the barriers, or lack of barriers, that a learner may face. Similarly, SJE in the history classroom should be a priority in a move towards social justice because a social justice approach to teaching and learning history encourages learners to engage in criticality of sources and dominant

representations of the past and emphasises the importance of activism. In this way, through a social justice approach to history, learners can examine oppression, problematic issues of power, and justice-seeking movements of the past and use this as a tool to identify and challenge oppression in society today.

While this study specifically focuses on the history classroom, the issues around assessment are experienced more widely across secondary education in Scotland and this is evident in the recent OECD (2021) and Muir (2022) reports. As these reports have established concerns over the ways in which learners are currently assessed in the Scottish context, and this study contributes to these concerns, moving forward, there needs to be further research regarding tangible changes to the ways in which history is taught and learned. That is, there needs to be more research into what can be done to shift away from the practices the participants of this study reported. This could, for example, involve research into actual classroom practice, unlike the reported practice explored in this study. This could also take the form of focus groups with history teachers seeking alternative ways to assess in the history classroom. Additionally, learners could also be consulted to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences in studying history in Scotland. Further, with regards to policy, there needs to be sweeping change to the assessment system. Insight from the further research into assessment and social justice in the history classroom in Scotland can work to inform policy changes. Finally, with regards to practice, more activism from history teachers on behalf of the discipline is required. In line with the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) and within the current landscape of re-examining the current assessment system, history teachers in Scotland have ample space to act on behalf of learners and the discipline of history. So, future research and change would be an ideal opportunity for history teachers in Scotland to engage in activism on behalf of the discipline of history, which will hopefully lead to changes that make the teaching and learning of history in the Scottish context align more strongly with both a social justice approach to teaching and learning as well as the transformative potential of the history as a discipline.



Altogether, a social justice approach to teaching and learning in the secondary school history classroom in Scotland is important. The participants in this study reported practices that do not align with SJE but instead work to serve a results-focused exam culture and the confines of a neoliberal context. Change is therefore necessary as a way forward with regards to advancing social justice. Changes to current policy and practice will lead to a version of history teaching that is more critical, transformative, inclusive, and applicable to the world around us; a version of history teaching that encourages the examination of potentially uncomfortable pasts and our own beliefs and values; and a version of history teaching that supports learners in being critical, engaging in activism, and developing a questioning attitude. All of this works to challenge the dangers of neoliberalism and works towards protecting democratic processes. Changes to the current system and the ways in which the participants in this study reported passivity around it will lead to an educational context where teachers can teach *about, through, and for* social justice and where learners can engage with history in more complex, realistic, and transformative ways.

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## Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form



### **Participant Information Sheet for Teachers**

**Name of Department:** Education

**Title of Project:** Exploring Teacher Identity and Teaching for Social Justice in the History Classroom

#### **Introduction**

My name is Christina Accardi and I am a History teacher and PhD researcher at the University of Strathclyde, under the supervision of Dr Claire Cassidy and Dr Navan Govender. I am working on a project that explores social justice education in History classrooms in Scotland.

#### **What is the purpose of this project?**

The purpose of this project is to explore the understandings History teachers in the Scottish education system have of social justice education, how these understandings impact on what they see as their role as a teacher within the Scottish context, and how their individual identities might affect their classroom practice.

#### **Do you have to take part?**

No, participation in this project is entirely voluntary. Should you choose to participate, you may withdraw from the project without reason or consequence at any time until data is anonymised at the time of analysis.

#### **What will you do in the project?**

If you choose to volunteer to participate in this project, you will be asked to

1. Sign a consent form
2. Complete a demographic survey
3. Create an identity chart showing some factors that shape your identity as a History teacher
4. Annotate an SQA History exam question (combined, tasks 3 and 4 should take less than one hour)
5. Participate in an audio recorded interview, lasting around one hour

For your convenience, the interviews will take place at a time and location of your choosing. This includes the option of Zoom or a phone call.

#### **Why have you been invited to take part?**

You have been invited to take part in this project because you are a History teacher in Scotland who holds registration with the GTCS.

#### **What are the potential risks to you in taking part?**

We do not anticipate any risks in participating in this project, although we understand and are respectful of the potential vulnerability involved in exploring personal beliefs, values, and experiences. For this reason, you will be able to withdraw at any time without consequence and are invited to only answer questions with which you are comfortable.

#### **What information is being collected in the project?**

Information collected from the above tasks will be anonymised to protect confidentiality. All participants will be given pseudonyms and names of pupils, colleagues, schools, and local authorities will not be used.

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**Who will have access to the information?**

All data will be kept confidential and the identities of participants will be anonymous. Only the researchers, and potentially examiners, will have access to the data.

However, if it is clear that you, colleagues, or pupils are at risk of harm, reporting procedures of individual schools and local authorities will be followed.

**Where will the information be stored and how long will it be kept for?**

Data will be stored securely on a password protected laptop and folder on the University of Strathclyde server. Any hard copies of data will be stored in a locked cabinet, to which only the researcher has access. All data will be securely destroyed no later than five years following successful completion of this project, in case of subsequent publications and presentations.

Please also read our [Privacy Notice for Research Participants](#)

**What happens next?**

If you would like to volunteer to participate in this project, please use [this form](#) to express your interest. If you would like to learn more about this project, please feel free to reach out to Christina using the contact details below.

You will then be required to sign a consent form to participate in this project.

Upon completion of the project, all participants will be provided with a summary of the project. Participants will be provided with a full copy of the completed thesis upon request. There is a possibility of subsequent publications and presentations. In the event of presentations and publications, all data will remain anonymised to protect confidentiality and anonymity.

If you do not want to participate in this project, we thank you for your time and consideration in reading this information sheet.

**Researcher Contact Details**

Christina Accardi



**Chief Investigator Details**

Dr Claire Cassidy



Dr Navan Govender



This research was granted ethical approval by the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee.

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the research, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact:

Secretary to the University Ethics Committee  
Research & Knowledge Exchange Services  
University of Strathclyde  
Graham Hills Building  
50 George Street, Glasgow, G1 1QE

Telephone: 0141 548 3707  
Email: [ethics@strath.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@strath.ac.uk)

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**Consent Form for Teachers**

**Name of Department:** Education

**Title of Project:** Exploring Teacher Identity and Teaching for Social Justice in the History Classroom

I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.	
I confirm that I have read and understood the Privacy Notice for Participants in Research Projects and understand how my personal information will be used and what will happen to it (i.e. how it will be stored and for how long).	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, up to the point where data is anonymised, without having to give a reason and without any consequences.	
I understand that I can request the withdrawal from the project of some personal information and that whenever possible researchers will comply with my request. This includes the following personal data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- audio recordings of interviews that identify me;</li> <li>- my personal information from transcripts of the interviews.</li> </ul>	
I understand that anonymised data (i.e. data that do not identify me personally) cannot be withdrawn once they have been included in the project.	
I understand that any information recorded in the research will remain confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available.	
I consent to being a participant in the project.	
I consent to being audio recorded as part of the project.	

Name of Participant	Signature of Participant	Date

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# History Teachers in Scotland

Call for Participants



**EXPLORING  
SOCIAL JUSTICE  
EDUCATION IN  
HISTORY  
CLASSROOMS  
IN SCOTLAND**

Scan the QR code for more  
information and to  
register your interest!  
Thank You!



At most two hours in total



Completed remotely



Help us explore teacher  
identity & teaching for social  
justice in the History classroom

All History Teachers in  
Scotland are Welcome!



University of  
**Strathclyde**  
**Glasgow**

## Appendix C: Blank Workbook



### **Thank you for volunteering to participate in this project exploring social justice education in History classrooms in Scotland!**

#### **Participation in this project includes 5 parts**

1. Sign a consent form
2. Complete a demographic survey
3. Create an identity chart showing some factors that shape your identity as a History teacher
4. Annotate an SQA History exam question (combined, tasks 3 and 4 should take less than one hour)
5. Participate in an audio recorded interview, lasting around one hour

You are receiving this workbook because you have volunteered to participate in this project and have completed parts 1 and 2.

This workbook contains parts 3 and 4, which will be used as a starting point for part 5.  
If possible, please print this workbook and write directly on it.

Please complete the tasks in this workbook *before* our interview.

Please bring this workbook to our interview.

If our interview is via Zoom or phone call, please email your completed workbook to Christina before our interview time.

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to Christina at



### **PART 3 - Creating an Identity Chart**

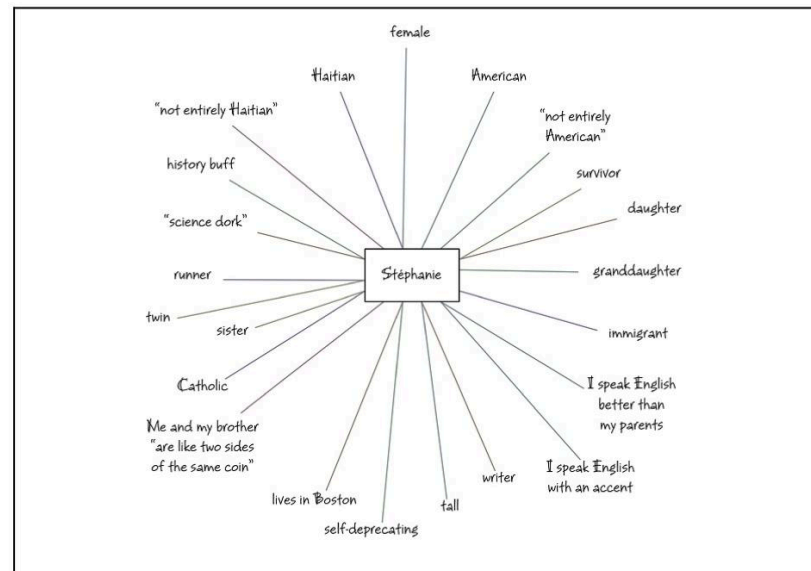
#### **What is an Identity Chart?**

An [identity chart](#) is a “diagram that individuals fill in with words and phrases they use to describe themselves as well as the labels that society gives them.” Identity charts are frequently used in [Facing History](#), an educational organisation focused on teaching history for equity and social justice, as a way to help young people explore the many factors that make up their identity. Identity charts can also be used in the classroom to help learners identify the many factors that make up historical figures and characters in literature. Identity charts will be used in this project to help you to explore and us to discuss the many factors that make up your own identity and how these elements may contribute to or reveal themselves through your teaching practice.

#### **Your Task**

Construct your own identity chart on the next page.

#### **Example**



<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/identity-charts>

Your Identity Chart



#### **PART 4 - Annotating an SQA Exam Question**

##### **Your Task**

Annotate the SQA exam question on the following page to demonstrate how you would teach the content required to successfully answer this question.

You do not need to answer the question, but demonstrate how you would engage with the question as a teacher.

##### **A Few Things to Consider**

- How might you teach the content required to answer this question?
- Does this question bring any particular resources, people, or events to mind?
- What tools might you use to teach the content required to answer this question?
- What connections can you make between the content and the lives of learners?

Source A is from a textbook written by modern historians, published in 2013.

##### **Source A**

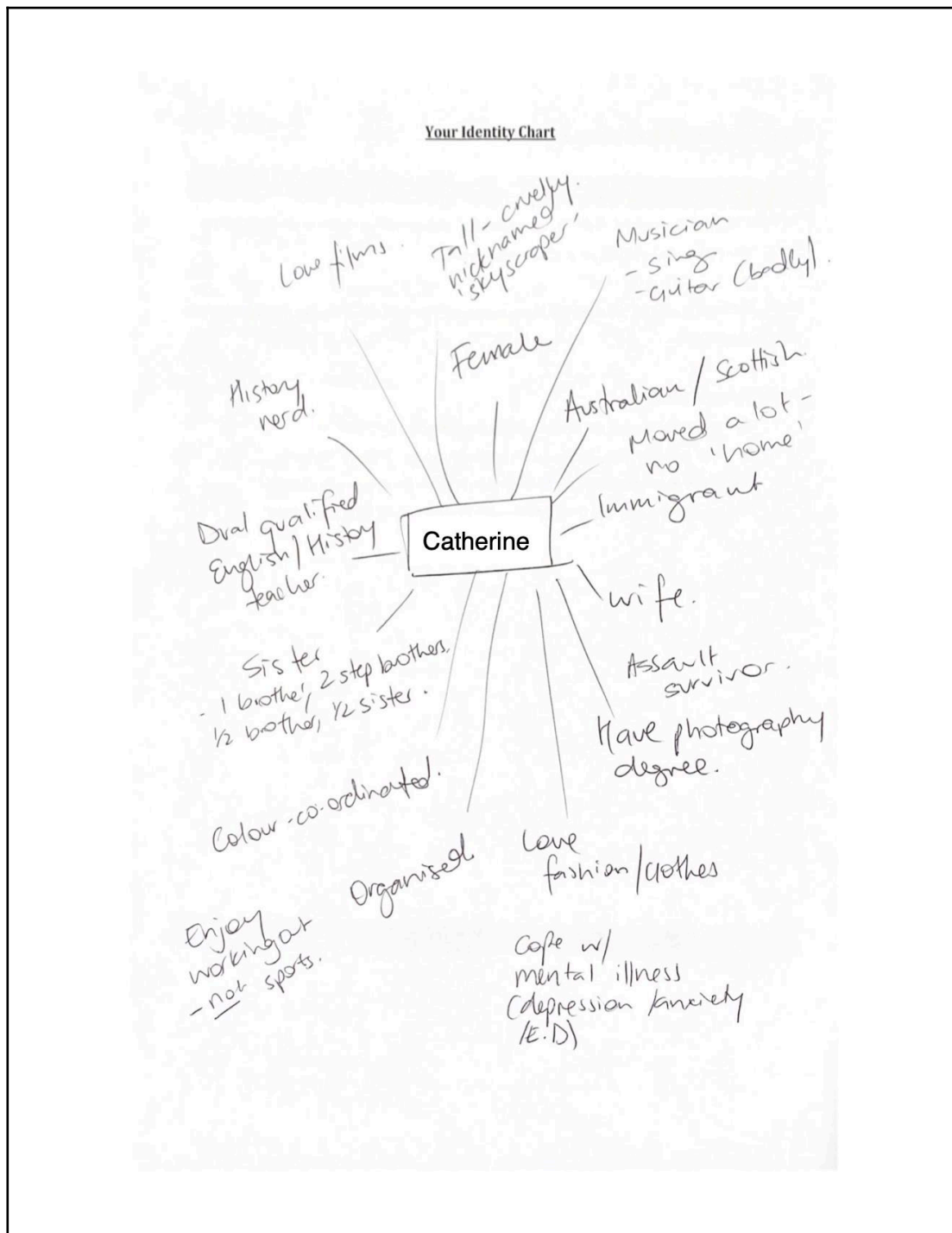
Slavery had been abolished in the 1860s but the Southern states of the USA used Jim Crow laws to maintain a segregated society. Black children were forbidden to attend school with white children. At work, black Americans collected their pay separately from whites. There were also strict bans on whites and blacks marrying. In 1896, the Supreme Court ruled that such segregation of black people from white people was acceptable. Their ruling was called the 'separate but equal' decision.

77. Evaluate the usefulness of Source A as evidence of the ways in which the Jim Crow laws segregated black and white Americans.

(You may want to comment on what type of source it is, who wrote it, when they wrote it, why they wrote it, what they say and what has been missed out.)

[https://www.sqa.org.uk/pastpapers/papers/papers/2018/N5\\_History\\_OP\\_2018.pdf](https://www.sqa.org.uk/pastpapers/papers/papers/2018/N5_History_OP_2018.pdf)

Appendix D: Example of a Completed Workbook



Also provide lots of bits of info - what choice sticks best.

- Content would be well known before tackling this q.
  - ↳ taught in different ways eg video, 'lecture', info hunt + w/ different tasks to better store info.
- would explicitly teach structure - 1 use TACO + FUE mnemonics.
  - ↳ how to write.
- would do I do - we do - you do
  - ↳ Break down model response
  - ↳ Co-construct a second response.
  - ↳ independently write 3rd.

Requires 3 sources / 3 questions

Source A is from a textbook written by modern historians, published in 2013.

Source A

Slavery had been abolished in the 1860s but the Southern states of the USA used Jim Crow laws to maintain a segregated society. Black children were forbidden to attend school with white children. At work, black Americans collected their pay separately from whites. There were also strict bans on whites and blacks marrying. In 1896, the Supreme Court ruled that such segregation of black people from white people was acceptable. Their ruling was called the 'separate but equal' decision.

77. Evaluate the usefulness of Source A as evidence of the ways in which the Jim Crow laws segregated black and white Americans.

(You may want to comment on what type of source it is, who wrote it, when they wrote it, why they wrote it, what they say and what has been missed out.)

T- 2013

A- historians

C- quotes 1/2/3  
x2

D- 2 omissions.

Feature - Source A written in 2013.

PUR.

Useful - this makes it more useful

Reason - because they would have access to lots of sources to write a balanced account of how Jim Crow laws segregated Black + white Americans.

[https://www.sqa.org.uk/pastpapers/papers/papers/2018/N5\\_History\\_QP\\_2018.pdf](https://www.sqa.org.uk/pastpapers/papers/papers/2018/N5_History_QP_2018.pdf)

\* use colour code to further embed sections of response.

Resources: - Documentaries / feature film clips  
eg Remember the Titans, The Help, Hidden Figures, Selma.  
- Photographs.

Tools - would make detailed ppt w/ embedded videos + written info + photos. Use smartArt to break up points.

↳ Activities - mind map, q+a, Cornell notes or more interactive - carousel, jigsaw, info hunt, guided reading.

Connections → \* discuss links to BLM.

- \* have discussions about rights + freedoms.
- \* how they would feel if their rights were limited / restricted / different to others in class.
- \* other examples where some treated differently in society.
- \* what problems possibly exist still due to segregation in the past.

## Appendix E: Schedule of Potential Interview Prompts

### Schedule of Potential Interview Prompts

#### Using Identity Charts (Link back throughout interview)

- Identify the many factors that shape who you are
- Identify communities to which you belong
- Why/how have these factors shaped who you are?
- Are any of these factors connected? In what ways?
- How do these factors impact your teaching?

#### Using SQA Exam Question Annotations

- What texts, people, events, movements, etc. come to mind?
- What do you notice about the wording or structure of this source and question?
- What activities would you use to teach the content covered by this question?
- What connections can you make between the content in this question and other events in history and/or current events?
- What skills are necessary to effectively answer this question?
  - Are those skills transferable? In what ways?
- Have you taught this content before?
- Did you find this task to be challenging? Why or why not?
- To what extent did you find the content of the topic challenging?

#### Other Key Questions

- What inspired or motivated you to become a history teacher?
  - Can you think of a specific moment, experience, or person that contributed to this?
- What are your goals or objectives as a history teacher?
  - Is there anything that hinders you from achieving these goals? In what ways?
  - Do you feel supported in achieving these goals? In what ways?
  - Do you think you have been successful in achieving these goals? How do you know?
- Have your goals as a history teacher changed or evolved?
  - In what ways?
  - What sparked this?
- Can you think of any personal experiences that impact how you engage with certain topics?
- What topics do you particularly enjoy teaching? Why?
- Are there any topics you avoid teaching? Why?
- What does your ideal teaching practice look like?
  - What elements of that are present in your current teaching practice?
  - What prevents some of those elements from emerging in your current practice?
- What personal values do you bring into your teaching practice?

- How do you identify as a teacher? (ie. 'teacher' or more specific- urban teacher, history teacher, etc.?)
- What do you think teaching for social justice means?
- Can you think of any examples of teaching for social justice in your classroom?
- When or where in your teaching does social justice emerge?
  - Would you like it to emerge more frequently or in different ways?
  - What is preventing this from happening?
  - What kind of support would you need to make this happen?
- Do you incorporate current events into your lessons?
  - Why or why not?
  - How so?
- What do you want learners to take away from your lessons?
  - How often do you think this happens?
  - If it happens often, why do you think that is? (ie. what are your priorities in the classroom?)
  - If it does not happen often, why do you think that is?
  - How could this happen more often?

## Appendix F: Rationale for Instruments of Data Collection

Research question	How to explore answers
<p>(1) How do history teachers in Scotland describe and understand their professional and personal identities?</p> <p>(1a) In relation to Scotland's education system, what do history teachers think their role is in the classroom?</p> <p>(1b) In what ways do their professional and personal identities cross over?</p> <p>(1c) In what ways do their professional and personal identities impact upon their espoused teaching practice?</p>	<p><b>Semi-structured Interviews</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What inspired or motivated you to become a history teacher?</li> <li>- Can you think of a specific moment, experience, or person that contributed to this?</li> <li>- What are your goals or objectives as a history teacher?</li> <li>- Is there anything that hinders you from achieving these goals? In what ways?</li> <li>- Do you feel supported in achieving these goals? In what ways?</li> <li>- Do you think you have been successful in achieving these goals? How do you know?</li> <li>- Have your goals as a history teacher changed or evolved? In what ways? What sparked this?</li> <li>- Can you think of any personal experiences that impact how you engage with certain topics?</li> <li>- Are there any topics you avoid teaching?</li> <li>- What does your ideal teaching practice look like?</li> <li>- What elements of that are present in your current teaching practice?</li> <li>- What prevents some of those elements from emerging in your current practice?</li> <li>- What personal values do you bring into your teaching practice?</li> <li>- How do you identify as a teacher? (i.e., 'teacher' or more specific- urban teacher, history teacher, etc.?)</li> </ul> <p><b>Identity charts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify the many factors that shape who you are</li> <li>- Identify communities to which you belong</li> <li>- Are any of these factors connected? In what ways?</li> <li>- How do these factors impact your teaching?</li> </ul>
<p>(2) How do history teachers in Scotland engage with teaching for social justice?</p> <p>(2a) What do teachers</p>	<p><b>Semi-structured interviews</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What do you think teaching for social justice means?</li> <li>- Can you think of any examples of teaching for social justice in your classroom?</li> </ul>

<p>understand by social justice and social justice education?</p> <p>(2b) In what ways does this understanding impact upon their espoused teaching practice?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When or where in your teaching does social justice emerge?</li> <li>- Would you like it to emerge more frequently or in different ways?</li> <li>- What is preventing this from happening?</li> <li>- What kind of support would you need to make this happen?</li> <li>- Do you incorporate current events into your lessons? Why or why not? How so?</li> <li>- What do you want learners to take away from your lessons?</li> <li>- How often do you think this happens?</li> <li>- If it happens often, why do you think that is? (i.e., what are your priorities in the classroom?)</li> <li>- If it does not happen often, why do you think that is?</li> <li>- How could this happen more often?</li> </ul>
	<p><b>SQA question annotations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What texts, people, events, movements, etc. come to mind?</li> <li>- What do you notice about the wording or structure of this source and question?</li> <li>- What activities would you use to teach the content covered by this question?</li> <li>- What connections can you make between the content in this question and other events in history and/or current events?</li> <li>- What skills are necessary to effectively answer this question?</li> <li>- Are those skills transferable? In what ways?</li> </ul>

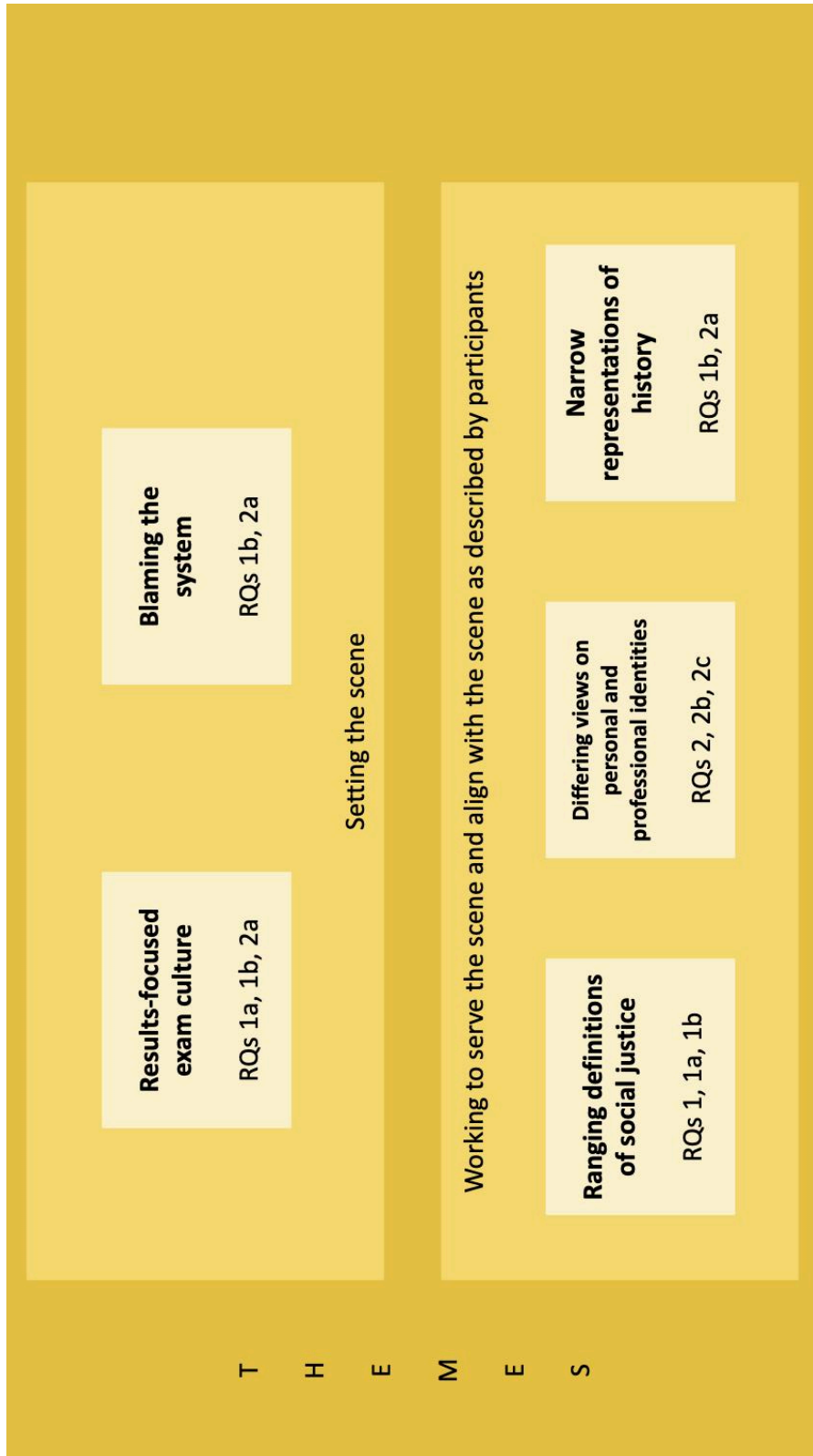


## Appendix G: Early Draft of Themes in Relation to the Research Questions

Theme	Description of Theme	RQs	Discussion
<p><b>Results-focused exam culture</b></p> <p>An access paradox, or trend of using exams as social justice, leading to a status quo of a results-focused exam culture.</p>	<p>There appears to be a trend of using exams as social justice, which leads to a status quo of a results-focused exam culture in Scotland. Participants described the nature of SQA requirements as “formulaic”, “prescriptive”, “binding”, “restrictive”, “regurgitating”, “tick box”, and “jumping through hoops”. Working within this culture, participants outlined several pedagogical choices that revolve around teaching to the test, thus reinforcing this access paradox (cite). Further, this results-focused culture creates and reinforces a disconnect between the skills required to pass the SQA exam and the skills historians use. Additionally, this results-focused culture also creates and reinforces a disconnect between the BGE and senior phases of the Scottish secondary education system where exam preparations are beginning early in the BGE phase, despite a misalignment with the CFE.</p>	<p>1a 2a 2b</p>	<p>OECD report, Smith (2019, 207), Janks (2004), Dover (2009), Picower (2011a), Smith &amp; Lennon (2011), Kincheloe (2008), Agarwal (2011), Dover et al. (2016), Smith (2018), Dover &amp; Pozdol (2016), Dover (2013b), Byford et al. (2009), HA survey (2021), Professional standards, Knowing history in schools chapter 5</p>
<p><b>Blame on the system</b></p> <p>Recognising it's wrong but placing blame on the system</p>	<p>Participants recognised that the status quo of a results-focused exam culture is wrong but placed blame on the system, claiming that there is nothing they could do about it other than work within it.</p>	<p>1a 2b</p>	<p>Smith (2019, 209), Sachs (2003), Apple (2011a), Zembylas (2021)</p>
<p><b>Ranging definitions of social justice</b></p> <p>Each definition of social justice ranges in sociopolitical variance and potentially lacks a clear definition at all</p>	<p>Participants provided definitions of social justice that range in sociopolitical variance (Dover, 2015), often linking social justice to access, equality, and history content, while reinforcing a results-focused exam culture, with some participants lacking clear definitions altogether.</p>	<p>2 2a 2b</p>	<p>Dover (2015), Agarwal et al. (2010), Westheimer &amp; Kahne (2004a), Picower (2011a), HA survey, McCully (2005)</p>
<p><b>Ranging elements of social justice education</b></p> <p>Elements of social justice in participants' espoused teaching practice emerged throughout the interviews</p>	<p>Elements of social justice education appear in participants' espoused teaching practice and range in sociopolitical variance (Dover, 2015).</p>	<p>2 2a 2b</p>	<p>Table in lit review HA survey</p>
<p><b>Differing views on personal and professional</b></p>	<p>Participants reported differing views on the crossover of personal and professional identities.</p>	<p>1 1b 1c</p>	<p>Smith (2018, 113), Professional standards, HA survey, McCully</p>

<p><b>identities</b></p> <p>Differences between personal and professional identities (as mentioned explicitly by four participants)</p>			(2005)
<p><b>Narrow representations of history</b></p> <p>Teaching history in Scotland is hindered by narrow representations of history</p>	<p>As a result of a results-focused exam culture, teaching history in Scotland is hindered by narrow representations of history where participants reported little time or space to stray from narrow SQA course specifications.</p>	<p>1a 2b</p>	<p>Smith (2019, 209), Dover (2009), HA survey (p. 17), Dozono (2021), Bret (2021), Kitson (p. 37)</p>

Appendix H: Mind Map of Themes



# Appendix I: Ethics Application

OFFICE USE ONLY  
UECREP  
Date  
Paper



## Ethics Application Form

Please answer all questions

<b>1. Title of the investigation</b>
Exploring Teacher Identity and Teaching for Social Justice in the History Classroom
Please state the title on the PIS and Consent Form, if different: N / A

<b>2. Chief Investigator (must be at least a Grade 7 member of staff or equivalent)</b>
Name: Dr Claire Cassidy <input type="checkbox"/> Professor <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reader <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Lecturer <input type="checkbox"/> Lecturer <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Teaching Fellow <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching Fellow Department: School of Education Telephone: [REDACTED] E-mail: [REDACTED]

<b>3. Other Strathclyde investigator(s)</b>
Name: Dr Navan Govender Status (e.g. lecturer, post-/undergraduate): Lecturer Department: School of Education Telephone: [REDACTED] E-mail: [REDACTED]
Name: Miss Christina Accardi Status (e.g. lecturer, post-/undergraduate): Postgraduate Research Student Department: School of Education Telephone: [REDACTED] E-mail: [REDACTED]

<b>4. Non-Strathclyde collaborating investigator(s) (where applicable)</b>
Name: Status (e.g. lecturer, post-/undergraduate):

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Department/Institution:  
If student(s), name of supervisor:  
Telephone:  
E-mail:  
Please provide details for all investigators involved in the study:

**5. Overseas Supervisor(s) (where applicable)**

Name(s):  
Status:  
Department/Institution:  
Telephone:  
Email:  
I can confirm that the local supervisor has obtained a copy of the Code of Practice: Yes  No   
Please provide details for all supervisors involved in the study:

**6. Location of the investigation**

At what place(s) will the investigation be conducted?

Locations for the investigation will be chosen at the convenience of the participant. Participants can choose a time outside of school hours and a place outside of school premises, such as a local library or cafe. Participants will also have the option of participating in the investigation via Zoom or via phone call.

If this is not on University of Strathclyde premises, how have you satisfied yourself that adequate Health and Safety arrangements are in place to prevent injury or harm?

Conducting the investigation at locations chosen by each participant will minimise any concerns regarding access.

Assuming current social distancing measures are still in place, the investigation can take place via Zoom or phone call. Zoom calls will be audio recorded for accuracy and participants will have the option of having video on or off. Transcription of the call and field notes will be shared with the participant to check for accuracy.

If interviews are conducted on the phone, the participant will be given my phone number in advance of the meeting to ensure that they know who is calling them. I will request their phone number to make contact, but will not retain a copy of their phone number on my phone and I will request that they delete mine at the end of the meeting. Phone calls, as with Zoom, will be audio-recorded and then transcribed. The transcription and field notes will be shared with the participant to check for accuracy.

If meeting in a public space, such as a local library or cafe, all efforts will be made to follow the health and safety regulations of the establishment as well as up to date social distancing guidelines as set out by the Scottish Government.

**7. Duration of the investigation**

Duration(years/months) : 2 years / 1 month

Start date (expected): November, 2020      Completion date (expected): January, 2023

**8. Sponsor**

Please note that this is not the funder; refer to Section C and Annexes 1 and 3 of the Code of Practice for a definition and the key responsibilities of the sponsor.

Will the sponsor be the University of Strathclyde: Yes  No

If not, please specify who is the sponsor:

**9. Funding body or proposed funding body (if applicable)**

Name of funding body: University of Strathclyde (Student Excellence Award)

Status of proposal – if seeking funding (please click appropriate box):

In preparation

Submitted

Accepted

Date of submission of proposal: 05 / 03 / 2020

Date of start of funding: 01 / 10 / 2020

**10. Ethical issues**

Describe the main ethical issues and how you propose to address them:

Participation in this investigation will be entirely voluntary and each participant will give informed consent before any data collection begins. Participants will be informed that their participation is voluntary and that they are able to withdraw without consequence at any time before data is anonymised at the point of analysis.

Due to the use of convenience sampling through professional networks, it may be the case that the researcher has a pre-existing relationship with some potential participants. Participants will not be coerced into participating and will be reminded that participation is both voluntary and informed.

During this investigation, participants will be asked to explore their beliefs, values, and identities. Throughout this process, participants will be invited to disclose their own personal values and experiences, which could elicit a range of emotions. For this reason, participants will only be invited to share what they are comfortable with and will be made aware of this. Participants will be informed before participating that they can opt out of answering any questions. Participants will be explicitly reminded throughout the interview process that they can opt out of answering any questions. Should there be any indication of stress, the interview will be terminated with the permission of the participant.

Due to the potentially sensitive nature of data collected during this investigation, all participants will be given pseudonyms to protect confidentiality and anonymity. Any names of colleagues, pupils, schools, and local authorities that may come up during data collection will be changed to protect confidentiality, and will not be included in any data presented within the thesis, subsequent publications, or presentations.

In the event of uncovering practice that shows that pupils may be at risk, or that the participant appears to be at risk, the researcher will follow procedures as outlined by individual schools and local authorities. For example, the researcher will follow school reporting policies for child protection and staff dignity and respect policies.

As a History teacher herself, the researcher understands the potential for bias during this investigation. The researcher will practice critical reflexivity throughout the investigation as a way to mitigate any potential bias. Potential tension between information a participant discloses and what the researcher believes will be lessened by engagement with critical reflexivity as a way to represent the beliefs, values, and experiences of each participant accurately.

**11. Objectives of investigation (including the academic rationale and justification for the investigation)**

Please use plain English.

This investigation aims to explore the understandings History teachers in the Scottish education system have of social justice education, how these understandings impact on what they see as their role as a teacher within the Scottish context, and how their individual identities can affect their classroom practice. This investigation will expand upon current social justice education literature in English-speaking countries and aims to break ground by focusing specifically on the role of teachers and teacher identity in relation to social justice teaching within Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and climate of high stakes Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) examinations.

There has been considerable research conducted in the United States regarding teachers and their understandings of teaching for social justice, especially in primary settings (Agarwal et al., 2010), and secondary English Language Arts (Dover, 2013a, 2013b, 2015a, 2015b). Recent research tends to focus on initial teacher education and the experiences of newly qualified teachers (Nowell & Poindexter, 2018; Reagan et al., 2016; Lee, 2011; Tilley & Taylor, 2013; Agarwal et al., 2010). However, there is limited research with regards to social justice teaching in the Scottish context, which is strongly influenced by both the national education policy and SQA examinations, and therefore can be prone to "survival teaching" and learning (Smith & Lennon, 2011, p. 35). Recent research within the Scottish context mainly investigates children's and human rights education (Cassidy, 2016; 2017). Further, Cassidy et al. (2014) investigated the understanding of student teachers in regards to human rights education. This project will expand upon this, and will contribute to the field by specifically focusing on History teachers' with a range of experience, their classroom practices and their teacher identity.

Through this investigation, the following research questions will be explored:

1. In relation to Scotland's education system, what do History teachers think their role is in the classroom and how does this affect their teaching practice?
2. How do History teachers in Scotland describe their professional identity?
3. How do History teachers in Scotland understand and engage with teaching for social justice?

**12. Participants**

Please detail the nature of the participants:

Participants will be current teachers in Scotland who hold General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) registration in History.

Summarise the number and age (range) of each group of participants:

Number: 15-20    Age (range) 20+

Please detail any inclusion/exclusion criteria and any further screening procedures to be used:

Participants will meet the following criteria:

- Current History teacher in Scotland
- Holds GTCS registration in History

Should more than 20 potential participants express interest in volunteering to participate in the investigation, participants will be selected based on length of History teaching experience so that there is a similar number of participants in the early, middle, and later stages of their History teaching careers.

**13. Nature of the participants**

Please note that investigations governed by the Code of Practice that involve any of the types of participants listed in B1(b) must be submitted to the University Ethics Committee (UEC) rather than DEC/SEC for approval.

Do any of the participants fall into a category listed in Section B1(b) (participant considerations) applicable in this investigation?: Yes  No



If yes, please detail which category (and submit this application to the UEC):  
N / A

#### **14. Method of recruitment**

Describe the method of recruitment (see section B4 of the Code of Practice), providing information on any payments, expenses or other incentives.

This investigation will utilise convenience and targeted snowball sampling to recruit participants. Initial invitation to participate in this investigation will be through an advertisement on a networking page for History teachers in Scotland (Appendix D) and then potentially through an email with the researcher's professional contacts. The researcher will use her insider status as a History teacher in Scotland to network and advertise this voluntary investigation. Potential participants will not be coerced or pressured to participate, will be reassured that they do not have to participate, and will be assured that they may withdraw without consequence at any time before data is anonymised at the point of analysis (Appendix A).

Anyone interested in volunteering to participate in the investigation will be able to express their interest through a form on Qualtrics, which is accessible through the PIS (Appendix B). Using her Strathclyde email address, the researcher will respond to potential participants using the email they provide in the form. All personal information in the form, including names and email addresses, will be securely stored on Strathcloud. These will be kept separately from the anonymity codebook.

Participation in this investigation will be informed and voluntary. Participants will be given no indication, expressed or implied, of an expectation to participate in this investigation. Payment in any form will not be used to recruit participants. Participants will be assured that they do not have to participate in the investigation, they may opt out of any questions during the interview, and may withdraw without consequence at any time before data is anonymised at the point of analysis.

#### **15. Participant consent**

Please state the groups from whom consent/assent will be sought (please refer to the Guidance Document). The PIS and Consent Form(s) to be used should be attached to this application form.

All participants will be required to provide voluntary and informed consent by signing a consent form (Appendix A).

Before signing a consent form, potential participants will be provided with a participant information sheet (PIS) that is written in plain English and presented in a form that is readily understood by potential participants (Appendix A). The PIS will identify the investigators conducting the investigation. The PIS will state the purpose, nature, and requirements of this investigation, taking into account the vulnerability of participants, including an acknowledgement that this investigation aims to unpack dispositions, beliefs, and values, and that participants will have the ability to opt out of any questions during the investigation. The PIS will detail the procedures of the investigation, explaining the potential for discomfort and the ability to opt out of any questions during the interview. The PIS will acknowledge that disclosed information about any participants or pupils at risk will be reported as per the procedures identified by individual schools and local authorities. The PIS will acknowledge that participants are invited to participate with informed and voluntary consent and are able to withdraw without consequence at any time until data is anonymised at the point of analysis.

#### **16. Methodology**

Investigations governed by the Code of Practice which involve any of the types of projects listed in B1(a) must be submitted to the University Ethics Committee rather than DEC/SEC for approval.



Are any of the categories mentioned in the Code of Practice Section B1(a) (project considerations) applicable in this investigation?  Yes  No

If 'yes' please detail: N / A

Describe the research methodology and procedure, providing a timeline of activities where possible. Please use plain English.

To answer the above research questions, this investigation will employ three instruments to collect data, (1) identity charts (Appendix E), (2) SQA exam question annotations (Appendix E), and (3) semi-structured interviews (Appendix F), and will utilise a critical narrative approach to construct meaning from the experiences of History teachers in Scotland. All contributions will be confidential and anonymised.

Drawing on both critical narrative (Goodson & Gill, 2014) and a narrative inquiry framework (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), this investigation aims to draw upon the "storied nature" of teacher experiences and identities to gain a deeper understanding of teaching for social justice within the Scottish context (Agarwal et al., 2010, p. 239). Analysis of data collected will aim to paint a detailed portrait of teachers' understandings of teaching for social justice within the Scottish History classroom while highlighting the realities of this approach to teaching in relation to the CfE and SQA examinations. In this way, narrative is seen as a "quest for meaning" (Goodson & Gill, 2014, p. 73).

Teaching for social justice requires an understanding that society is unjust as well as a "critical conception of the world [that] recognises that education contributes to the perpetuation of unequal power and the unjustness of the status quo through the way in which knowledge is defined, constructed and implemented in the socially formed space" (Goodson & Gill, 2014, p. 42). In this investigation, critical narrative will allow participants to critically reflect on their beliefs, values, and experiences, identify themselves within this context, and seek transformation and action. Further, "although life narratives may appear to be immersed in the past, they are reflective of the present and can lead us to the future" (Goodson & Gill, 2014, p. 31). This means that the past experiences of participants can uncover their identities in the present and how this contributes to their teaching practice, as well as create an opportunity to seek transformation and make changes in their future practice. The objects of analysis will be the identity charts, SQA exam question annotations, and the semi-structured interviews. These objects will form a narrative of each participant.

Linking this altogether, "the task of the narrative researcher is to relate the meanings of an individual's story to larger, theoretically significant categories in social science" (Clandinin, 2007, p. 549). Since researchers bring their own values to the investigation, it is vital that we engage in critical reflexivity to mitigate bias and represent the narratives of participants accurately (Clandinin, 2007).

The three instruments employed in this investigation are:

**1. Identity charts (Appendix E)**

An identity chart is a "diagram that individuals fill in with words and phrases they use to describe themselves as well as the labels that society gives them" (<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/identity-charts>). Identity charts are frequently used in Facing History, an educational organisation focused on teaching history for equity and social justice, as a way to help young people explore the many factors that make up their identity. Identity charts can also be used in the classroom to help learners identify the many factors that make up historical figures and characters in literature. Similarly, identity charts will be used in this investigation to help participants explore the many factors that make up their own identities and how these elements may contribute to or reveal themselves through their teaching practice. As part of a workbook (Appendix E), participants will be provided with an example and asked to construct their own identity chart ahead of the interview. A copy of the identity chart will be e-mailed to the researcher in advance of the meeting. The identity chart will then be used as a starting point for the interview and may help to identify critical incidents that contribute to their teaching practice and identity as teachers. This instrument aims to be a reflective exercise for participants. This instrument seeks to answer the research questions of this investigation by helping participants explore the many factors that contribute to their identity as well as to construct a history of themselves as History teachers. This instrument for data collection will be piloted before the investigation begins.

**0. SQA exam question annotations (Appendix E)**

Like the identity charts, participants will be asked to annotate an SQA exam question before the interview and to e-mail this to the researcher in advance of the interview. This instrument seeks to explore classroom practice without observing teachers in the classroom. This element of the investigation aims to paint a more complete portrait of teaching practice, as information gleaned from interviews may reflect espoused practice rather than actual practice. As part of the workbook (Appendix E), participants will be provided with an SQA exam question and instructions to annotate the question. An exam question from the topic *Free at Last? Civil Rights in the USA 1918-1968* has been chosen because it is a commonly taught topic in History classrooms in Scotland. Participants will also be provided with prompts to help them complete this task. For example, the prompts will ask participants how they would teach the content required to answer this exam question. Prompts will also ask participants if the question brings any particular readings, people, or events to mind. In other words, what tools would they use in the classroom to teach the material required to answer this exam question? What connections do the participants make between the content in this exam question and elements of teaching for social justice? What connections do the participants make between the content required to answer this exam question and the lives of learners?

**0. Semi-structured interviews (Appendix F)**

Interviews will be used to unpack the identity charts and SQA exam question annotations from the workbook and further explore the understandings participants have of social justice education and how their identity may contribute to this understanding. The interviews, lasting around one hour, will be semi-structured in nature to allow for more in-depth exploration of participant experiences, beliefs, values, and identities. Both the participant-produced identity charts and SQA exam question annotations will be used as a starting point during the interview and referred to throughout. Interviews will be audio recorded for accuracy with a digital audio recorder and with participant permission. Identities will be anonymised and pseudonyms will be assigned at the time of analysis. A codebook with pseudonyms and actual names will be kept in a separate location and stored on a password protected laptop and file on Strathcloud. Participants will be able to see the transcripts of their interview and will be able to comment, change, and omit statements made. All data, including digital recordings of audio will be deleted no later than five years after successful completion of the investigation.

The researcher will use these instruments to construct a narrative that is representative of the experiences of participants and located within the Scottish context. This will be a critically reflexive process for both researchers and participants.

Once expressing their interest in volunteering to participate in the investigation (Appendix B), a consent form (Appendix A) will be sent to individual participants using the email address they provided. Upon signing and returning the consent form, participants will then be sent a workbook with the identity chart and SQA exam question annotations to complete (Appendix E). In the event of interviews taking place via zoom or via phone call, participants will be asked to send their completed workbook back to me via email ahead of the scheduled interview time.

A date, time, and platform for the interview will also be scheduled through email at this point in the investigation. Assuming current social distancing measures are still in place, the investigation can take place via Zoom or phone call. Zoom calls will be audio recorded for accuracy and participants will have the option of having video on or off. Transcription of the call and field notes will be shared with the participant to check for accuracy.

If interviews are conducted on the phone, the participant will be given my phone number in advance of the meeting to ensure that they know who is calling them. I will request their phone number to make contact, but will not retain a copy of their phone number on my phone and I will request that they delete mine at the end of the meeting. Phone calls, as with Zoom, will be audio-recorded and then transcribed. The transcription and field notes will be shared with the participant to check for accuracy.

The interviews will last around one hour and will begin by exploring the participant's identity chart and exam question annotations. These instruments will be referred to throughout the interview. After the interview, recordings will be transcribed and participants will be provided with an opportunity to review the transcription and notes to check for accuracy, and will be able to comment, change, and omit statements made.

Provisional Timeline

- Recruit participants and schedule interviews, November - December, 2020
- Conduct interviews, December, 2020 - March, 2021

What specific techniques will be employed and what exactly is asked of the participants? Please identify any non-validated scale or measure and include any scale and measures charts as an Appendix to this application. Please include questionnaires, interview schedules or any other non-standardised method of data collection as appendices to this application.

1. Consent form on Qualtrics (Appendix A)
2. Demographic survey on Qualtrics (Appendix C)
3. Identity chart (Appendix E)
4. SQA exam question annotation (Appendix E)
5. Interview (Appendix F)

Where an independent reviewer is not used, then the UEC, DEC or SEC reserves the right to scrutinise the methodology. Has this methodology been subject to independent scrutiny? Yes  No

If yes, please provide the name and contact details of the independent reviewer:

N / A

**17. Previous experience of the investigator(s) with the procedures involved.** Experience should demonstrate an ability to carry out the proposed research in accordance with the written methodology.

The researcher has previously engaged with critical reflexivity in her Master's-level dissertation and has experience as a History teacher in Scotland.

Dr Navan Govender is a Lecturer at the University of Strathclyde. He has experience with research in teacher education and with (student) teachers which has included a variety of qualitative research methods such as critical (multimodal) discourse analysis, thematic content analysis, and interviews and focus groups.

Dr. Claire Cassidy is a Reader in the School of Education, University of Strathclyde. She has a range of experience in conducting and supervising empirical research projects, which includes methods that explore identity and values, such as individual and focus group interviews, Nominal Group Technique and Personal Construct Theory.

**18. Data collection, storage and security**

How and where are data handled? Please specify whether it will be fully anonymous (i.e. the identity unknown even to the researchers) or pseudo-anonymised (i.e. the raw data is anonymised and given a code name, with the key for code names being stored in a separate location from the raw data) - if neither please justify.

Data will be pseudo-anonymised at the time of analysis to protect confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Any information that could be used to identify participants, including names of colleagues, pupils, schools, and local authorities, will be changed. All participant information, including a key for the code names and personal contact details, will be stored in a separate and password-protected location from the raw data. Only pseudonyms will be used in any presentations or publications related to the study.



Explain how and where it will be stored, who has access to it, how long it will be stored and whether it will be securely destroyed after use:

Data will be stored on a password protected laptop and folder on Strathcloud and accessible by only the researchers and potentially examiners. Any printed copies of data will be stored in a locked cabinet accessible by only the researchers.

Data will be stored and then securely destroyed no later than five years after successful completion of this investigation, in case of subsequent publications.

Will anyone other than the named investigators have access to the data? Yes  No   
If 'yes' please explain:

Examiners will potentially have access to data.

#### 19. Potential risks or hazards

Briefly describe the potential Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) hazards and risks associated with the investigation:

As outlined in the submitted eRisk Assessment form, potential hazards and risks include:

- Sitting for too long and/or eye strain if an interview is conducted via Zoom
- Delay of arrival to predetermined meeting place if an interview is conducted in person
- A participant entering an emotional state in a public space if an interview is conducted in person
- Contributing to the spread of COVID-19 if an interview is conducted in person
- Uncovering information of participants and/or pupils as at risk

These potential hazards and risks are unlikely and will be mitigated through control measures such as effective communication, social distancing as outlined by the Scottish Government, and individual school and local authority reporting procedures.

Please attach a completed OHS Risk Assessment (S20) for the research. Further Guidance on Risk Assessment and Form can be obtained on [Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing's webpages](#)

#### 20. What method will you use to communicate the outcomes and any additional relevant details of the study to the participants?

All participants will be provided with a summary of the investigation. Participants will be provided with a full copy of the completed thesis upon request.

#### 21. How will the outcomes of the study be disseminated (e.g. will you seek to publish the results and, if relevant, how will you protect the identities of your participants in said dissemination)?

Outcomes of this investigation will be disseminated through a thesis with the possibility of further publications and presentations at academic conferences. Presentations and publications may also be undertaken for a professional audience. All data will be anonymised to protect the identities of participants.

Checklist	Enclosed	N/A
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<b>Participant Information Sheet</b> (Appendix A)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Consent Form</b> (Appendix A)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Sample questionnaire</b> (Appendix C)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Sample interview format</b> (Appendix F)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Sample advertisement</b> (Appendix D)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>OHS Risk Assessment (S20)</b> (Submitted online)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Any other documents</b> (please specify below)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appendix B- Draft of form to express interest</li> <li>• Appendix E- Draft of workbook</li> </ul>		

**22. Chief Investigator and Head of Department Declaration**

Please note that unsigned applications will not be accepted and both signatures are required

I have read the University's Code of Practice on Investigations involving Human Beings and have completed this application accordingly. By signing below, I acknowledge that I am aware of and accept my responsibilities as Chief Investigator under Clauses 3.11 – 3.13 of the [Research Governance Framework](#) and that this investigation cannot proceed before all approvals required have been obtained.

Signature of Chief Investigator

Please also type name here:

Claire Cassidy

I confirm I have read this application, I am happy that the study is consistent with departmental strategy, that the staff and/or students involved have the appropriate expertise to undertake the study and that adequate arrangements are in place to supervise any students that might be acting as investigators, that the study has access to the resources needed to conduct the proposed research successfully, and that there are no other departmental-specific issues relating to the study of which I am aware.

Signature of Head of Department

Please also type name here

Linda Brownlow

Date:

7 / 10 / 2020

**23. Only for University sponsored projects under the remit of the DEC/SEC, with no external funding and no NHS involvement**

**Head of Department statement on Sponsorship**

This application requires the University to sponsor the investigation. This is done by the Head of Department for all DEC applications with exception of those that are externally funded and those which are connected to the NHS (those exceptions should be submitted to R&KES). I am aware of the implications of University sponsorship of the investigation and have assessed this investigation with respect to sponsorship and management risk. As this particular investigation is within the remit of the DEC and has no external funding and no NHS involvement, I agree on behalf of the University that the University is the appropriate sponsor of the investigation and there are no management risks posed by the investigation.

If not applicable, tick here

Signature of Head of Department

Please also type name here

Date:

/ /

For applications to the University Ethics Committee, the completed form should be sent to [ethics@strath.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@strath.ac.uk) with the relevant electronic signatures.



**24. Insurance**

The questionnaire below must be completed and included in your submission to the UEC/DEC/SEC:

<p>Is the proposed research an investigation or series of investigations conducted on any person for a Medicinal Purpose?</p> <p>Medicinal Purpose means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ treating or preventing disease or diagnosing disease or</li> <li>▪ ascertaining the existence degree of or extent of a physiological condition or</li> <li>▪ assisting with or altering in any way the process of conception or</li> <li>▪ investigating or participating in methods of contraception or</li> <li>▪ inducing anaesthesia or</li> <li>▪ otherwise preventing or interfering with the normal operation of a physiological function or</li> <li>▪ altering the administration of prescribed medication.</li> </ul>	No
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If **"Yes"** please go to **Section A (Clinical Trials)** – all questions must be completed  
 If **"No"** please go to **Section B (Public Liability)** – all questions must be completed

**Section A (Clinical Trials)**

<p>Does the proposed research involve subjects who are either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. under the age of 5 years at the time of the trial;</li> <li>ii. known to be pregnant at the time of the trial</li> </ul>	Yes / No
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If **"Yes"** the UEC should refer to Finance

<p>Is the proposed research limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>iii. Questionnaires, interviews, psychological activity including CBT;</li> <li>iv. Venepuncture (withdrawal of blood);</li> <li>v. Muscle biopsy;</li> <li>vi. Measurements or monitoring of physiological processes including scanning;</li> <li>vii. Collections of body secretions by non-invasive methods;</li> <li>viii. Intake of foods or nutrients or variation of diet (excluding administration of drugs).</li> </ul>	Yes / No
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If **"No"** the UEC should refer to Finance

<p>Will the proposed research take place within the UK?</p>	Yes / No
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If **"No"** the UEC should refer to Finance



Title of Research	
Chief Investigator	
Sponsoring Organisation	
Does the proposed research involve:	
a) investigating or participating in methods of contraception?	Yes / No
b) assisting with or altering the process of conception?	Yes / No
c) the use of drugs?	Yes / No
d) the use of surgery (other than biopsy)?	Yes / No
e) genetic engineering?	Yes / No
f) participants under 5 years of age (other than activities i-vi above)?	Yes / No
g) participants known to be pregnant (other than activities i-vi above)?	Yes / No
h) pharmaceutical product/appliance designed or manufactured by the institution?	Yes / No
i) work outside the United Kingdom?	Yes / No

If **"YES"** to **any** of the questions a-i please also complete the **Employee Activity Form** (attached).  
If **"YES"** to **any** of the questions a-i, and this is a follow-on phase, please provide details of SUSARs on a separate sheet.  
If **"Yes"** to any of the questions a-i then the UEC/DEC/SEC should refer to Finance ([insurance-services@strath.ac.uk](mailto:insurance-services@strath.ac.uk)).

<b>Section B (Public Liability)</b>	
Does the proposed research involve :	
a) aircraft or any aerial device	No
b) hovercraft or any water borne craft	No
c) ionising radiation	No
d) asbestos	No
e) participants under 5 years of age	No
f) participants known to be pregnant	No
g) pharmaceutical product/appliance designed or manufactured by the institution?	No
h) work outside the United Kingdom?	No

If **"YES"** to any of the questions the UEC/DEC/SEC should refer to Finance ([insurance-services@strath.ac.uk](mailto:insurance-services@strath.ac.uk)).

**For NHS applications only - Employee Activity Form**

Has NHS Indemnity been provided?	Yes / No
Are Medical Practitioners involved in the project?	Yes / No
If YES, will Medical Practitioners be covered by the MDU or other body?	Yes / No

This section aims to identify the staff involved, their employment contract and the extent of their involvement in the research (in some cases it may be more appropriate to refer to a group of persons rather than individuals).

<b>Chief Investigator</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b>Employer</b>	<b>NHS Honorary Contract?</b>
		Yes / No
<b>Others</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b>Employer</b>	<b>NHS Honorary Contract?</b>
		Yes / No
		Yes / No
		Yes / No
		Yes / No

Please provide any further relevant information here:

## Appendix J: Essay Question

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

US History I DBQ - Essay Planning

Recent historical interpretations of Christopher Columbus' voyages to the New World have created controversy surrounding the national celebration of Columbus Day. Following last year's protests, President Obama has formed a task force to answer the question:

*Is Christopher Columbus a hero or a villain?*

The task force consists of Congressmen, business leaders, college professors and Mrs. Barrows and Miss Accardi's US History I students. The President has asked all members of the task force to write a five-paragraph essay expressing their point of view. The President's advisors have provided documents that give background information on the Columbus debate. Use the documents to support your argument **for or against** the celebration of Columbus Day.

To complete this task, you will:

1. Read, CHAMP, and analyze four documents that support your claim;
2. In groups, respond to clarifying prompts about each of the documents;
3. Use a graphic organizer to create an outline for your essay;
4. Write a five-paragraph essay using evidence from the documents to support your claim.

To be successful in this task, you must remain focused and on the task throughout the class.

Your grade will reflect the thoughtfulness and effort that you dedicate to completing this assignment.

**Rubric**

<b>Task</b>	<b>4 points</b>	<b>3 points</b>	<b>2 points</b>	<b>1 point</b>
	<b>Student has</b>	<b>Student has</b>	<b>Student has</b>	<b>Student has</b>
<b>CHAMP Activity (x2)</b>	used three or more CHAMP strategies when annotating 4 texts	used three or more CHAMP strategies when annotating 3 texts	used three or more CHAMP strategies when annotating 2 texts	used three or more CHAMP strategies when annotating 1 text
<b>Group Work</b>	participated by doing 4 of the following: sharing ideas, actively listening, staying on task, completing worksheets	participated by doing 3 of the following: sharing ideas, actively listening, staying on task, completing worksheets	participated by doing 2 of the following: sharing ideas, actively listening, staying on task, completing worksheets	participated by doing 1 of the following: sharing ideas, actively listening, staying on task, completing worksheets
<b>Writing and revising (x2)</b>	done 4 of the following: completing graphic organizer, writing paper, rereading essay, making corrections	done 3 of the following: completing graphic organizer, writing paper, rereading essay, making corrections	done 2 of the following: completing graphic organizer, writing paper, rereading essay, making corrections	done 1 of the following: completing graphic organizer, writing paper, rereading essay, making corrections
<b>Professionalism</b>	Behaved professionally by doing 4 of the following: staying on task, working consistently the entire class, stayed SHARP, quietly waited for classmates to finish assessment	Behaved professionally by doing 3 of the following: staying on task, working consistently the entire class, stayed SHARP, quietly waited for classmates to finish assessment	Behaved professionally by doing 2 of the following: staying on task, working consistently the entire class, stayed SHARP, quietly waited for classmates to finish assessment	Behaved professionally by doing 1 of the following: staying on task, working consistently the entire class, stayed SHARP, quietly waited for classmates to finish assessment

**Total points** /25





CODE "50A"

1 Chris p. 26	"That's shameful for me, but I have to hold my hand and say that's not my fault, that is the system that has forced us into that"	Recognising that it's wrong but placing blame on the system. Nothing he can do about it? <b>DOUBLE CODE</b> (reflexivity). <u>DEFINITION?</u>
1 Chris pp. 26-27	"I just don't bother [...] why bother trying to teach them type or purpose when it's just not worth it?" (in relation to exam)	Pedagogical choice to not teach certain skills because they will confuse learners and <b>impact exam grade</b> . Exam strategy/mechanics.
1 Chris p. 29	"If someone told me that I had to get rid of all those things because the kids need to pass the exam, you'd have to suck it up because that's the way that the system is set up."	Recognising that it's wrong but placing blame on the system. Using the system to remove responsibility from self/other teachers? Access paradox.
2 David p. 7	"The biggest challenge [re]teaching I feel nowadays is this exam. [...] that is what all your preparation and time and supported study is all geared towards."	Challenge. <b>Disconnect</b> between skills required to pass exams and skills used as historians. Teaching to the test. Time. <u>expectation vs. reality</u>
2 David p. 13	"The biggest (problem) for kids is time. And when you're teaching skills we try to teach that they have seven and a half minutes to answer a five-mark question like an <i>evaluate</i> . We used to try to teach everything and then realized that's a fool's errand, so now we go for the acronym COAT"	Pedagogical choice to not teach certain skills because they will confuse learners and <b>impact exam grade</b> . Exam strategy/mechanics. <u>strategy?</u> <u>TWE is this a choice??</u>
2 David p. 13	"I don't like this, but at the end of the day, it's more for the exam. [...] that's the minimum standard that you need for the mark."	Recognising that it's wrong but placing blame on the system. Using the system to remove responsibility from self/other teachers? Access paradox. <u>strategy/mechanics</u>
2 David p. 14	"From (rote) learning alone, they should be getting four out of five."	Rote learning. Exam strategy/mechanics. Teaching the test.
2 David p. 15	"The exam is always a problem. We are geared towards this exam. This is how schools are judged. This is how teachers are judged. We need to justify exam results at the end of the year. We need to explain to parents why a particular pupil didn't get an exam result they were wanting. Universities accept exam results for depending on who gets in and who doesn't. Schools and employers and graduate schemes, it's all based on results. So until there is a societal shift away from you need to sit in an exam hall for two and a half hours, regurgitating things that we tell you, then we can never go into this wonderful detail about actually challenging it. [...] unfortunately we need to teach it."	Recognising that it's wrong but placing blame on the system. Using the system to remove responsibility from self/other teachers? Access paradox. Rote learning ("regurgitate"). * own performance PUPILS/parents/unis/ employers * link to Anne solution? ecosystem?

\* link rote learning to access paradox?



disconnect/misalignment; blame; access paradox; system issues

2 David p. 15	"[...] if it ain't coming up in the course I've not got time to go away on a tangent too much. And I could give them extra [time] could say well why don't you go away and do this and do this and do this, but that's to the detriment of their total exam because it's taking away time from other studying for other subjects. [...] that's the driver unfortunately"	Limited time and space. Teaching to test/course specification. Results focused. Placing blame on the system.
2 David p. 19	"They're tied to a point, because obviously they need that exam result and they need staff for things and they need us."	"Unfortunately" → system
2 David p. 21	"Kids are restricted by they need the school because the school provides the facilities, and the grading, and the exam halls."	Encouraging learners to challenge injustices... to an extent... but it all comes back to the reality of exams and results. disconnect (access) paradox
2 David p. 21	"Parents trust me because I get their kids through the exams [...]"	Placing blame on the system. Same as previous.
3 Beth Workbook	"For me, this is an SQA exam question. Feelings don't come into it. I phrase it to students that this is the way the SQA does exams and so we need to be able to do this under time, with detail and with accuracy."	disconnect but also not his fault (apparently?) (culture) around exams → access, Results focus
3 Beth pp. 12-13	"It's just boring [the Changing Britain topic], but the kids do well in it because it's very formulaic. Every other school in the country does it, so I would be doing the kids a injustice if I was to then teach Mary Queen of Scots at Higher, which are not good essays. Consider them?"	Teaching to the test. Exam mechanics/strategy.
3 Beth p. 13	"So I hate doing it. It's boring. I hate it, but you gotta do it. You gotta do it because that's what they do best in. On the one hand, you want to teach fun history. On the other hand, you want your kids to pass."	Formulaic. Pedagogical choice to teach 'easy' topics that will get marks. Exam strategy. Link to using exams as social justice (access paradox). Bowing down to the exam/system. ↳ (culture)
3 Beth p. 13	"I teach SQA stuff rigorously and with religious fervor!"	Does this have to be one or the other? Pedagogical choice to teach 'easy' topics that will get marks. Exam strategy. Link to using exams as social justice (access paradox). Bowing down to the exam/system.
3 Beth p. 13	"You could write the world's greatest paragraph as one sentence, but no, that's worth one mark because you put one full stop."	Teaching to the test. Dedicating time and space to exam strategy/mechanics.
3 Beth p. 14	"You're not teaching them how to put an essay together. You're not. You're teaching them how to get very-set marks. [...] and it's boring. That's wonderful. That is wonderful because you have candidates in"	Exam strategy and mechanics. Teaching to the test. Disconnect between skills required to pass exams and skills used as historians.

\*  
Social  
Moral  
Things to

\* Access Paradox → Culture of exams leads to neuroticism → not learning