Vad elever önskar i ämnena engelska och historia
Högstadieelevers krav på lärare och undervisningsinnehåll

*What students want in the subjects of English and History*
*Middle school students’ demands of teachers and content*

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Lärarutbildning 90 hp
2012-05-28

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Summary

This thesis is written within the field of education. I will be explaining what international students want to learn about in the subject areas of History and English. The question being answered is, “What Do Students Want in English and History Teaching?” The goal was to gain more specific insight into what students want to learn about and how.

This paper will use and critique Lev Vygotsky and John Dewey’s theories on education as well as more current research done regarding the needs and wants of students.

Several books and many articles regarding education theory and what students want were used to get an insight into current theory. My contribution of evidence to this area is through a questionnaire that was given to middle school students in four different classes in two different grades.

The results of this questionnaire showed that students have a great demand for content that covers many different facets of English and many areas and time periods of History. Students had clear ideas of what a good teacher is like. The conclusion of this research is that students see the value in motivating, knowledgeable teachers who vary their lessons. Students want their teachers to be fun and sympathetic to the life of students today.
Key words: International Baccalaureate, SCORE, Teaching English, Teaching History.
Table of Contents

1. Introduction .................................................................................................................................. 8
   1.1 Purpose and Questions ........................................................................................................... 10
2. Knowledge Background .................................................................................................................. 11
   2.1 Vygotsky and Teaching ......................................................................................................... 11
   2.2 John Dewey and Education ................................................................................................. 11
   2.3 S.C.O.R.E ............................................................................................................................. 12
3. Methods ....................................................................................................................................... 13
   3.1 Choice of Investigation Method ........................................................................................... 13
      3.1.1 The questionnaire ......................................................................................................... 13
      3.1.2 Choice of classes .......................................................................................................... 13
      3.1.3 Students fill out the questionnaire .............................................................................. 15
      3.1.4 Collating the results ..................................................................................................... 15
      3.1.5 Receiving feedback from students about their answers ............................................. 15
   3.2 Ethical considerations ............................................................................................................. 15
4. Results and Analysis ...................................................................................................................... 17
   4.1 Answers regarding content in English class ......................................................................... 17
   4.2 English Teacher requirements ............................................................................................... 20
   4.3 History content requirements ............................................................................................... 22
   4.4. History Teacher requirements ........................................................................................... 24
   4.5 Assessment ............................................................................................................................ 26
5. Conclusion and Discussion ............................................................................................................. 28
   5.1 The Survey and Vygotsky .................................................................................................... 28
   5.2. The Survey and Dewey .................................................................................................... 30
   5.3 The Survey and S.C.O.R.E ................................................................................................. 31
   5.4 The Survey and its Strengths and Weaknesses .................................................................... 31
   5.5 The Results and My Own Teaching ..................................................................................... 31
   5.6 Future Research Possibilities .............................................................................................. 32
6. Reference List ............................................................................................................................... 34
7. Appendices .................................................................................................................................... 35
1. Introduction

Curriculums at national, international and local levels are determined by adult educators. When working in the International Baccalaureate system great flexibility is given to teachers at the Middle Years Program (Middle school, grades 6-10) to determine what is specifically taught. The Swedish system is more prescriptive in some areas but also maintains a level of flexibility especially in regards to the teaching of English.

Students in History do not have to study World War II or create a model of a motte and bailey castle. Teachers are expected to stimulate their students and know what to teach. By the end of the MYP program (Year 1 of gymnasiet) students are expected to use historical terminology correctly, be able to do research and use appropriate methods, analyze concepts, analyze sources, synthesize information and structure their work. There are thirteen objectives to be reached by the end of the final year of the MYP program.¹

The IB Language A (English) guide has eight aims and fifteen objectives. The IB never says that students must read Shakespeare or write a 5 paragraph essay. They are expected to spell and use grammar correctly. Students are to structure work coherently and analyze author choices appropriately.² The IB is most prescriptive when it comes to literature:

“In most cultures, literature includes poetry, prose (short stories and novels), mythology and drama, and in some cultures, literature also includes autobiography, biography, graphic novels, travelogues, satires, essays, letters, literary non-fiction, speeches, oral traditions, screenplays, film, and episodic television. Schools need to determine what constitutes literature within the context of their language A course(s).”³

The Swedish system recently created a new curriculum as well. This new curricula is more prescriptive than the IB when it comes to History. For example, students in year

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groups 7-9 should learn about ancient civilizations to 1700, imperialism and the World Wars, democratization and welfare state development in History. Students are to attempt to understand the relevance of facts and historical figures and events and be able to understand life in the past. Students are to learn about events like the Holocaust, gulags, Swedish welfare state, trade between the continents, etc.⁴

In English, students in the Swedish system should focus on songs, English used in various contexts, their own interests, oral and written narratives, pronunciation, etc. The Swedish system is much less prescriptive here than in history.⁵

To an educator both systems are quite liberating. One can tell that the Swedish system is designed by the government whereas the IB system is meant to cater to a larger, perhaps more heterogeneous population. The educator in the IB can create the syllabus from scratch. The Swedish educator can do the same with the English syllabus, but will have to make sure to cover certain content, like the Holocaust and Swedish welfare state. Still there is freedom with the content.

Perhaps the most frustrating part of working in these systems is when a unit is created and presented to the students and after several lessons the teacher starts wondering why the students are not as enthused as the teacher. A huge risk to a teacher’s self esteem is to ask students what they think of a lesson, a unit or a year. If one has hardened oneself to the criticism that will be dealt and understand that it is possibly some of the most valuable criticism available, then great steps can be made in the development of curriculum and teaching methodology.

Several events sparked the creation of this thesis. Several months ago in a review of the new “läroplan” in an educational magazine, the author briefly mentioned that no one has asked the students what they thought of the new curricula.

Weeks later, I was speaking to students about the value of questioning what they are taught and how it could apply to real life. We spoke about various subjects and the content within them. Why do they learn about anatomy, Napoleon or Shakespeare? Why do they spend so much time on studying these topics at home? One of my best students raised her hand. She habitually receives high scores on all assignments. Her

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⁵ Lgr 11, pages 34-35.
answer, “Because they will be on a test.” I was mortified. Didn’t they see the connections to real life? Were teachers failing? How? What was needed to get students to love or just enjoy education? What was needed to get them to look beyond the assessment?

That is what sparked the question, “What do students want when learning English and History?”

**1.1 Purpose and Questions**

The purpose of this paper is to identify patterns within the content area of English and History that would allow for meaningful creation of curriculum and syllabi for teachers of those subjects. In addition, the role of the teacher in creating meaningful units and lessons is also investigated. The 44 students’ opinions are the evidence used for the conclusions drawn in the paper.

My questions are:

- What is meaningful content in English to students?
- What is meaningful content in History?
- What role do teachers play in creating meaningful curricula?
- Where do students feel emphasis should be placed in their education? Why could that be?
2. Knowledge Background

In this section several educators and theories will be introduced. Their findings will be compared to what the students responded in the survey.

2.1 Vygotsky and Teaching

Lev Vygotsky believed that there were three important areas of focus for teachers to ensure that knowledge is attained by the students. These points are:

1. Subjects must have connections with each other so that students are able to be interested
2. Lessons should not just be a repetition of previous lessons. Instead the content must be developed and deepened in order to maintain students’ interest.
3. Finally, what is taught in class must be applicable to real life.  

2.2 John Dewey and Education

John Dewey had progressive ideas about education for his time. He felt that teachers should play the role of a guide. Students needed to be active in developing curriculum and needed to be active in their education, i.e. learning by doing. The students’ prior knowledge is vital to the students’ ability to understand content.

It will be interesting to see what the students want to learn about and what they don’t want to learn about, especially at this particular surveyed age (13-16). Where are teachers to guide students at this point in their development? An answer is provided by Dewey when he says, it is of vital importance for a teacher to be aware of what interests the children at various stages of their development. Dewey does warn against following

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8 Dewey, pp. 4-5.
the students blindly, "we must take our stand with the child and our departure from him. It is he and not the subject-matter which determines both quality and quantity of learning."\textsuperscript{10}

\subsection*{2.3 S.C.O.R.E}

Finally, research identified four needs which people need to satisfy in order to be engaged in their work. These needs are identified in the acronym SCOR for \textit{Success, Curiosity, Originality} and \textit{Relationships}. Together these four needs create \textit{Energy} (SCORE). To simplify the theory, students want to succeed to have a feeling that they are competent. Students respond to interesting facts and units that make them think and consider other perspectives. The originality expressed is the students’ own when they create to respond to the curiosity aroused by the topic/question/facts. The relationships need relates to how students value relationships between each other and this can work in a classroom by students mastering different facets of a topic and sharing. Students then need each other. \textsuperscript{11}

3. Methods

In the method section I will explain how I gathered information that was used in my thesis. I will also explain how I chose the students I chose and why I asked the follow up questions I asked.

3.1 Choice of Investigation Method

My investigation has gone through two stages; observations and class discussions. I did this in order to receive as much information as I possibly could from the students. Before this I had searched library search engines and the internet for recent articles and studies about what students wanted in their education. These sources and my previous studies of Vygotsky and Dewey sparked the choice of questions for the questionnaire. Before finalizing the questions I thought to ask the students what questions they wanted to be asked, in the hopes of avoiding a situation where the students quickly and without much thought answered a questionnaire with questions they found to be irrelevant.

3.1.1 The questionnaire

The questionnaire consists of 36 questions. Most of the questions, 33 of them, are open ended, intended to get qualitative answers. The reason behind that is that students think differently about their education and if I only gave quantitative questions then I would get answers that were easy to collate but perhaps would force me to guess as to why students chose certain answers or expressed certain opinions.

3.1.2 Choice of classes

I chose to give the questionnaire to my MYP3 and MYP4 classes, four classes with a total of 65 students. Most of these students had been my students in the previous year although there were 21 “new” students that I had not had in class the previous year. I chose these students because they are the most mature and had often expressed the most boredom, anxiety and frustration with school at times. Students between the ages of 12-
18 are “identified foremost by their physical and emotional maturation, identity
development and influence from their social surroundings.”\(^\text{12}\) They are also quite gifted
and perform at high levels in academic areas. Their high scores and strong emotions
regarding their education were important to me when choosing who to give the
questionnaire to.

Four classes were surveyed about what they wanted in the History and English
education as well as what was needed from teachers. Forty four surveys from 19 girls
and 25 boys between the ages of 13-16 were turned in. All students attend Bladins
International School of Malmö. Some students had been taught at Bladins (BISM) for
only this year, a few have spent their whole education careers here and the rest have
been at Bladins for a year or more. Twenty five of the students have English as at least
one of their native languages, thirteen included Swedish as a native language and
Danish was the third biggest native language with less than five students claiming it as a
native language. Other languages listed were: Hindi, Telug, Portuguese, Polish,
Japanese, Chinese, Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian, Russian, Finnish, Greek, Dutch, Arabic
and Slovaki.

These range of languages, cultures and experiences present a challenge to a teacher of
English and History.

Most students at BISM come from middle class or higher backgrounds. This does not
mean they do not face traumatic events like divorce, frequent moves to other countries
or death. Most of the students surveyed come from Europe and are products of Anglo-
American educational systems. Their teachers are currently predominantly from this
Anglo-American or Swedish background. Five students hail from the “Middle East”,
three from Turkey, one from Lebanon and one from Iran. Two students have a
background from the Indian subcontinent. There are no students with a South
American/Latin American background and only one with an African background and
one with a background from the Oceania region.

I have had many of the students for at least one and a half academic years and have built
up, in general, a strong bond with the students. They were quite happy to answer the
survey for me and hoped it would help change their education. When I had not said

anything about the survey after a couple weeks, one class anxiously asked what was going on with the survey.

3.1.3 Students fill out the questionnaire
Students were given an entire class period of 50 minutes to fill out the questionnaire after the ski week vacation in February 2012. Students were given time in class to ask questions if they needed to do so. If students did not finish in time then they were allowed to take the questionnaire home and complete it for the next day. A few students were absent that day and a few students who took the questionnaire home did not turn it in. In all, I received 44 questionnaire back, 19 from female students and 25 from male students.

3.1.4 Collating the results
Time was spent at home going through the results and organizing them to see what patterns emerged. If I noticed a pattern that I felt needed more clarification for me then I wrote that question down and spent some times asking the class for feedback about that answer.

3.1.5 Receiving feedback from students about their answers
There were a number of questions that I wanted more clarification about often regarding units that should or should not be taught or genres that should be read. I asked classes directly why they liked a certain form of assessment or a certain genre of book. While I may have asked individuals for their answers, I found that to be impractical at that point in time and perhaps even unnecessary. There were many students who spoke up about the answers that were given and offered feedback about why what had been written had been written. I was pleased to see that similar answers were something given by different classes.

3.2 Ethical considerations
I told each class that I would ask them to fill out a questionnaire about their History and English educations. They were to consider all the units and years they had ever done
and be honest. An understanding question from the students was, “Will this affect my grade?” I assured them it would not and they were not to put their names on the questionnaire. I did give each questionnaire a number and asked the students to write the number down somewhere in case I would like to speak to them later. I told them they would not have to speak with me if they did not want to. In general many students seemed to express eagerness in wanting to fill out the questionnaire in the hopes of changing their education and/or having their voices heard.

I did not push students to hand in their questionnaires and I avoided walking around the room except to answer questions. Occasionally, I clarified one of the questions on the questionnaire for the whole class as it seemed there were many questions about it. I did not feel that the questionnaire was a threat for the students. Perhaps this is because it was about their education which many students have a strong opinion about but do not feel threatened to share. Personally, I realized that the answers could have an effect on me since some of the criticism, if not most in the English section, would be aimed at me.
4. Results and Analysis

In this section, I will present the results of the survey in three different categories. One category will present some of the information regarding what content should be taught in English, another category will focus on what content should be taught in History. The third category will present what an effective English teacher needs to be like and the final category will focus on what an effective History teacher needs to be like.

4.1 Answers regarding content in English class

Students in each class were asked several questions about what content should be taught or not taught in English class. The questions and answers were as follows:

*What areas of English need less focus?*

Students were given a quantitative question here where they could mark the facets of typical English classes that were unnecessary. Forty three percent of students surveyed felt that poetry was the area that needed the least focus in English. Grammar was the area that followed closely with 41% of students finding it unnecessary. Essay writing was in third place followed by spelling and viewing film/pictures in 4th place (tied).

There was only one topic that showed a large difference between the sexes. Eight boys found essay writing to be unnecessary whereas only two girls felt that way.

When classes were asked why poetry was unpopular there were many different explanations. The common theme was that it was not useful in life or other subjects. One student suggested that it may not be taught well. This seems to be a reliable explanation for the students’ opinions. Perhaps literary devices like metaphors, symbols, personification, etc need to be taught in different contexts rather than through poems. To connect to students’ lives the literary devices need to be experienced in songs, literature and speech.
Grammar was the other aspect of English that was felt to be unnecessary to students in the 13-16 year range. Their explanations were that grammar was easy, taught in a boring way and not so pertinent for students whose first language is English. At this point in their lives English grammar was “common sense.” Grammar, for international students taught in English, is not essential to their language learning at this stage. However, students who have not been taught with English as the language of instruction or taught by different types of language instruction may think otherwise. Grammar is also viewed as being “boring” which does not create excitement in the SCORE theory.

When asked about the importance of essay writing students felt that they received too many essay assignments in many classes and some stated that presentations and other assessments allow them to show their knowledge better. These explanations were uniform across the 13-16 year range.

What genres should be read?
This question was also a quantitative question. Students could choose the different genres and add any that were not listed.

The most popular genres were Fantasy and Sci-Fi with 64% and 59% of the respondents wanting those genres to be read. These were followed closely by Mystery (57%) and Classics (50%) Reading Plays was one of the most unpopular with only 16% of students wanting to read them. Other unpopular genres were Poetry and Horror.

The popularity of sci-fi and fantasy was explained by students in all four classes by the interesting settings of the books and the outlet it gave the students to escape real life. This escapism coupled with the recent films of Hunger Games, Star Wars, Narnia, Harry Potter, etc speaks for the popularity of the sci-fi and fantasy books. A difficulty for teachers is keeping up with the interests of the students and what should be read. Students should be reading Shakespeare, Ibsen, Hemingway, etc. The cost of buying class sets of these books and keeping up with the times could be difficult. Would one teacher want to teach contemporary fiction? Perhaps it is better for the students to have the option of reading a book or two on their own that they want to read while being
exposed to the classics or books that they *should* read according to the teacher. As Dewey stated the students should not be blindly followed.\(^{13}\)

**What burning topics should be read about?**

There were many suggestions given but only one area was mentioned more than once and that was History. Four students would like more reading involving history. Other topics mentioned by individual students were Sports, Science/Technology, Sex, the Environment and Current Events.

The desire to focus on history is rather unexpected especially since the interest on sex and sports was so minuscule. Students at this age have begun dating and participating in sports is a way to establish oneself in school society, especially for boys. It is also a hint that combining the subjects or having the same teacher in the subjects could be beneficial to the students. The most interesting part of this section was the lack of response. At the ages of 13-16 one could expect the students to be beginning to become interested in the world around them.

**What specific books should be read?**

The students chose contemporary books for those that should be read in class. *Hunger Games* was chosen by 14% of the students, all of them girls. The Harry Potter books came in second with 7% of the votes. Other suggestions were *The Da Vinci Code*, *Vampire Diaries*, *House of Night*.

Here again is a list of contemporary literature. Students were, however, intent on reading the “classics”. Students may rely on school to teach them what they *should* and read what they should but they read what they want on their own and are in tune with popular fiction. It is important to keep in mind, and perhaps a relief to some educators that 50% of students surveyed wanted to read the “classics.” Students may feel that being familiar with the classics allows them to flex their intellect when conversing with others in the future whether that be friends, colleagues or family.

\(^{13}\) Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum*, p. 15.
**What types of lessons are the most helpful when learning English?**

None of the answers in this category dominated nor received even 20%. The most helpful lessons were lectures according to 16% of students. Tied for second (14%) were Discussions and lessons that included many visuals. Fun and Games was the only other lesson that received more than one vote.

Another surprising choice was the opinion that lectures were beneficial in language learning. A lecture is not normally thought of as entertaining. A lecture that involves the students and brings up pertinent issues and questions to the topic at hand and/or to the students’ lives would hopefully make the lecture interesting and maybe even fun according to Dewey and Vygotsky.

**What is missing in your English education?**

Grammar needed to be addressed according to 25% of the students. Vocabulary and Spelling each needed more attention according to 11% of the students. A few students wanted more focus on plays and three wanted time spent on Shakespeare.

This was one of the most confusing responses given by students. After a large population of the subject declared grammar as being “boring” and useless 25% felt that it was missing in their education. This may be because they had quite a lot in earlier years or with earlier teachers who focused on it regularly. Language learning at the later stages becomes more about interpretation and analysis of texts, images and speech rather than the actual construction of the language. At the same time this could be a sign that there is sizeable section of the population that feel that their grammar skills are not as great as their friends’ and that is concerning for them.

### 4.2 English Teacher requirements

In this section will be the summary of results regarding what is required of the English teacher and his/her lessons. The questions and answers were as follows:

**How could English be both fun and informative?**

Creative work and using Film were tied for the most choices with 16% each. Film was chosen by mostly boys whereas Creative work was chosen by an almost equal amount
of boys and girls. Games, open ended assignments and group work were the other
popular choices, none with more than 7% support from the students.

Creative work allows the individual to express him or herself. Students get to be
original and avoid having a task become mundane.\(^\text{14}\) The enthusiasm for Film is more
difficult to understand where it fits in when considering Dewey, Vygotsky and SCORE.
It is someone else’s creation. The film perhaps allows the students the ability to
envision what they have read or experienced in class. They can compare and contrast or
get some clarification. It is often simply more entertaining. Students love when they
watch movies in class. Students pay attention to movies. Film may be more engaging
which puts great demands on the teacher.

*What is a great English teacher like?*

A teacher with a sense of humor was the biggest choice by students in this open-ended
question, with 30% of the students choosing that quality. Somebody who was easy
going and created fun activities was also important. Many of the responses dealt with
qualities of personality like; nice, trustworthy, patient, inspiring, supportive, engaging,
relates to student. There was only one student who asked that the teacher be
knowledgeable. A teacher who differentiates his/her lessons was important to a couple
students.

Humor was extremely important to the boys more than the girls. Nine boys marked
humor as being important whereas only two girls chose that quality.

Great stress is put on the teacher’s personality rather than his or her academic
credentials. What is important to students in a teacher is someone who can relate to
students and do a good job by varying their lessons. Students agree with Vygotsky and
the SCORE method in that lessons need to create excitement and doing that requires
variation in the methods in class. Excitement in class tends to involve discussions,
debates and group projects, whereas more boring types tend to be lectures and
individual reading and writing.\(^\text{15}\) That is up to the teacher. In addition, the teacher needs
to have the interpersonal skills to create a healthy social environment and react and

“read” the class in order to make sound judgments.\textsuperscript{16} A sense of humor seems to be beneficial, especially regarding the boys.

The teacher is no longer desired to only be an expert in his or her field. Knowing content is only part of the occupation.

\section*{4.3 History content requirements}

In this section I will present the opinions and feedback of the students regarding the content that is taught or not taught in the subject of history. The questions and answers were as follows:

\textit{Were there any units in History you enjoyed?}

Antiquity was the most enjoyable unit according to 30\% of the students. World War I was the second most enjoyable unit according to 25\% of the students. Coming in third was the French Revolution.

Almost twice as many boys as girls chose WWI as an enjoyable unit.

When students explained why they liked Antiquity so much they said it was another form of escapism and it was a topic that they had not covered recently. This is a sign that students may not always prefer history to be taught chronologically over the years but perhaps want references to previous time periods and civilizations or even teaching history around certain themes. Would History teachers have that time or patience is another question. The Lgr 11 calls for less focus on Antiquity and good focus on Swedish development. Students surveyed expressed no interest in Swedish development and great interest in Antiquity. This could reflect more of a lack of knowledge of Swedish history and its richness and their understanding of Antiquity’s richness.

World War I was chosen by students because of its violence. The fact that WWI explains how the world is today was also important to students. They also felt that Antiquity explained the world today. This could provide more firepower to teachers who would want to teach History thematically. Time does not seem to matter so much to the students. What matters is understanding the world today.

\textsuperscript{16} Imsen, p. 30, 34
What periods of History do you want to study more about?
The World Wars and Antiquity were the most popular choices in this question. Twenty five percent and 23% of the students chose these two respectively. Boys made up two thirds of the votes for Antiquity. The World Wars were chosen equally by boys and girls. A couple students chose 20th century history.

Again, Antiquity and the World Wars were popular. The World Wars were popular for their violence as well as for their importance to understanding today. Action and escapism reoccur here as well, in connection with wanting to understand their world better.

What periods of History do you feel are important to learn about in order to understand the world better?
Again, the World Wars were the big winners in this question with 32% of the students choosing the World Wars.

What countries, continents, time periods do you learn the most about?
Fifty-five percent of the students noted that History class is dedicated to European History. Forty-one percent of the students narrowed down the focus of History class to the history of England or Britain.

This is rather surprising for an international school with so many students from around the world. Do the students from Asia find European history to be pertinent to themselves? According to a *Journal of American History* podcast it is possible to apply history from one country to others. It does require a knowledge of other countries’ histories. Is the role of India and Burma in the World Wars brought into focus? If focus is on England or even Sweden, is enough focus given to the Italian states, Indonesia, Iran or China? Do students from outside the UK or Europe see the importance of History if its focus is on only those areas? Dewey would doubt it.

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What countries, continents, time periods do you learn the least about?

Africa, Asia (25% each) and South America (16%) had the least amount of attention in History class according to the students.

Many students do not have much knowledge about three continents that house such economic powerhouses as India, Brazil and China and other emerging markets and powerhouses like Kazakhstan and Mongolia. If international students should identify with being “international” and “worldy” then they are more familiar with Europe than the world. For students moving to China, they may be at a disadvantage when they do not understand culture, politics and society of their new host country. If globalization is the new pattern that politics and economics follows then students surveyed are getting more regional focus on Europe. History needs to address students’ current needs to understand their role in today’s society. 19

4.4. History Teacher requirements

In this section, I will present the results and opinions of the students regarding what they would like in their history teacher. The questions and answers were as follows:

Was the teacher a part in your enjoying History?
Sixty four percent of the students answered “No” to his question. Eleven percent said “Yes”.

Many people have stated that they never liked History until they visited a place like Greece or Auschwitz or Osaka. Teaching of history has often been associated with memorizing dates and learning about old, rich, dead men and women. When students had a great teacher they remember that person.

What is a great history teacher like?
An informative history teacher was the most desirable quality a history teacher could have according to 30% of the students. These students find the teacher to be the most important factor in planting the seeds of knowledge within History learning. 20 Twenty-

19 Dewey, Individual, school and society. p. 44.
20 Imsen, 28-29.
one percent of students, all of them boys, felt that a history teacher needs to be enthusiastic. Sixteen percent, all of them boys, also felt that a humorous history teacher makes a great history teacher. Other desirable qualities mentioned by two or fewer students were: active, takes students on field trips, hands on teacher.

A difference here from the qualities desired in the English teacher is the desire to have a knowledgeable/informative History teacher. Enthusiasm and humor were important to the male students. Why this difference? Is it a difference in current teachers? Is history viewed as an informing subject whereas English is more of an exploring subject? Perhaps at this point in their educations it has become that. Do female students only want the facts while the male students want more entertainment or action in the lectures?

How could history classes be fun and informative?
The use of film was the most dominant factor with 16% of the students choosing that. All of those students were boys. Going on field trips and having differentiated lessons were tied for second with 9% of the votes each. Most of those votes were put down by boys. Female responses included creative work, links to the arts, experiments, open-ended questions, debating and guest speakers.

Again, film was chosen by many boys as being both fun and informative. It may be time for educators and administrators to stop looking down on film as an unpedagogical method. Used wisely it opens up discussion, provides clarification and most importantly gains the attention of male students.

The females and males wanted the course to be more interactive and hands on, which answers the question of whether females only want the facts. They want the facts but they want them in a creative manner. “…people are creative when they can solve problems, create something or ask questions in a certain area in different ways that are accepted in one or more cultural settings.” Students want to create and participate and hear from others. Students are curious about history and understand that their curiosity will be piqued by interesting lessons. Dewey would agree stating that students prefer to

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21 Imsen, p. 429.
be active over passive and the best way to avoid a feeling of time being wasted was to create active lessons.  

*How should history be taught?*

Seventy five percent of the students would like history to be linked to art and music. Two-thirds of the students wanted hands-on activities. The use of film and Youtube was chosen by half the students. Visits to museums and guest speakers also were chosen by over 40% of the students. Experiments, historical novels, reading and answering questions from a book and researching and becoming an expert on a topic were also chosen by 36% of the students.

Girls made up over half the students preferring visits to museums. Boys preferred film and linking history to art a bit more than girls. Doing hands on activities were almost equally appreciated by boys and girls.

The wide range of responses from students shows their desire to have differentiated lessons that allow them to experience History. The students found value in a variety of lessons from museum visits to film to answering questions from a book. The boring history teacher lecturing to the class day in and day out or having the students read and answer questions are not desired. However, being lectured and answering questions from a book is not frowned upon, it is simply one of many methods that must be used by an effective teacher. Students’ different responses regarding how English and History are taught support the idea that each subject has special requirements of the teacher.  

### 4.5 Assessment

In this section I will present the feedback from the students regarding assessment. The question and answers were as follows:

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23 Imsen, p.29.
What types of assessments accurately reflect your knowledge in a subject?

Presentations were chosen by 55% of the students. Half the students felt a discussion accurately reflected their knowledge. Essays and creative work that allowed for the use of art, film and visuals was chosen by 39% of the students.

Boys were much more likely to choose presentations than girls. Discussions, creative work and essays were evenly chosen by boys and girls.

The importance of varied lessons carries through to assessment. Students find a variety of assessment types allow them to accurately reflect their knowledge. Teachers may need to start considering offering a choice of assessment in order to allow students the ability to show what they know. Some students want to write an assessment, some want to present. The students have identified these assessments as the most reliable. These types of assessments also allow students to express who they are and who they want to be, crucial to social development. Are teachers able to allow students that range of choices in various units? Surely students can show the same skills in a presentation as in an essay. Creating meaningful assessments that may not be traditional assessments for their subject, where students can show their understanding of a topic is a challenge for subject teachers in every subject. The students must see a connection between these assessments and units and their own lives in order for the units and assessments to have meaning.

24 Strong, p.11.
5. Conclusion and Discussion

In this section I will discuss the importance of the results of the survey and the correlations or deviances from pedagogical literature. I will also analyze the investigation method and identify strengths and weaknesses. The uses of the findings to my own future as a teacher will be following that as well as areas that could call for future research.

5.1 The Survey and Vygotsky

What validity does Vygotsky have in the classroom today when it comes to how students learn best? In the following sections each of the three statements of Vygostky’s in the introduction will be discussed.

Subjects must have connections with each other so that students are able to be interested

“Must” is a strong word to use. This is an idea that is being preached by both the Swedish education system and the International Baccalaureate. Cross-curricular units are ideal in both systems. Creating valuable cross-curricular units is the difficult part and ensuring that students understand the connections could be more difficult. Do they remember the connections the next year? Or in two years? Or after the assessment?

An obstacle is the student himself who often puts his pen down when learning about something like the Russian Revolution in English class and says, “Why are we studying History? This is English class.”

At the same time, quite a few students wanted to read historical fiction novels and many students wanted to be able to use the arts and see connections between the arts with History.
Lessons should not just be a repetition of previous lessons. Instead the content must be developed and deepened in order to maintain students’ interest.

Students were quite interested in learning more about both subjects. Students wanted to read a variety of books and they wanted focus to hit on all areas of language learning. When it came to History students noticed that they were not learning enough about other regions of the world and saw that they learned much about one region of the world. Students today are being bombarded with revolts in North Africa and the Middle East, economic development in Asia and South America cultural pressure from Europe and North America. Content is important to the students to compete and understand.

Finally, what is taught in class must be applicable to real life.

As stated above, content is important to the students to compete in the real world with the English language. Real life for the students is competing for positions in high school and surviving when they reach the high school. Being familiar with Shakespeare and the classics and speaking and writing with good grammar are both important to students. So is reading contemporary sci-fi and fantasy. Students want to be able to impress their friends with what they know about the classics and be able to discuss the latest book before it is made into a movie.

When it comes to History, students consciously or subconsciously recognize that their world is getting smaller. They read, hear about and watch events from places like Syria and China and want to know more. Many of these students have been out of the country for extended periods of time and probably feel that will be a what their future holds. They understand the need to know more about the world to predict and comprehend what occurs and why based on what has already occurred.

Are Vygotsky’s theories consistent with the students’ ideas?

The simple answer is “Yes.” Students in the 13-16 year group have real life needs that encompass their interests and what they anticipate will be needed in the future. The one area that perhaps is grey is about how the subjects need to be linked. Students probably see the links or are beginning to see the links between the subjects. This could be an area where teachers need to be more explicit in their teaching.
5.2. The Survey and Dewey

In this section focus will be on John Dewey and his ideas about students’ role in determining curriculum. How large of a role should the students have? Do the students seem to have a good understanding of what is important in education?

The Role of Students in Curricula

The students surveyed gave a variety of responses regarding content and what should be taught. This hints at two possibilities neither of which needs to be dominant in a class of students with different needs and skills. The first possibility is that the students see the importance of studying a bit of everything. This could be to understand their world better as Vygotsky would have us believe. The other possibility is that students find themselves at different stages of their development. Some students have mastered English grammar at home and find it unnecessary. Some began learning English recently and feel it is necessary. Some students come from European backgrounds and/or may feel that it is the dominant culture and should be studied. Others may grow weary with focus on an area that they do not necessarily identify with apart from calling it a temporary home.

The Students Understanding of what is Important in Education

Again, it appears that students want to have a variety of content in their English and History classes. Whether this is due to personal needs or an understanding that the world is large and a great ability to use the English language may give students an upper hand in the future is neither here nor there. What remains is the fact that students’ responses varied greatly in what was needed in content and how they should be assessed. Students showed a great desire to learn about a lot in a variety of ways. This does allow the teacher to be a guide like Dewey says. It also shows that students’ opinions about content and teaching methodology should be taken seriously. Students did not give answers that hinted at preferring the easy way out of school with easy assessments and easy content. They want to be able to compete and understand.
5.3 The Survey and S.C.O.R.E

In this section the SCORE theory and the survey responses will be discussed. Did students hint at desiring to learn based on the SCORE theory?

As previously stated students have the desire to succeed and are curious about their world. That seems to be there for the students. Of course, students can face personal issues that dampen those needs in the academic arena, but in general those qualities are there. The need for relationships was specifically stated the need to have teachers who can identify with the students. The role of the teacher as facilitator and guide remains important to students. Boredom would be avoided by having curricula and teachers that are aware of student needs to learn, relate and express themselves.27 Dewey would be pleased.

5.4 The Survey and its Strengths and Weaknesses

The survey’s initial strengths were that it contained mostly open ended questions and wanted specific student input in a variety of specific areas. Students were also given a good amount of time to fill it in.

The weaknesses were that students didn’t always give much reasoning behind their answers. Some students did not turn in the survey. An unforeseen event was the publication of Historieundervisningens utmaningar by Vanja Lozic. According to the synopsis in alfa magazine the author of the book has interviewed students about their expectations regarding relevant History teaching. I was unable to access the book via the library. Perhaps the number of questions was too excessive for this thesis although they are appropriate to my own teaching.

5.5 The Results and My Own Teaching

The opinions of the students tended to add evidence to my suspicions about what students want in the English and History courses. Students want to learn about a variety

of subjects in a variety of ways. Focus on “Western” history is no longer adequate for students especially in an international school. English requires great flexibility in an international school because of the different levels of the students. The need for contemporary fiction and young adult fiction is an area that I need to address when teaching.

When it comes to assessments, I feel that perhaps it is time to offer a variety of assessment types for units in all my classes in order to appeal to the varied demands of students to show what they know. At the same time I must be sure that students master all areas that would be expected of future teachers, partners, businesses, governments, etc.

The desire to have field trips and guest speakers is incentive to get my students out more often. They value having other people talk and present.

I was disappointed that so few students responded to the “burning issues” question. This is an area where I may need to ask students every year what they want to learn about or discuss. Some issues, like sex, may never change, or perhaps that particular issue is still too taboo to talk too much about it.

This insight into what students want when it comes to their teachers and content does allow for a dialogue with my own students which, as Vygotsky would argue, makes the students part of the pedagogical process.  

5.6 Future Research Possibilities

The importance of a teacher’s social skills calls for more research. Is there an ideal set of social skills? What expectations do students have of teachers socially? If teachers are so important to students’ lives is that because of the content taught or a private conversation about life or both?

Some of the responses were interesting because of the differences in the responses from boys and girls. The boys’ desire to have a humorous teacher was an area that stood out. The boys’ desire to have film and pictures was interesting. Is that a sign that boys tend to be visual learners? Is there any link to our hunter-gatherer past if that is the case?

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Why are some of the more boring aspects of school like reading and answering questions from a book, essay writing and grammar learning still viewed as important? On the other hand, if thinking outside the box is so important to being successful or an entrepreneur why do schools or teachers focus so much on specific assessment types for specific subjects? Do universities need to offer more differentiated lessons and assessments?

Finally, looking for trends in Language and History learning with students from different cultures would be interesting and perhaps help in teaching in different cultures or areas of cities. This will allow us to address the needs of students today and try to predict their needs to tomorrow. 29

29 Bråten, p. 43.
6. Reference List


Klump, J What the Research Says (or Doesn’t Say), Education Northwest, vol 17, no.2, 2012.


Skolverket, Lgr 11, Stockholm, 2011.


7. Appendices

7.1 The survey questions

Please fill in this questionnaire with thorough answers in order to better understand what you mean. You may write more to an answer on the blank sheet at the back. Please write the number of the question you are writing about first.

Age:

Gender:

Native Language(s):

1. What are your favorite subjects?

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

2. What makes them your favorite subjects?

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

3. How do you learn best? With visuals like film, pictures, examples? Through auditory learning like listening to what a teacher or someone else says? Hands on learning (creating something in your own way)?

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

4. What areas of English need less focus? Grammar___ Spelling___ Essay writing___

Viewing film and pictures_____ Poetry_____ Book reading_____ Creative writing___

Other
(specify)
5. What kinds of lessons have been the most helpful with your English learning?
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

6. How could English lessons be fun and informative?
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

7. What genres should we read in English class? (Check as many as you want)
Sci-Fi___ Horror___ Mystery___ Classics___ Poetry___ Plays___
Fantasy___
Historical Fiction___ Contemporary___ Memoirs___ Other______
Do you have specific recommendations of books to read that students your age would
enjoy?_________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Do you have recommendations of burning topics or areas of interests that students
would like to read about?
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

8. What is a great English teacher like?
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

9. What is missing in your English education?
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
10. What recommendations do you have for English teachers?
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

11. Do you like History lessons? Why or why not?
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

12. Were there any units of History you enjoyed? If so, why?
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Was the teacher a part in causing your enjoyment of History?
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

13. How should history be taught? Film/youtube___ Historical novels___ With links to music___ With links to art___ Visits to museums___ Guest speakers___ Experiments___ Hands on activities___ Read and answer questions in a book or from a text___ Students become experts on something and teach the class___ Other___
____________________________________________________________________

14. When you are studying a topic in history do you prefer to have the teacher talk about the topic or would you rather be told to go find out about it? Explain why?
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

15. What periods of history do you want to study more about? Why?
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
16. What periods of history do you feel are important to learn about in order to understand the world better?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

17. Which countries, continents, time periods do you learn the most about?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

18. Least?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

19. Is that OK with you? Please explain.

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

20. What is missing in your history education?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

21. What is a great history teacher like?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

22. How could history classes be fun and informative?
23. What types of assessments accurately reflect your knowledge in a subject? Why?

Fill in the blank___ | Multiple choice___ | Essay___ | Verbal exam (where the teacher asks you questions)___ | Presentation___ | Short answer___ | Creative work that allows for use of art/posters/film/other visuals___ | Discussion___ | Other (specify)______________________________________________

24. Would you prefer to complete an assessment task in class in a week or have the assessment to do at home and two weeks to complete it? Why?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

25. What types of assessments do you frequently receive from teachers? Is this good or bad?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

26. Is the organization and setup of the room important to you? If so, how should a classroom be set up? Posters? Furniture? Light?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

27. Do you like learning in groups or individually? Why?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
28. Should music be allowed when working in class?

______________________________________________________________________

29. How important is a seating chart in ensuring that you are able to learn?

______________________________________________________________________

30. What amount of homework in one subject is adequate? Why?

______________________________________________________________________

31. How well do you remember key concepts and ideas from English class from one year to the next?

______________________________________________________________________

32. How well do you remember key concepts, ideas and events from History from one year to the next?

______________________________________________________________________

33. If you feel you forget quite a bit of information how could teachers help you keep information from previous years or units?

______________________________________________________________________

34. When is feedback helpful for you?

______________________________________________________________________

35. If you were a teacher how would you teach? Why?
36. Overall, would you rate academics in school as 1(uninspiring), 2(rarely inspiring) 3(sometimes inspiring) 4(often inspiring) 5 (always or almost always inspiring)

Please feel free to use the extra paper to add more information to any of your previous answers. Please write the number of the answer you are adding on to. Thank you!
7.2 Survey results

Areas of English that need less focus:

Grammar: 5 girls, 9 boys
Spelling: 7 girls, 5 boys
Poetry: 9 girls, 10 boys
Book reading: 4 girls, 4 boys
Viewing Film/Pictures: 7 girls, 5 boys
Essay Writing: 2 girls, 8 boys

What genres should be read?

Mystery: 10 girls, 15 boys
Classics: 5 girls, 17 boys
Contemporary: 9 girls, 2 boys
Plays: 3 girls, 4 boys
Fantasy: 11 girls, 17 boys
Sci-Fi: 7 girls, 19 boys
Historical Fiction: 5 girls, 12 boys

English Helpful Lessons

Fun and Games: 3 Boys
Discussions: 4 Girls, 2 boys
Lectures: 4 Girls, 3 Boys
Visuals: 1 Girl, 6 Boys
Acting: 1 Girl

Books to Read
Hunger Games: 6 Girls

Harry Potter: 1 Girl, 2 Boys

Shakespeare: 1 girl

**How could English be fun and informative?**

Mixes different ways of learning: 2 girls

Easy Going: 3 Girls, 3 Boys

Has reading time: 1 Boy

Engaging: 1 Girl

Jokester/humorous: 2 Girls, 7 Boys

Friendly: 2 Girls

Inspiring: 1 Girl

Relates to Students: 2 girls

**What is missing in your English education?**

Plays: 2 Girls

Theater: 2 Girls

Shakespeare: 3 Girls

Grammar: 5 Girls, 6 Boys

Drama: 2 Girls

Spelling: 5 Boys

Vocabulary: 5 Girls, 5 Boys

**Were there any History Units that you enjoyed?**

Ancient Egypt: 3 Girls
Ancient Rome: 4 Girls, 6 Boys

French Revolution: 2 Girls

WWI: 4 Girls, 7 Boys

Victorian Times: 2 Girls

**Was the teacher a part in your enjoyment of History?**

No: 13 Girls, 15 Boys

Yes: 1 Girl, 4 Boys

**What periods of History do you want to study more about?**

WWI: 2 Girls, 3 Boys

WWII: 6 Boys

Antiquity: 3 Girls, 7 Boys

**What periods of History do you feel are important to learn about to understand the world better?**

WWI: 5 Girls, 2 Boys

WWII: 4 Girls, 3 Boys

**What continents, countries and time periods do you learn the most about?**

Europe: 24

England: 18

**What continents, countries, time periods do you learn the least about?**

Africa: 11

Asia: 11

South America: 7

Australia: 3
What is a great History teacher like?

Active: 2 Girls
Differentiates learning methods: 3 Girls
Excited: 3 Girls, 1 Boy
Enthusiastic: 9 Boys
Funny: 7 Boys
Informative: 1 Girl, 5 Boys

How should History be taught?

Film/youtube: 9 Girls, 13 Boys
Historical Novels: 8 Girls, 8 Boys
With links to Music: 4 Girls, 8 Boys
With links to Art: 9 Girls, 12 Boys
Visits to Museum: 14 girls, 6 Boys
Guest speakers: 8 Girls, 10 Boys
Experiments: 7 Girls, 9 Boys
Hands on Activities: 14 Girls, 15 Boys
Read and answer questions from a text: 8 Girls, 8 Boys
Students become experts on something and teach class: 14 Girls, 15 Boys

How could History classes be both fun and informative?

Film use: 7 Boys
Field Trips: 4 Boys
Differentiated lessons: 1 Girl, 3 Boys

What types of assessments accurately reflect your knowledge in a subject?
Fill in the blank: 4 Girls, 8 Boys

Multiple choice: 8 Girls, 8 Boys

Essay: 8 Girls, 9 Boys

Verbal Exam: 6 Girls, 9 Boys

Presentation: 9 Girls, 15 Boys

Short Answer: 3 Girls, 5 Boys

Creative work that allows for use of art, film, visuals: 9 Girls, 8 Boys

Discussion: 11 Girls, 11 Boys