Students' Experience of Using Primary Sources at A-Level and in an Honours Degree in History: An Exploratory Case-Study

Stefania Gargioni

MSc by Research in Education

St Anne's College

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Abstract

The use of primary sources plays a significant role in history teaching in England. With the development of the School Council History Project (1976), the establishment of the GCSE (1985) and the National Curriculum (1991), students' work on primary sources became fully integrated within history teaching, with assessment objectives specifically devoted to it.

Scholars in history education have investigated how students make sense of primary sources and develop historical thinking, by emphasising the importance of understanding sources in their context. Much less attention has been paid, however, to the ways in which students themselves think about the process and purpose of using sources within their study of history. In seeking to address this gap, my research uses a cross-sectional case-study design to examine the ways in which students approach the use of sources within history courses at A-Level and when within a single-honours history for an honours degree. Therefore, this dissertation aims to explore students' perspectives of the journey towards becoming historians, examining the process of transition from working with sources at school, within a tightly structured programme tailored to A-Level examinations, to looking at primary materials when studying at university, with a more independent approach to the subject.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, in which both A-Level students and third year undergraduates were involved. The analysis of the data collected revealed how A-Level students perceived a certain disconnect between historians' methodology and the work done with primary materials during their course. Instead, undergraduates viewed more positively the tasks with sources carried out during an honours degree in history, highlighting how this work was often similar to historians' way of working.

Introduction

This dissertation looks at the way in which A-Level students and undergraduates perceive work with primary sources. Researchers in history education have investigated the way in which students approach primary source material up to A-Level, giving very little attention to the use of sources at university level, for which only a few studies looking at the general experience of study history at degree level have touched upon the role of sources (Hibbert, 2006; Booth, 2000). Additionally, scholarship in history education has mainly looked at the role of sources through the perspectives of teaching staff, providing meaningful reflections on how to make purposeful use of sources and offering models for good practice (for example, Sellin, 2018; McDonnell, 2019). Despite that, researchers in history education have neglected to investigate the perspectives of students on the ways they tackle tasks with primary sources. Therefore, this dissertation will focus on A-Level students' and undergraduates' perspectives on work with primary sources, aiming to explore how they perceive and engage with sources in relation to the study of history. Additionally, this research will look at the identities reflected in the A-Level students' and undergraduates' discussion of their work with primary materials, investigating the role that their work with sources has in informing students' perception of themselves.

This study follows a cross-sectional methodology, providing a "snapshot" of the students' experience at a particular time during their study of history. Due to the limited attention that scholarship has given to this area of research, my study will be structured as an exploratory case-study, focused on a single phenomenon (i.e. students' perceptions of their work with primary sources) significantly neglected by researchers in the field.

The literature review will explore three main areas of research. Firstly, it will look at the role that primary sources have in the UK history curriculum, both at school and at university. Secondly it will explore the way A-Level students and undergraduates make sense of primary materials, looking at how their historical understanding is influenced by the work they do with sources. This section will also explore at the significant role that primary sources have in developing students' historical thinking, by looking at the connections between contextual knowledge and evidential thinking. Finally, the

literature review will investigate the relationship between the study of history and students' identities formation, focusing on the way this aspect of historical study informs the way students perceive themselves.

The research design section will look at the methodological choices I made about how to conduct this research, discussing the reasons why I decided to follow a cross-sectional methodology and to structure my research as an exploratory case-study.
This section will also examine the rationale behind my sampling strategies and the instruments for gathering data, discussing the way the semi-structured interviews were designed. This section will conclude by looking at the decisions I made about data analysis and at the coding process, tackling questions concerned with the choice of thematic analysis and inductive coding.

The findings from the data analysis will be presented and discussed across two different sections, looking at them in relation to the different research questions that this dissertation aims to address. The discussion of the findings will focus on the perceptions students had of the tasks they carried out with primary sources, on the links between looking at primary materials and getting familiar with historians' way of working and on the identities that A-Level students and undergraduates developed while working with sources. The last section of this dissertation will discuss the implications for practice, looking at the recommendations that can be based on the findings of this research.

1.Literature review

As highlighted in the introduction, this study aims to investigate the ways in which A-Level students and undergraduates perceive their work with primary sources when studying history. History educators have offered a variety of reasons for engaging in evidential work within school history, looking particularly at what kind of understanding this type of work could elicit. Therefore, research in history education has revealed different formulations regarding the aim of evidential work. Some researchers have emphasised the links between students own direct work with sources and their understanding of historians' methods (Wineburg, 1991). It allows them to understand how claims about the past are constructed and validated and by engaging in the process themselves, they learn how to use contextual knowledge to support the process of drawing inferences from the traces left behind and to make meaningful connections, cross-referencing different sources.

Evidential work is also seen as fostering students' understanding of the nature of historical knowledge, enabling them to recognise that historians do not uncover a single true picture of the past; rather than construct an interpretation of the past, in response to particular questions. This allows students to make sense the status of historical knowledge as a series of claims based on the interpretation of sources (Husbands, 1996; Barton and Levstik, 2004). Another strong reason, however, for asking students to engage directly with sources from the past is that it makes that past more real: it can thus foster students' historical thinking by encouraging them to abandon presentism and acknowledge the "otherness of the past" (Wineburg, 1991, p. 86). The editors of *Teaching History* also point out that the work of Keatinge – the first person to advocate for the use of sources in history – "pulses" with a concern to use sources to "foster sense of period or 'atmosphere' as he calls it" (Historical Association, 2019, p. 22).

Despite this strong support for the use of historical evidence in the classroom, it is important to acknowledge how these different arguments give rise to slightly different rationales for asking students to use sources. While some teachers enthusiastically claim that would like their students to see themselves *as historians,* some teacher

educators have drawn a clear distinction between how sources are used by young people in the classroom and the place they have in historians' methodology. While historians are using sources to generate new claims about the past, Husbands (1996) argues that the significance of evidential work in the classroom relies *not* on the fact that "it makes classroom history authentic", nor because it models the activity of the historians, but because it can foster students' understanding of historical knowledge. Through evidential work, students can make sense of how historical claims are corroborated by evidence gathered from primary sources. According to Husbands (1996), students will generate "new private understandings" of sources they looked at, without producing any "new public knowledge" from the study of primary materials (p. 26).

While Barton and Levstik (2008) agree with Husbands about the significance of evidential work for making sense of historical claims, they also argue that the benefits of evidential work go beyond history. They argue that working with sources would enable students to understand how *all* claims (including those made by current politicians, for example) should be tested and supported by appropriate evidence. Consequently, learning to engage in the enquiry method on which evidential work focuses would help "students to reach conclusions about significant social questions", preparing them to participate in a pluralist democracy (p. 136).

Acknowledging these different formulations regarding the purpose of evidential work in school, this research will look at how students themselves understand the place of evidential work in school history. Since the research is focused on those who have chosen to continue with the subject in the final years of school and on into university it will look particularly at how it serves to build students' familiarity with historians' work and at whether, or to what extent, students see themselves as actually engaging in the tasks of a historian.

Working with primary sources has become a common practice in history teaching over the last few decades. From the early 1970s, scholars in history education have emphasised the importance of the use of sources in the classroom, especially to "foster students' historical understanding" (Van Nieuwenhuyse, Roose, Wils, De Paepe, Werschaffel, 2017, p.1). They have argued that students should develop an

understanding of how the past is constructed through the interpretation of primary sources and that they should then be able to "reason both with and about sources" (Van Nieuwenhuyse, Roose, Wils, De Paepe, Werschaffel, 2017, p.2). However, research has not yet investigated history students' perspectives on their work with primary sources and the ways in which such work features in their understanding of the discipline.

By exploring such issues, my research will also look at what kinds of identities are reflected in students' perceptions of their work with primary sources and also at the different kinds of factors that inform such views. Scholars in educational research have investigated the link between studying history and identities' development. Researchers in history education have analysed the shaping of history students' identities by linking this process with the different activities that students encounter in the classroom, such as using textbooks and examining historians' work (Boon and Gopinathan, 2005; Nzeribe-Nascimiento, 2018).These studies have demonstrated the significant role that particular experiences of studying history have in forming students' identities, shaping the views that students hold both about themselves and about the subject (Korostelina,2008).

1.1. The Place of Primary Sources in the UK History Curriculum

The idea of history as a "received subject" characterised early twentieth-century history teaching (Sylvester, 1994, p. 23). Except for Keatinge (1910) – who "provided a wide range of specific source-based activities" (McAleavy, 1998, p.10) – early twentieth-century history educators did not generally reflect on the use of sources in the classroom (Cannadine et al., 2011). Little changed in this respect, for many decades although some facsimiles of original sources were published in the Jackdaw collections of primary materials associated with particular topics, such as the Norman conquest of 1066 or the Gunpowder Plot (Edwards, 2016). More significant in terms of its emphasis on work with primary sources was the outcome of a series of School Council Projects launched between 1972 and 1976 (Cannadine et al., 2011). These projects were able to attract the interest of a substantial number of schools and teachers. By the mid-1980s, "20% of schools were teaching the O-Level examination

for the course launched by the most influential of these projects, the Schools' Council History (13-16) Project (SCHP)" (Cannadine et al., 2011, p.50). The Schools' Council recognised the importance of developing historical understanding in the classroom and set out to structure a new kind of history syllabus, responsive to the specific needs of adolescents. SCHP guidelines emphasise the active role of the students and the development of subject-based thinking skills. Working on historical evidence was considered significant for developing students' understanding of "human action in the past" (SCHP, 1976, p.29). It was argued that the use of primary sources could help pupils to learn how to question, how to assess the evidence for particular claims and "more particularly how to distinguish between evidence and interpretation" (p. 25). It is important to note that the SCHP guidelines did not suggest that pupils in schools "should study only historical evidence" (p. 26). They also acknowledged the vital importance of guidance provided by the teachers, which was seen as essential for giving students the background information necessary for comprehending and analysing historical evidence.

While the SCHP was intended to be taught from age 13, the National Curriculum launched in 1991 established attainments targets for history ages 5-16. Along with Attainment Target 1 (knowledge and understanding of history) and Attainment Target 2 (interpretations of history), Attainment Target 3 was defined as "the use of historical sources". With the first revision of the National Curriculum in 1995, the amount of prescribed content was reduced, as was the level of prescription and the number of separate attainment targets. A major change was concerned with Attainment Target 3, the use of historical sources, which was reframed as "historical enquiry" (and re-named as 'Key element 4). This was judged to be helpful in supporting teachers to think in an "enquiry-based way", which required students to use evidence to answer specific historical questions (Husbands et al., 2003, p.13) – an approach that contrasted openly with characteristic practice within the initial version of the National Curriculum (1991), described by Christine Counsell (2000) as "death by sources A to F" (Husbands et al., 2003, p.14). The initial version of the National Curriculum had tended to focus on evaluating the reliability and utility of different sources in general terms, or in relation to the study of specific topics. However, it had failed to encourage students to use the sources that they had evaluated to develop answers to genuine historical questions (Husbands et al., 2003). According to Counsell (2000), this

approach led to the process of evaluating sources becoming detached from the idea of using primary materials to build valid and well-substantiated historical claims. The analysis of primary sources is still required by the most recent revision of the National Curriculum (2014) and (as explained further below) also features in both GCSE and A-Level examinations. The National Curriculum requires students to 'investigate issues critically and make valid historical claims by using a range of sources in their historical context' (Department for Education, 2014, p.3).

The changes introduced by the SCHP to the lower secondary curriculum in the early 1970s also came to be reflected at A-Level (Hill, 1972, p.36). These changes were intended to develop and test students' capacity to engage in 'argument, critical interpretation and engagement with controversy' (Burston, 1957, p.51). Until then, post-16 history had essentially focused on "the essay as a vehicle to assess students' historical knowledge and understanding" (Chapman, 2011, p.48), but by the early 1980s, a diverse range of innovative A-Level history courses, inspired by the "New history" approaches, had been developed which 'aimed to make A-Level simultaneously rigorously disciplinary and engaging' (Chapman, 2011, p.48). The first course devised was the Associated Examining Board's Alternative syllabus (AEB 673), which was followed by the Cambridge History Project, the Enquiry into Teaching History to Over Sixteens (ETHOS) and the London Syllabus E. All of these specifications were centred on developing "a conceptually informed understanding of history as a form of knowledge" (Lewin, 1994, p. 212). Syllabus AEB 673, for example, offered a "personal study, a paper on historical method and a period study". (Lewin, 1994). ETHOS also focused strongly on what it defined as "doing history" - engaging students actively in historical research through "personal study" in the form of a student-led research project. The stated intentions behind designing this new specification were to address:

> a) The relative decline in the numbers of students in "A" and "AS" history classes: b) the need to preserve an "A" level and develop a balanced curriculum which would address cross-curricular themes: and c) the need to develop a certification in terms of positive achievement and not pass/fall grade levels (Fines and Nichol, 1991, p.28).

The project was certainly underpinned by the idea of history "as a discrete academic discipline", an element that was reflected in academic historians' perceptions (Lewin, 1994, p. 216). A central element of the project was, therefore, students' independent construction of their own point of view on the past by undertaking historical investigation under teachers' supervision. Its designers stressed that "students would be assessed on their ability to frame and to pursue historical enquiry, to handle historical sources and to demonstrate historical understanding and explanation" (Lewin, 1994, p. 217).

Subsequent reform of the curriculum in 2000 reduced the number of specifications offered at A-Level and provided greater clarity about the kind of work that A-Level students would encounter during the course (Chapman, 2011). Although the inclusion of sources within A-Level assessment was not new, historical enquiry was clearly identified as a specific focus in Assessment Objective 2 (AO2). Just as early versions of the National Curriculum and GCSE specifications were criticised for the nature of their focus on sources, so the A-Level reforms of 2000 faced criticism on the grounds that the examination assessed historical competences through exercises that did not actually reflect historical practice (Husbands et al., 2003). Despite this, it can be argued that A-Level history continued to require "high-order reading and writing skills, scholarship and research, the use of evidence to justify an argument" (Haydn et al., 2001, p. 266).

The most recent revisions to the national requirements for AS and A-level history were published by the Coalition Government in 2014 for courses that were first taught from September 2015. The subject content requirements for history underline the importance of using "historical sources critically in their context deploying appropriate information and reaching substantiated conclusions' (Department for Education, 2014, p.4), There are now just three examination boards offering A-Level specifications: AQA, OCR and Edexcel, all declaring that one aim of their history course is helping students to become independent and reflective thinkers. The boards also emphasise how central an understanding of 'the nature of history [as being] concerned with judgements based on available evidence' really is (AQA, 2014, p.21). Assessment Objective 2 (AO2), defined as the ability to 'analyse and evaluate appropriate source material, primary and/or contemporary to the period, within its

historical context' (OCR, 2014, p. 22), carries a weighting of 20% of the total score, with the specifications offered by all three exam boards (AQA, 2014; OCR, 2014; Edexcel, 2014).

1.2. Role and Place of Source Work at University Level.

Research on subject pedagogy at university level has largely neglected the question of the role of primary sources in history degrees. One of the few studies that had a strong focus on such issues is the doctoral research carried out by Barbara Hibbert (2006) on the transition between doing history at secondary school and at university.

Within her study, Hibbert briefly discussed how students work on primary sources both at A-Level and during their undergraduate degree. According to Hibbert, A-Level coursework on primary sources depended largely on following the syllabus. Referring to four of the five schools included in her sample, Hibbert argued that in the first two schools there was "extensive use of sources", while in the others there "was very little" use of primary sources, and this was done only through work on past papers (Hibbert, 2006). Hibbert's study also highlighted how more regular work with primary sources was carried out in the schools that followed a syllabus requiring "doing special papers with prescribed documents" (2006). In a previous study published in 2002, Hibbert also highlighted how teachers and students encountered problems in using sources due to "the artificial nature of the materials they are forced to use, with exams increasingly encouraging the short gobbet" (p. 40). She concluded that sources "do not engage learners, especially if they are not put into context" and suggested that "there may be room for sixth form teachers to experiment with a large use of primary sources" (p. 41). Further, Hibbert's doctoral research underlined the fact that not all universities require coursework on primary sources during the first year of an undergraduate degree. Students interviewed by Hibbert experienced work on primary sources at university as specifically requiring them "to interpret the source yourself, while at A-Level you are talking about things from the textbooks" (Hibbert, 2006, p. 122).

Hibbert's research can also shed some light on university tutors' views about students' preparation for working on primary materials. The academics she interviewed expressed contrasting views; while one lecturer "would like to see more active questioning in relation to the sources", another university tutor stated that students "have reasonable skills" to work on that. In addition, another academic affirmed that he would like to see his students understanding "more about criticising evidence although they've learned the word bias and sometimes source criticism doesn't go very much beyond identifying bias […] and once you've identified bias you can throw the source away" (Hibbert, 2006, p. 124). In her conclusions, Hibbert argued that history students find the transition from school to university "very difficult even if they enjoyed the topic". She also emphasised how both students and teachers "could see sixth form history teaching as spoon-feeding". Based on issues raised by the participants in her research, Hibbert argued that sometimes A-level students could "see teachers doing much of the work for them" even though some of them "find themselves ready for independent study, while accepting a degree of spoon-feeding" (p. 126). She also argued for more attention "to the transition from school to higher education" (Hibbert, 2002, p. 126). Additionally, research carried out by Alan Booth with undergraduates based at the University of Nottingham showed that only 30% of the students involved in an honours degree in history "claimed to have a made a significant use of primary sources" (Booth, 1997, p. 36).

It is important to acknowledge that in recent years the debate about transition to university has benefited from reports and materials published by professional institutions in history education, such as the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the Historical Association (HA). These reports provided a detailed picture of teaching and learning history at university, also highlighting the main challenges encountered by undergraduates when working with primary sources. The report conducted by the HEA and the HA (Higher Education Academy, 2015) suggested that inadequate preparation in skills such as critical reading and lack of ability to evaluate different primary sources affected undergraduates' work with sources. In very recent times, Marcus Collins and Peter Stearns (2020) looked at the way in which history is studied at university. By adopting a comparative approach that focused both on the American and the British contexts, Collins and Stearns discussed the skills that undergraduates discussed while studying history. They considered the work on sources as an

important part of an honours degree in history, helping students to learn how to evaluate historical evidence (Collins and Stearns, 2020).

1.3. Students' historical understanding and work on primary sources.

Until the 1960s, children's responses to historical sources were classified through a Piagetian framework. By drawing on such an approach, Hallam assumed that "historical thinking is characterized by the same stage progression that Piaget posited for logic-mathematical constructs" (Hallam, 1969, p. 3). Some academic historians shared with Piagetian psychologists a scepticism about students' understanding in history and the inclusion of primary sources in the classroom. Elton argued that "any thought that children can usefully analyse or evaluate the nature of the evidence seems to be seriously mistaken" (Elton, 1970, p.222). According to Elton, young students are unable to understand the complexities and the abstractions proper to the subject (Elton, 1967, 1970).

Among the scholarship that contested the dominant approach drawn from the Piagetian framework, it is particularly important to discuss Martin Booth's research in cognitive psychology. Ultimately, Booth's research demonstrated how processes connected with historical understanding were "not of a kind which could be classified in neat Piagetian understanding" (Booth, 1987, p.34). Booth argued that to understand all the elements involved in the development of pupils' historical thinking, it is fundamental to "determine the particular nature of the discipline and the learning and teaching it requires" (Booth, 1994, p.66). In other words, Booth considered it important to establish what Bruner called "the structure of the subject" (Bruner, 1960, p. 42) and therefore asserted that historical thinking is not primarily about "hypothesis, induction or deduction but is more about finding the meaning and significance of historical sources and asking questions about them" (Booth, 1994, p.69).

Another important piece of research that broke the grip of the Piagetian framework was the evaluation of the SCHP conducted by Denis Shemilt in 1980, focussed on adolescent ideas about historical evidence in history. The evaluation was based on the work of a sample of pupils following the SCHP and a sample of those following

more traditional examination courses. By drawing on extensive interview data, Shemilt and his colleagues outlined coherent models for progression in adolescents' ideas, not just about historical evidence and historians' methodology but also in relation to causation and empathy (Shemilt, 1980 and 1984: Lee and Ashby, 1987). His work has thus been highly significant for the articulation of a "history-specific model of progression in terms of elements of historical understanding" (Husbands et al., 2003, p.26).

Among Shemilt's collaborators was a team of researchers at the Institute of Education (formerly a separate part of the University of London): Lee, Dickinson and Ashby. Their work focused initially on mapping progression in pupils' ideas about empathy (See for example: Lee and Ashby, 1987, 2001) and the group's subsequent studies – conducted within Project CHATA (Concepts of History and Teaching Approaches) – focused on pupils' understanding of the nature of historical accounts and historical (specifically causal) explanation. The models of progression that they developed outlined broad changes in children's understanding of individual concepts that can be summarized in relation to three main steps: "a) explaining the outcomes of action; b) causal structure; and c) rational understanding" (Lee, Dickinson and Ashby, 2001, p.110). The conclusions raised by CHATA presented an idea of history education based on progression in understanding rather than on the aggregation of factual knowledge and suggested that "history teaching can develop powerful intellectual tools – but specifically historically – within pluralist and open historical content" (Lee, Dickinson and Ashby, 2001, p. 114).

The very significant contribution made by Booth and Shemilt – and later by the CHATA project – was the idea of grounding their experiments in the specific context of history teaching rather than borrowing abstract cognitive models and seeking to adapt them to historical understanding. They considered that previous models of historical understanding – such as the one built on Piaget's theory by Hallam – had a restricting effect on the history curriculum and concluded that students' historical understanding could be assessed only by considering its "chaotic and uneven" elements (Booth, 1987, p.24), which differentiated it from logical thinking.

More recently, other scholars in England and abroad have borrowed this kind of approach. Their research has focused on: a) further investigation of the processes underlying students' historical understanding; and b) ways in which teachers' can support students' evidential thinking.

The American cognitive psychologist Sam Wineburg investigated the methods used by historians and by students in dealing with historical evidence. By investigating how historical thinking is taught and the ways through which students can engage with this concept, Wineburg argued that secondary students could use the modus operandi proper of the historian (Wineburg, 1991). He argued that even though historians have more sophisticated ways to interpret historical materials, due to their broader background of "knowledge and beliefs" (Wineburg, 1991, p.26), students are nonetheless able to derive information and develop historical explanations from particular sources. Wineburg built a framework intended to help students to develop their historical reading and thinking strategies, which consists of the following parts:

> a) The act of looking first to the source (i.e. the provenance) of the document before reading the body of the text (sourcing); b) the act of situating a document in a concrete temporal and spatial context (contextualization); c) the act of comparing documents with one another (corroboration); and d) close reading (Wineburg, 1991, p. 77-78).

According to him, the major feature that differentiated students' approach from that of historians is concerned with corroboration: students had difficulties in dealing with contradictory information while historians could "erect elaborate scenarios" (Wineburg, 1991, p. 78) within which to accommodate it. Historical thinking is defined by Wineburg as an "unnatural act": students do not use complex components of historical thinking by nature; when working with sources they need to be taught to contextualise (Wineburg, 1991, p.80). By building on Wineburg's assumptions, Peter Seixas developed an additional model of historical thinking. According to him, to think historically students would need to:

> Establish historical significance; b) use primary source evidence; c) identify continuity and change; d) analyse cause and consequence; e) take historical

> perspective; f) understand ethical dimension of historical interpretations (Seixas and Morton, 2012, p. 22).

Seixas concluded that all these concepts would link "historical thinking" to "historical literacy", identified as a way of reaching a substantial understanding of historical "event and processes through active engagement with historical sources" (Seixas and Morton, 2012, p.23)

Other research in the field has investigated the way in which teachers could support the development of students' thinking about evidence. In this respect, the work undertaken by teachers such as Elizabeth Pickles (2010) and Paula Worth (2016) in the English context is particularly relevant. Pickles explored the relationship between sources and context at GCSE level (2010) by examining the link between students' substantive knowledge and their evidential thinking. She explored the way in which students used historical evidence, by looking at the connections between their contextual knowledge, their understanding of the nature of sources and their ways of thinking emphatically about the historical context in which primary materials were produced. Her conclusion was 'that the expertise with which pupils handle sources exceed[s] their application of routine source skills and include[s] prior knowledge and a conceptual understanding of the nature of evidence' (Pickles, 2010a, p.33). In other words, Pickles emphasised how working on historical sources cannot focus on the mere use of sources but should be supported by the development of substantive knowledge about the relevant topic that could enable students to locate and interpret the sources within their specific context.

Worth, who was working with GCSE students, explored how understanding and using language could inform their understanding of sources. She discussed how the major challenge was "making meaning from sources before evaluation and communicating the meaning that pupils distilled" (Worth, 2016 p.100). However, she found that pupils started to connect different interpretations of the source to "build a cautious, complex argument about the difficulties of interpreting, carefully substantiating these with different tentative readings of historical sources" (p.100-101). She showed how inferences about sources should be related to contextual knowledge in order to make

students able to justify their claims. Her research thus reached a similar conclusion about the importance of the link between sources and their context.

Recently, teacher-researchers in history education have suggested how work with sources could be modelled on historians' methodology. McDonnell highlighted the value of letting students work on collections of chosen sources. This research demonstrated that the use of multiple sources could elicit not only students' understanding of primary materials but could also offer them important insights into historians' methodology. Fordham (2015) took this idea further, suggesting the use of an agreed 'anthology' of sources in public examinations, arguing that this element would help students to tackle tasks that are more similar to historians' way or working.

Dutch scholars, such as Jannet Van Drie, Carla Van Boxtel and Harry Havekes (2008 and 2010), worked on the development of a conceptual framework for teaching historical contextualisation, which they referred to as the "Active Historical Thinking" framework (AHT). This framework focused on the relationship between "students' epistemological stance about history and elements involved in knowing and doing history" (Havekes, Coppen, Luttenberg, Van Boxtel, 2012, p.72). Echoing Wineburg's findings, the framework that they built also showed that "epistemic beliefs take effect on how knowing and doing history relate and are used in constructing an historical context" (Havekes et al., 2012, p.83). Havekes' own research offers a practical experiment based on the AHT framework. He designed an AHT learning activity – called an "images debate" – around three different stages: a) students had to choose visual sources for an exhibition focused on a certain enquiry, asking contextualising questions to make a choice; b) students received contextual information about the sources and were asked to confirm or reconsider their previous choice; and c) a final plenary in which students discussed their choices and reflected on the fact that they had used different sources for the same purpose (2010). He concluded that they were able to contextualize sources and were able to consider history as 'a construction of the past, (Havekes, 2010, p. 58).

Both the frameworks built by Wineburg and by the Dutch scholars emphasise the importance of understanding sources in their context, as a way to develop historical reasoning about the nature of historical evidence. A further practical application of

frameworks concerned with historical thinking has been carried out by Abby Reisman in public schools in the San Francisco area. Her intervention study – concerned with the extensive inclusion of sources in secondary history – has shown how regular work with sources, modelled on historians' methodology, can improve both students' understanding and literacy (Reisman, 2012). Very recently, Jonathan Sellin (2018) highlighted the importance of contextual knowledge when practising evidential thinking. In his research, Sellin started to build students' "contextual knowledge to answer questions about a source's usefulness before unveiling the source itself (2018, p. 32). Sellin's conclusion suggested that the development of contextual knowledge could prevent students "from spring-boarding in one direction from source into own knowledge" (2018, p. 32), leading them to make meaningful connections between sources.

This analysis of the literature in the field has highlighted the different stages through which scholars have moved, from sceptical views towards students' understanding in history to the idea that young people could reach a certain level of historical understanding in relation to tasks appropriate to their age. This shift in scholars' approach implied a reconsideration of the nature of historical understanding, by analysing its complex and peculiar nature and the role that imagination could play in such a process. Recent studies drew on this approach and further investigated the processes underlying historical cognition and developed models to analyse it and to help students in developing historical thinking. These studies have certainly demonstrated that work on sources cannot consist merely of the evaluation of primary materials, but has to be informed by a good knowledge of the context. While the most recent revision of the National Curriculum has also emphasised the need to relate work on sources to the development of substantive knowledge, the research work reported above has shown that work on sources is more complex even than that; it involves not only knowledge but also close reading, comprehension and the ability to compare one source with another.

Although these studies represent a major contribution to the research in the field, they have focused on exploration of the cognitive processes in which students (need to) engage, looking at them from an outside perspective, considering what the students actually do, and what this suggests about their understanding of the nature of history.

They have worked by comparing students' approaches to those of historians, asking how the processes in which they engage tend to compare. They have not, however, explored the students' perspectives: what do they think they are doing and how important do they believe that process to be? How easy do they find the processes in which they are expected to engage and to what extent do they regard them as important? Any analysis of students' perspectives on their learning process in history has been largely neglected and it is this neglect that I intend to remedy by asking how the students themselves make sense of the demands that they face: how do they perceive the process of using sources?; what importance do they attach to it?; how difficult do they find it? Drawing on an approach to educational research and school improvement that recognises how much researchers can learn about effective teaching by taking students' perspective seriously (see, for example, Rudduck and Flutter, 2004; Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007), I will investigate students' own views of the nature of the process in which they engage as they work with sources. By looking at the students' perceptions, my research will foreground their role as active agents in the learning process.

1.4. History Education and the Shaping of Students' Historical Identities

The relationship between history education and students' identities formation has been extensively investigated by scholars in the field. The majority of studies concerned with this topic have been focused on the links between history education and the construction and re-construction of national, regional and ethnical identities, by looking at how study of the subject has shaped social identities and views of a shared past in different contexts (Korostelina, 2008). The shaping of these kinds of identities has been studied by connecting these elements with the general history curriculum and with activities carried out in the classroom, particularly focused on the use and influence of textbooks (Boon and Gopinathan, 2005). Such studies have looked at identities through different theoretical lenses: social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986), social categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher and Watherell, 1987) and psycho-dynamic theory (Volkan, 1997).

All these studies demonstrated the major role that history education plays in shaping social identities, by analysing how the discipline "formed and transformed modes, forms and concept of identity" (Korostelina, 2008). Some studies have also focused on the relationship between history and identities' formation by focusing on conflicting national identities and the concepts of "us" and "the other" (Akinoglu, 2016), while another relevant body of research has focused on the relationship between history education, memory and identity (Bellino and Williams, 2017).

Students' perceptions of their self-identity in relation to the study of secondary school subjects have been recently the focus of different studies that have highlighted the multiplicity of elements connected with identities' formation (i.e. success, engagement, participation, prior background ideas). This body of scholarship has revealed the wide range of elements that can helpfully be considered when exploring the different kinds of identities that are reflected in students' perceptions of their work in studying history.

Boaler, William and Zevembergen (2000) have explored the ways in which secondary students develop their identities in relation to the study of mathematics, while Lankiewicz and Kozak (2014) have investigated language students' identities formation within a multicultural milieu. Studies in education – particularly about schooling and literacy – have carried out longitudinal analysis of identity formation. Boaler and Greeno (2000) have analysed identity formation within the activities set up in a maths classroom. By drawing upon the concept of "situated cognition and situated learning", the two scholars concluded that the sense of identity (or of the self) that students developed in relation to maths affected their engagement with the learning of that subject. According to Boaler and Greeno, those identities informed choices about maths activities and a future career in maths. Urrieta carried out a study – based on in-depth interviews – that investigated the links between participation and identification in schooling activities and offered a good insight on the extent to which past histories and participation can be the basis for future identities (Urrieta, 2003).

History students' perception of their own identities has been recently explored by Sophia Nzeribe-Nascimento by looking at how students see the subject and their relationship with it. She particularly focused on: a) the perceptions that students have

of historians; b) the ways in which they understand their own identity; and c) the extent to which they see themselves as historians. Nzeribe-Nascimento found that her sixth-form students perceived themselves mostly as "students" and very rarely as "historians". She also identified the kinds of skills that the students tended to attribute to historians, such as the "ability to interpret and carry out research" (Nzeribe-Nascimento, 2019, p. 13) and the qualities that they associated with them: having strong opinions, being knowledgeable and analytical and demonstrating passion for the subject (Nzeribe-Nascimento, 2019).

My own research will draw on socio-cultural theory (Wertsch, 1985) to interpret the ways in which students perceive their own identity in relation to the study of history and the work done with primary sources.

According to a socio-cultural approach, "identity" is a social construct of the context, in which the interaction with other individuals and contexts play a crucial role in shaping people's perceptions of themselves (Fotovatian, 2015). Adopting such a framework enables me to look at student identity development as something "continually produced in individuals and by their interactions with others and social practices" (Penuel, 2015, p.3). It will also allow me to look at history students' identities development as a fluid and dynamic process, in which there is a reflexive element that links the formation of identities with the factors that influence this development. Within this framework, identity, practices and resources are intrinsically related and inform each other's development (Norton, 2006). Furthermore, a socio-cultural theory represents a useful lens through which to conceptualise history students' identity development as a "joint-accomplishment" between them and their interactions with "practices, experiences, cultural tools, relationships, institutional and cultural context" (Hand and Gresalfi, 2015, p.193). In this respect, the joint-accomplishment of identities can be examined in relation to "different levels of activity, including how identity develops in relation to the practices of a particular activity, how identity shifts over time across activities" (Hand and Gresalfi, 2015, p.193).

When discussing the adoption of a socio-cultural framework in history education, it is important to acknowledge the different ways in which historical thinking and its connection to identity formation have been theorised within socio-cultural theory.

Socio-cultural research in history education has looked at the idea of thinking historically and at the nature of historical claims (Epstein and Peck, 2017, p. 2) in different ways. While a disciplinary approach presents historical thinking as an "inside out" process, in which people use historical evidence to make claims about the past (Epstein and Peck, 2017, p. 11) with reference to methodologies accepted by a scholarly community , a socio-cultural approach looks at it as a process which occurs from the "outside in" emphasising the role that the "social, cultural and historical contexts" of the historian – or *other* interpreter – have in shaping historical narratives (Epstein and Peck, 2017, p. 11). Historical thinking occurs within "a mental model of human thought" (Epstein and Peck, 2017, p. 11) that is informed by the context in which any individual operates. This model – described by socio-cultural researchers as an "internal culturally mediated framework" (Wertsch, 2002, p. 26) – plays a fundamental role in shaping historical narratives, since it reflects the social and cultural beliefs on which the individuals rely when they "think historically" (Epstein and Peck, 2011, p. 11). The process of constructing claims about the past is not a discrete process independent of the world in which those claims are being constructed and the particular reasons why particular people (not all of them historians) seek knowledge of the past will necessarily shape the kinds of narratives they develop.

In adopting a socio-cultural approach to studying young people's identity, this study focuses in particular on their "historical identity" in terms of the extent to which they think of themselves as historians, but it also acknowledges that there are other aspects of participants' historical identities, that reflect the ways in which they see their own lives in relation to the histories that they are studying. In asking about the role that historical thinking plays in shaping individuals' historical narratives (Epstein and Peck, 2017, p. 146), it recognises that other social and cultural factors also play a critical role in shaping them.

By considering the issues discussed in the literature review, my aim is to answer the following research questions:

a) How do A-Level students and undergraduates perceive their work with primary sources in relation to their experience of studying history?

b) What factors influence the way in which A-Level students and undergraduates engage with primary sources?

c) What kinds of historical identities are reflected in A-Level students and undergraduates' discussions of their work primary sources?

2. Research Design

2.1 Why a Cross-Sectional Study?

In this section, I will first present an overview of my research design that sets out the its key elements. I will then explain the processes of decision-making that have led me to this particular design.

After a detailed examination of the qualitative methodologies available for undertaking such a study, I decided that the best way to address the four research questions outlined in the rationale was through a cross-sectional study, using an explorative approach. Cross-sectional methodology is generally defined as an approach that "involves taking a snapshot of the information at a given point in time" (Wise, Selwyn, Smith and Suter, 2017, p. 145). Therefore, it offered the possibility of analysing the participants' perceptions at a certain moment of their experience. Within the context of this study, a cross-sectional research design enabled the investigation of how students at different stages within education (i.e. towards the end of the A-Level course and towards the end of an honours degree in history) perceived the work that they were doing with primary sources

A cross-sectional study, which involved selection *at* each stage of those who met the essential criteria, made it possible to collect sufficient data from samples of students belonging to different contexts (i.e. A-level students following different specifications, and undergraduates attending different kinds of university). A cross-sectional study also offered the possibility of studying a more representative sample of the population in relation to the purpose of my research: those at each level who would choose to continue with the subject *and* those who would not.

In reaching this decision, I explored the possibility of adopting a longitudinal approach, which could offer important advantages, allowing me to track the same cohort of students through their transition between A-Level and university. One of the main reasons for ruling out such an approach was the large number of students that I would have had to include in my sample of Year 13 students in order to ensure that

it would contain an adequate number of individuals who subsequently opted to pursue history at a sufficiently wide variety of universities.

An additional factor that informed my choice of a cross-sectional study was the time constraint imposed by the expected length of a MRes programme. Since the University expected completion within a period of between two and three years, the adoption of a longitudinal approach, tracking students for the five years that would encompass a two-year A-Level course and a three-year degree would imply a research design that would exceed the allowed time.

2.2. Exploratory Case-study

Exploratory case-studies have been largely used in research concerned with social and medical sciences (Depa, Hilzendegen, Tinnemann, Stroebele-Benschop, 2015). According to Jupp, "exploratory research is a methodological approach primarily concerned with discovery and with generating or building theory" (Jupp, 2006, p.1). He also argued that such an approach could be particularly appropriate to a widely neglected research topic, in which "the notion of exploration is wedded to the idea of researcher as explorer" (Jupp, 2006, p.1). Having identified the large gaps in research focused on students' use of primary sources and their role in the transition between A-Level and university, I decided that an explorative approach would suit the purpose of my study. According to Mills, Durepos and Wiebe, "an exploratory case study investigates distinct phenomena characterized by a lack of detailed preliminary research, especially formulated hypotheses that can be tested, and/or by a specific research environment that limits the choice of methodology" (Mills, Durepos and Wiebe, 2010, p. 23). This form of case-study is often applied to a study – such as the one discussed in this dissertation – aiming to explore a relatively new field of investigation. As Theleir argued, exploratory research would suit an under-explored area of investigation because it could examine it "in a length and in a manner unhindered by a confining and limiting a-priori theory" (Theiler, 2012.p.29). Moreover, while descriptive research is designed to test hypotheses or to answer questions concerning the current status of a process (Theiler, 2012), exploratory research can offer a more appropriate approach to contribute to the definition of a problem that "is

broad and not specifically defined" (Theiler, 2012, p.49). The flexibility that it offered made exploratory research suitable for examining a variety of perspectives that have previously been under-investigated by history educators. These perspectives were mainly concerned with students' different attitudes towards working with primary sources and diverse perceptions of their historical identity as they engaged in such tasks.

Therefore, the "broader concept" proposed by exploratory studies offered a high level of flexibility "with regard to the research design as well as the data collection, as long as these fulfil the required scientific criteria of validity and reliability" (Mills, Durepos and Wiebe, 2010, p.23). Yin pointed to more elements that can lead to a more structured definition of exploratory studies by arguing that they are "means to define the necessary questions and hypotheses for developing consecutive studies" (Yin, 1989 p. 15). According to Yin, a central characteristic of exploratory case studies is "the intense focus on a single phenomenon" (Yin, 1989, p. 17). Drawing on Yin's approach, this study focused on a single process: the way in which history students – at both school and university – perceived the study of the subject and the work they do with primary sources.

2.3. Involvement of Multiple Sites

When developing the research design for this study, I also reflected on the possibility of adopting either a single-site or a multiple-site approach. I decided to choose a multiple-site approach for three main reasons, that it would: a) allow me to corroborate the findings that emerged from one site; b) provide a more in-depth investigation of a phenomenon; and c) make it possible to consider the role that individual and contextual differences play in shaping the perceptions that A-Level students and undergraduates have about work with primary sources. The fact that I wanted to explore individuals' experiences of using primary sources at both school and university obviously called for a multiple-site study and Merriam has argued that including data from multiple sites "make the findings and the interpretations more compelling" (1998, p. 54). Therefore, I decided to look at different sites in order to

“corroborate, qualify, or extend the findings that might be found were there to be only one case” (Theiler, 2012, p. 28-29).

Audet and D’Amboise argued that focusing on multiple sites would help the researcher to “gain an in-depth knowledge of a phenomenon that had barely been researched” (Audet and D’Amboise, 2001, p.1). Such an approach could specifically serve the purpose of my own study, which aimed to investigate in-depth the perceptions that A-Level and undergraduates developed about their own work with primary sources. Vu highlighted how the use of a multiples sites’ approach while undertaking an exploratory research could not only allow investigation of different questions in relation to the same phenomenon (i.e. “what”, “how” and “why”) but also make it possible to “take into consideration how a phenomenon was affected by the contexts in which it was situated and the individuals that were involved in it” (2017, p. 584). He concluded that the data collected through such an approach were “richer and of greater depth than could be found through other types of case study or experimental designs” (Vu, 2017, p. 584). This aspect suited the focus of my research, which looks in depth at individual experiences within diverse contexts such as different schools and universities. Additionally, the choice of looking at multiple sites enabled the investigation of the range of expectations and experiences as perceived by different students attending the same institution.

The decision to look at multiple sites was also driven by the idea of taking into consideration the similarities and differences between the cases examined. According to Baxter and Jack (2008), such a study can provide conclusions focused on the variations that can occur within the same phenomenon across different sites. Within this research, such empirical evidence offered in-depth insight into the ways in which students from two different schools and two different universities perceived the process of doing history – specifically working with primary sources – and their own identities in relation to the study of the subject.

2.4. Reconnaissance

The research design outlined above was informed both by my reading and by reconnaissance work which I conducted in local schools and through informal conversations with PGCE history students, who had recently completed undergraduate degrees. I used this exploratory investigation in a formative way, as described by Yin, in order "to develop relevant lines of question" (1989, p. 47) and also to become familiar with an education system that is slightly different from that of my home country. Robson has argued that this kind of reconnaissance can help in assessing "the feasibility of what is proposed in terms of time, effort and resources" (Robson, 1994, p. 45), by providing more specific information in order to identify the main areas for exploration in the next stages of the research. Reconnaissance was particularly important because my review of the literature in the field had not provided a detailed enough picture of the use of primary sources at A-level and university to allow for the design of a research project.

The reconnaissance involved A-Level lesson observations at three local comprehensive schools which alerted me to, and helped to illuminate, the importance of the differences between exam boards and the specific ways in which they allocate marks to Assessment Objective (AO2), which is concerned with students' use of primary sources. This exploratory stage also included informal discussions and three more focused conversations with PGCE history students in the Department of Education at a Russell Group university in order to identify specific areas for investigation. PGCE history students were chosen as they are a sample of students that have recently been through both history A-level, and an honours degree in history and are now beginning to experience the nature and specific requirements of A-level from a teacher's perspective, which might make them particularly alert to the differences (and/or the continuities) between the ways in which history is taught in school and at university.

The relatively informal, semi-structured interviews that I conducted with the PGCE history students were intended to give me a sense of their experience of using primary sources in both contexts. I asked them about the kinds of sources that they had been presented with as part of their A-level courses and about the ways in which they were

asked to engage with them. A particular focus – coming out of these conversations – has been on the personal investigation – the coursework assignment undertaken as part of A-Level – since the analysis of primary sources plays an important part in this assignment. My questions about their use of primary sources at university level were intended to explore whether there were likely to be significant differences in the extent to which, or the ways in which, students engaged with primary sources during the years of their undergraduate degree. I was also particularly interested in the kind of preparation that A-Level can offer regarding the work on primary sources that they were subsequently asked to do at university.

What I learned from the informal conversations played an important part in refining aspects of the research methodology. Although their work on primary sources was not something that they perceived as particularly challenging at A-Level, all the students interviewed pointed out that primary sources were part of their learning experience at that stage. Two of the three students referred to their personal investigation as an independent study in which primary sources played a significant part (the third student had not undertaken coursework of that kind). The students particularly underlined how challenging, but stimulating, they found the process of collecting materials for the "source package" necessary for carrying out the personal investigation. The importance ascribed by all the students to the personal investigation led me to consider Year 13 as a relevant moment in students' work with primary sources, as my own reading of the exam specifications had suggested that the requirement to undertake a personal investigation in Year 13 is very important in terms of students' engagement with primary sources. This latter point underlines once again the differences between each year of study and highlights the importance of looking specifically at Year 13, as a period of study during which students reach a level of more independent learning that prepares them to different kind of learning they will approach at university.

Questions concerning the experience of using primary sources at undergraduate level showed how work with historical materials became more relevant through the years of the honours degree. My interviewees had experience with different kinds of primary sources due to the different types of degrees they had undertaken: a) an

honours degree in ancient history and archaeology; b) a joint-honours degree in media and history; and c) a joint-honours degree in history and politics.

Two of the three students also mentioned the use of digital archives during the last two years of their honours degree – particularly digitalised collections of archaeological artefacts and databases, including oral history sources. Furthermore, each of the students interviewed underlined how the end of the second year of their undergraduate degree could be identified as a turning point for their awareness about the use and the potential of primary materials, while the third year of study represented their first opportunity to do a more independent work on sources (i.e. within their final dissertation). Their first year of university was considered by all the three students as a period in which they were required to include primary sources quite regularly in their assignments – and one of them also attended a class on historical methodology that had a specific component related to use of primary sources – but they reported that at this point they were not aware of the central role that primary sources have for historians' work.

Instead, the third year of the honours degree was unanimously considered as the point at which primary sources became highly relevant, due to the final dissertation that students were required to write. When reflecting on this point, I acknowledged the existence of a possible bias concerned with students' reflections on prior experiences. Therefore, this element has been considered during data analysis and examined within the discussion of findings.

The students also discussed how the difficulties and the challenges related to their work with sources increased progressively throughout their degree. They also reported how the workload required for an honours degree met their expectations. Only one of the three students raised an issue in relation to the preparation offered by A-Level. The student mentioned the fact that her A-Level had not provided her with a good enough background in medieval history and medieval primary sources, which was required during two modules offered in her first undergraduate year. This latter element illustrated the importance of students' perceptions of the preparation that A-Level history offered in relation to university programmes and alerted me to think

about investigating the different kind of gaps that might be perceived in the preparation offered at A-Level.

The informal conversation I had with the PGCE students highlighted the importance of discussing in my study the whole university journey – from the first year of undergraduate study to the third one in which students are asked to complete a structured independent investigation such as the dissertation. For this reason – and after reflecting on the more general findings of the reconnaissance – I decided to focus my research on two different year groups: Year 13 students and third year undergraduate students. By investigating the perspective that those students have on their work with primary sources, I had the opportunity of exploring the following relevant areas: a) the views that students have on their work with primary sources during Year 13 when they have undertaken a personal investigation and are about to make their transition to university; b) the views of third year undergraduates, who can offer relevant insights about the different kinds of work (i.e. papers, coursework, dissertation) done with primary sources across the undergraduate course. The focus on third year undergraduates offered the unique opportunity of working with students who have both a short-term and a long-term perspective. They were able to reflect on work done with primary sources in relation to their current year of study and over their whole university journey.

2.5. Identification of Samples

The strategies for selecting the sample to participate in the semi-structured interviews involved a voluntary and purposive sampling. Jupp defined volunteer sampling as "a form of case selection which is purposive rather than based on the principles of random probability sampling" (Jupp, 2006, p.4). I chose voluntary sampling because the in-depth nature of the research required a sample of individuals with sufficient sense of engagement with the subject (i.e. history) to be willing to participate in a study that involved interviews, based on open-ended questions.

When adopting this sampling strategy, I also reflected on how some researchers highlighted willingness to participate as an element of possible bias. The study was

likely to attract individuals more pre-disposed and interested in the topic, which meant that the data can be considered as biased (Brownell, Kloser, Fukami and Shavelson, 2013). However, after having acknowledged the existence of a possible bias, I decided to adopt voluntary sampling for two main reasons. In first instance, an exploratory study in an under-researched area benefited from the participation of students more willing to articulate their experiences. Moreover, a sample based on voluntary participation represented an advantage for my research: as mentioned above the in-depth nature of this study required the involvement of students highly engaged with the subject and willing to participate in interviews structured around open-ended questions.

Along with volunteer sampling, I decided to use a purposive criterion in selecting the sample for this research. When discussing features of purposive sampling, Lavrakas emphasised how the goal of such a strategy is "to produce a sample representative of the population by applying expert knowledge" (Lavrakas, 2008, p.3). In the case of this study, I applied the information I gathered during the reconnaissance stage to select a sample of students that could represent "a cross-section of the population" (Lavrakas, 2008, p.3).

Regarding the A-Level sample, the findings of the reconnaissance underlined the importance of the personal investigation within students' experience of working with primary source. The findings of the reconnaissance stage also revealed that it was important to draw a distinction between the demands and expectations of different exam boards since these may have a significant impact on students' experience of working with sources and thus on the samples that had to be selected for this study.

Therefore, I conducted an analysis of the work the exam boards required for Assessment Objective 2 (AO2). According to Ofqual guidelines, AO2 should assess how A-Level students "analyse and evaluate appropriate source material, primary and/or contemporary to the period within its historical context" (Ofqual, 2014, p. 10).

(AO2) accounted for 20% of the total mark awarded by all three exams boards (Edexcel, OCR and AQA). Within Edexcel, AO2 was assessed in Paper 2 (a 'Depth study' in which AO2 accounts for 10% of the total 20% represented by the paper),

through a question that focuses on a primary source of 400 words in length and in Paper 3 ('Themes in breadth with aspects in depth', in which AO2 accounted for 10% of the total 30% represented by the paper), through a question concerned with a primary source of 350 words in length (Edexcel, 2017). Edexcel did not assess AO2 in the personal investigation.

AQA assessed AO2 through Unit 1 – a source-based paper on British history in which students were required to analyse and evaluate four sources. In Unit 1, AO2 represented the only objective assessed (15%). Within the personal investigation, a 3,000-4,000-word essay, AO2 represented 5% within the total 20% weighting given to the unit (AQA, 2019).

OCR assessed AO2 through Component 2 and the personal investigation (Component 3). Component 2 required the evaluation of three different sources of 350-400 words each and AO2 accounted for 15% of the total 40% represented by the unit. The historical investigation required a 3,000 to 3,500-word essay in which AO2 accounted for 5% of the 20% attributed to the whole unit (OCR, 2019) (See Table 2.1.).

ASSESSMENT OF AO2 (20% of the overall mark)		
Edexcel	OCR	AQA
• Paper 2, Depth study, evaluation of two sources, 10% • Paper 3, Themes in breadth with aspect in depth, evaluation of one source, 10%	• Unit group 1, evaluation of four sources, 15% • Personal investigation, 5%	• Component 2, evaluation of three sources, 15% • Personal investigation 5%

Table 2.1. Assessment of AO2 across the three exam boards.

The analysis of the requirements established by the different exam boards in relation to the findings of the reconnaissance phase study prompted me to include a sample of two A-Level students from two different schools. This allowed for the inclusion of

those studying exam specifications that assessed the use of primary sources in different ways. Due to the importance of the personal investigation based on primary source, I decided that this component was the most important element to consider when choosing the exam boards. Due to the strong similarities between the way in which AQA and OCR assessed AO2 – through the personal investigation (weighted at 5% in both examinations) and a source question included in one of the papers proposed (weighted at 15% for both AQA and OCR) – I decided to include one school following *either* an AQA *or* an OCR specification and another school that was following the Edexcel specification, which included a personal investigation not based on primary sources, but instead on historical interpretations. Subsequently, the choice of a school following either OCR or AQA was based on the access possibilities I had when schools were approached. Since access to a school following AQA was easily achieved, I selected this exam board.

Additionally, the choice of selecting two A-Level students for each of the two schools was intended to address the need of analysing – even within a small sample – the incidence of personal factors (such as individuals' preference for a certain historical period, or their personal attitudes towards the course) that could have informed the perception A-Level students had of their work with primary sources.

At university level, I looked for third year undergraduates who were following only a single honours degree in history. My reconnaissance data showed how the experience of undergraduates undertaking a joint-honours degree could be influenced by a number of different variables (e.g. numbers of modules in history and/or other disciplines, a dissertation in a discipline other than history) that could diminish the strength of the data gathered.

The sampling of undergraduates considered the "variable nature" of students' experiences at university (Hibbert, 2009, p. 126), encompassing the variety of courses offered at a certain university, the chronological and thematic spectrum of those courses, the area of specialisation chosen by the undergraduates for elective modules and the final dissertation. Moreover, at undergraduate level, different departments are likely to offer different kinds of courses and different pathways within them in terms of their approach to history (i.e. cultural political, social) and the range

of periods covered (i.e. ancient, early modern, modern) which has important implications in terms of the types of sources available and their accessibility to undergraduates. Choosing student samples from different kinds of universities meant that they were likely to be more illustrative of the diversity of experiences at university level. Therefore, I selected the samples from two different kinds of UK universities: a Russell Group university and a post-1992 university. Two elite institutions, the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge were considered but rejected because of the highly unusual teaching system that they adopt at undergraduate level (i.e. the tutorial system).

I decided to interview just two undergraduates from each of the two schools and the two universities selected. Selecting two different undergraduates from each site enabled me to explore something of the diversity of experience within the same school or university. Additionally, looking at two different schools and two different universities enabled me to sample students who were undertaking their studies in different contexts. For example, at A-Level, these contexts included different teachers and different exams boards since there were important differences in how primary sources were used for independent projects.

Regarding the sample at university stage, my exploratory conversations had underlined the importance of interviewing undergraduates from the third year of an honours degree. Looking back on their experience, the PGCE students suggested that each year of their undergraduate courses was part of a progressive path leading to the final dissertation and the end of the degree – in which every year represents a different level of awareness in relation to the role of primary sources. Therefore, undergraduates belonging to this year of study could offer that unique perspective of discussing their long-term experience of working with primary sources across all the years of their degree.

The sample selected for this research therefore included: a) two Year 13 students for each of the two exams boards (Edexcel and AQA); b) two undergraduates undertaking the third year of a single honours degree in history in each of two different universities (Russell Group and post-1992 universities).

In order to protect participants' anonymity, I assigned a code to each of them. The code referred to the way interviews were numbered when recorded (i.e. AL1 or UG1) and to the particular institution that the A-Level students and undergraduates attended (i.e. SC1 or UN1) (see Table 2.2).

PARTICIPANT	CODE
A-Level student 1	AL1SC1
A-Level student 2	AL2SC1
A-Level student 3	AL3SC2
A-Level student 4	AL4SC2
Undergraduate student 1	UG1UN1
Undergraduate student 2	UG2UN1
Undergraduate student 3	UG3UN2
Undergraduate student 4	UG4UN2

Table 2.2. Participant Key

2.6. Choice of Instruments for Information Gathering

The main instrument for information gathering was semi-structured interviews for both A-Level and undergraduates. Interviews investigated in depth the perceptions of a small number of individuals within each context.

The choice of using semi-structured interviews to analyse the experiences of A-Level students and undergraduates was based on the flexibility of this kind of interview. As Cohen and Manion argue, semi-structured interviews "have a number of advantages: they are flexible; they allow the interviewer to probe so that she may go into more depth if she chooses […] they encourage cooperation and help to establish rapport" (1994, p.52). The flexibility of semi-structured interviews was further discussed by Robson who points out how the interviewer engaged in this kind of questioning always has 'clearly defined purposes, but seeks to achieve them through some flexibility in wording and in the order of presentation of questions' (1993, p.31). In addition, Merrian argued that the format of semi-structured interviews 'allows the researcher

to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent' (Merrian, 1988, p. 148). Therefore, the flexibility of the semi-structured interview – and the possibility they offered to the interviewees of expressing their views in detail and in their own terms – suited the purpose of my study, which aimed to analyse in depth the perception that students had of their work with primary sources.

I considered using lesson observation but rejected the idea because 'lessons observed might not be typical of the generality of teaching in an institution unless they were very extensive' (Hibbert, 2006, p. 130). Moreover, the specific focus of my research on work with primary sources – which often arises not only in the classroom but also in the context of independent projects undertaken by the students – led me to conclude that lesson observations would not be the most suitable tool to collect relevant data.

The enquiry involved two phases: a) analysis of course documentation at both levels to provide background information and to inform my understanding of the ways in which the use of primary sources is included in the syllabus and then evaluated in the examination; and b) in-depth semi-structured interviews intended to gather detailed information on the students' experience of the course and more specifically on the ways in which they have used sources within the current year of their programme.

The selection of questions for the A-Level students' interviews took into consideration findings from the literature. Research in history education showed how other abilities – such as the building of contextual knowledge – had a role in the way students make sense of primary sources (Pickles, 2010). History educators also highlighted how students often perceive work with primary sources as "artificial" and struggle "to put them into context" (Hibbert, 2002, p.30). Therefore, the questions focused on: a) the kinds of sources that they have used and the tasks associated with them; b) the challenges or difficulties that they have experienced in working with primary evidence; and c) the nature of their work on primary sources in relation to the personal investigation required for the A-level qualification, with a particular focus on students' ideas of what such work was and whether they have found it interesting and enjoyable (See Appendix A).

Furthermore, I decided to include questions about why they had chosen history at A-Level as well as questions about their future aspirations and (where relevant) about the criteria that they believed would influence or had influenced their application to particular history programmes at undergraduate level. I chose to include these questions in order to investigate the particular influence in individuals' experience of specific factors – such as A-Level students' future expectations or the epistemological beliefs that they had built over time. Therefore, these questions enabled me to look at how these factors informed both students' perceptions of their work with primary sources and the development of their identities as historians.

I also asked the A-Level students to bring along some of the sources that they worked with and to talk freely about what they had done or what they planned to do with that evidence. Research in history education showed how examination of the way in which they approached the analysis of primary sources could elicit students' abilities to think as historians (Wineburg, 1991). This part of the interview enabled me to explore students' experience and sense-making in relation to a specific source that they were using and specific pieces of work that they had produced.

In terms of the choice of relevant points for the undergraduate interviews, the literature clearly highlighted the limited degree of familiarity that such students have with primary sources when entering university (Booth, 2001). Research in the field has also showed how primary sources have tended to be a very challenging point for undergraduates, due to their lack of different skills including: a) basic study skills, such as researching materials and reading effectively; b) high-level intellectual skills, such as synthesising information, using a critical approach to historical evidence and creating personal insights and interpretation on the basis of a rigorous comparison of evidences; c) communication skills; d) personal skills such as the ability to work independently and flexibly (Booth, 2001; Norton, Keenan, Williams, Elander and McDonough, 2009).

The choice of the aspects to be included in the interview with undergraduates considered the findings highlighted by previous research. The interview questions focused on the ways the undergraduates approached primary sources, the moments of difficulty and enjoyment they experienced when tackling tasks with primary

materials and the abilities they developed by doing this kind of work. It was particularly important to investigate at what point undergraduates have to identify sources for themselves and how they are taught to find them, in order to assess the degree of independence they had when looking at sources (See Appendix A). It was also relevant to look at the work with sources which third year undergraduates are required to do for their dissertation. This element represented a significant moment for evaluating the role that the dissertation had in shaping undergraduates' perception of their work with primary sources.

I also asked the undergraduates questions about the reasons that they believed had influenced their application to study for a history degree at university. They were asked to talk about what skills they were developing while studying history and whether such abilities could be relevant beyond the study of the subject in their course. Those questions allowed me to look closely at how the undergraduates felt about their work with sources and how this was connected with the development of their historical identity as historians throughout their university courses.

The undergraduates also had the opportunity to discuss their future aspirations, including whether they had any current intention to undertake a further degree in history or to enter employment connected in some way with historical studies. This section of the interview investigated how undergraduates perceived the study of history in relation to their future aspirations, drawing also on the conclusions of Hibbert (2006) and Booth (2001) who highlighted the importance of this element. Even though this aspect did not represent the main focus on my research, the inclusion of these questions allowed me to investigate the extent to which undergraduates saw the study of history as an opportunity for them to learn skills that could be relevant beyond the university course.

As planned for the interviews with A-Level students, I asked the undergraduates to bring along a source with which they were working – or that they had used in the previous years of their degree – and to discuss openly the work they have done or they intend to do with that.

2.7. Access

Given that this project involved two secondary schools and two universities, access had to be negotiated effectively with these institutions. For the secondary schools, I used the contacts that I had already established through my local reconnaissance work, to approach two local schools that were following specifications produced by Edexcel and AQA. I was cognisant that I needed to ask school and university staff for permission to conduct the research, seeking their informed consent to permit interviews of one to two hours each.

2.8. Thematic Data Analysis

For the interview data, three methods of analysis were initially considered. The rationale for employing thematic analysis as the most appropriate tool to analysis data will be addressed.

Thematic analysis is a "dynamic, creative, iterative, yet disciplined craft of qualitative interpretation" (Crabtree & Miller, 1998, p. 130) and aims to analyse and report themes and patterns within a certain set of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), while Daly, Kellehear and Gliksman (1997) argued that this type of analysis includes the examination of the information gathered and the identification of themes that are crucial to understand the phenomenon. Therefore, thematic analysis was chosen due to "its highly systematic, transparent approach to the identification of themes" (McCullogh, Boyle, Fothergill & Defeyter 2019, p.3), since it is "a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.6).

Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that methodologies for data analysis in qualitative research can be discussed from two different perspectives. One perspective – described as "theory-dependent" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 80) – includes analytical methods such as interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith & Osborn, 2003), grounded theory (Glaser, 1992), discourse analysis (Gee, 2005), deconstructionism (Olsen, 1997) and narrative analysis (Murray, 2003). Braun and

Clarke (2006) suggest that analytical methods governed by a theory could offer the researcher less freedom during the analysis process, whilst other methods – independent of theory – could be more flexible and therefore be used across a number of theoretical frameworks.

Braun and Clarke included thematic analysis in the second group, by arguing that its independence from theory could lead to its use "as a research tool rather than a research method" (2006, p.81). As Boyatzis claimed, thematic analysis is "not another qualitative method but a process that can be used with most, if not all, qualitative methods" (1998, p.4). The flexibility offered by thematic analysis suited the exploratory nature of this study and its aim of investigating in depth the perceptions that students had of their work with primary sources.

As discussed at the beginning of this paragraph, I chose thematic analysis over two other methods: interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and grounded theory. I will now explain why I rejected those two methods.

IPA is intended to examine in detail how people operating in a particular context make sense of a certain phenomenon, with a major emphasis on the meanings that experience can have for people (Smith & Osborn, 2003). IPA is based upon two different stages of the sense-making process. The first step is concerned with the participants' views and the second one with the researchers' perspectives. Furthermore, the idiographic nature of IPA tends to focus the analysis on individual experiences, rather than on connections across them. Due to the "dualistic tension between idiographic commitment and search for connections across cases" (Noon, 2018, p.3), I decided to discard IPA. Due to the truly exploratory nature of my study, I preferred to adopt a methodology that ensured more flexibility than IPA in analysis. When looking at the density and the richness of my data, I opted for a methodology that could be more easily adapted to its characteristics, instead of framing the analysis within the a priori "dualistic tension between idiographic commitment and the search for connections across cases" proposed by IPA (Noon, 2018, p. 8).

A second method considered – and subsequently discarded – was grounded theory, – although this was an approach that initially seemed attractive because of its reliance on an inductive approach.

2.9. Inductive and Explicit Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that researchers should consider carefully the specific approach to thematic analysis that they want to use before undertaking this work on the data set. Depending on the researcher's approach to thematic analysis, codes and categories can be created by looking at the literature or can emerge from the data itself (Gibson, 2006), influencing how the analysis is conducted, interpreted and reported. They indicated that themes should be drawn from the data gathered by employing two different methods: an inductive or a deductive method.

When approaching thematic analysis, I initially intended to adopt a deductive approach, with the literature leading my analysis and shaping the definitions of themes gathered from the data. However, after a first reading of the data collected, I acknowledged that an inductive approach might be better suited to analysing the rich and dense data I had gathered. Within inductive coding, themes emerge directly from the data set, while deductive coding is based on the researcher's theoretical approach. Additionally, Braun and Clarke (2006) argued that the latter offers the researcher the possibility of drawing a detailed picture of sections of the data set, but does not guarantee to provide a rich investigation of all the data gathered. Since I wanted to account for all the data that I had collected, an inductive approach was more appropriate. This did not, however, mean adopting an extreme position, rejecting all the existing theoretical insights drawn from previous studies of history education or identities formation. While the use of inductive thematic analysis implied that the data gathered could be coded without being bound by pre-existing codes or of researchers' pre-developed analytical ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006), I remained open to the influence of those ideas in reflecting on and refining the emergent themes and thus rejected a grounded theory approach.

I also reflected on the level at which the data would be identified. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this happens either at an explicit or interpretative level. Identifying explicit themes deals with the surface meaning of the data set, whilst interpretative level is intended to "identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations" of the data gathered (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). To control any possible bias derived from my personal perspectives on the topic researched, I decided to use an explicit approach to thematic data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.13).

Braun and Clarke (2006) identified six phases of thematic analysis (See Appendix B). These stages were used to guide the analysis of the data gathered through the semi-structured interviews. Even if the analysis is presented as a linear approach, the process I followed was iterative and reflective. I also referred to the 15-point checklist (See Appendix C) for thematic analysis that Braun and Clarke developed (2006).

2.10. Coding Process

As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), the data were fully transcribed before coding in order to fully immerse the researcher in the information gathered. Transcription is also considered essential to ensure an accurate level of analysis (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). Due to the relatively small size of my data set, I considered it unnecessary to use coding software to support the organisation of my analysis.

Overall, the coding process was more complex than I had initially assumed. When originally designing the methodology of this study, I had not expected to gather quite such rich data through the semi-structured interviews.

The complexity of the coding process led me to reflect on the way I had planned this process before undertaking the data collection, and to try to make explicit the choices that I would be making "consciously or not, when […] coding in a certain way" (Elliot, p. 2851). I therefore opted for an inductive coding approach, seeking to better capture

the density of my data. As I focused on the data, I discarded the idea of multiple coding, opting instead for the attribution "of a single code" (Creswell, 2015, p. 60) to each unit of meaning within the data. The definition of a 'unit of meaning' with which I am working here is a "discrete phrase, sentence or series of sentences which conveys one idea or one related set of perceptions" (Mostyn, 1985, p. 116). The codes that were applied to the data that then informed the emergent themes thus represented the "main ideas conveyed" by each unit of meaning (Creswell, 2015, p. 60). Adopting this approach helped me to identify the most important concepts that permeated my data, using them as the main themes around which my analysis revolved.

When adopting this approach to the coding process, I also reflected on its limitations, acknowledging how this modus operandi could have left out some ideas that – although relevant – did not represent the *main* idea conveyed in each discrete unit meaning unit within the data gathered.

As mentioned above, I decided to follow the inductive analysis process presented by Thomas (2006) (See Appendix D). By considering the exploratory nature of my research – intended to investigate an under-explored subject – and the coding by hand procedure (Elliott, 2018), I discarded multiple coding and I instead opted for exclusive coding.

When approaching the coding process, I decided to treat codes as "labels" of any kind attached to a piece of data" having "names that capture the essence of their content" (Elliot, 2018, p. 2850). Each interview transcript was read, and each pertinent section was highlighted and coded (See Appendix E). The code attributed to each specific passage referred to its explicit meaning. The coding process was conducted through a "careful reading and re-reading of the data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 18). After the identification of each code, data extracts were collected. Due to the relatively small size of my data set, I decided to code "in rounds" by working on paragraphs during a first stage of coding, "before refining the labels to smaller pieces through further re-readings" (Elliot, 2018, p. 2857). The gathered extracts for each theme were re-read and analysed to establish "internally coherent, consistent and distinctive" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 14). Once the emergent themes and data

concerned with them were reviewed, these were compared to the original recording to provide the highest level of accuracy, and refined if necessary.

During the coding process, codes were attributed across the whole data set. I followed the modus operandi discussed by Creswell (2015) by adapting it to the size of my data set. I initially coded all the data into 49 codes. I then identified "overlap and redundant codes" in order to reduce their overall number to a maximum of 25 codes (Creswell, 2015). Subsequently, the 20 remaining codes were collapsed into a smaller number of themes – eleven in the case of this data set – that constituted "the headings in my findings section" (Creswell, 2015, p. 156). For each theme, I linked three to four sub-themes, for a total of thirty in the whole data set. I ensured that each theme had a quote illustrating its meaning and that each-sub theme included was represented by a minimum of eight quotes (one for each participants) highlighting similarities and differences within each thematic area (See Appendix F). I ensured coding reliability by keeping a precise record of this process, which Richards described as a "continuing report on the story of your project" (2015, p. 21).

I also reflected on saturation methods. Due to the inductive coding process adopted for data analysis, I decided to opt for inductive thematic saturation. Since this method is based on the identification of new codes within the data set, saturation was reached when no further elements emerged from the analysis of the data gathered (Saunders et al., 2017).

A thematic map is presented for each research question to illustrate the themes identified in the data set (See figures 3.1., 3.2. and 3.3.). All the mind maps included in this study were created using the software Canva.

2.11. Ethical Considerations

Since my research was based on data collected through interviews with young people, the main ethical concern that it raised was related to the idea of working with information given by people of such age. All the participants were personally asked to give their consent to participation in the project. According to the Central University

Research Ethical Committee guidelines, the participants under 18 were considered as “competent youth” able to sign consent forms on their own. Therefore, I sent a letter to each head teacher to ensure that this procedure would be accepted by the schools’ regulations. Although I was interested in the students’ responses to the particular demands that they faced, the topic was not a particularly sensitive one about which to talk (See Appendix G, Appendix H and Appendix I).

The only obvious risk that I foresaw was that encouraging students to talk with a researcher about the difficulties they faced in their own work could have created feelings of inadequacy. In this case, I offered reassurance in response to comments about the challenges they experienced. On no occasion the students appeared uncomfortable or distressed in sharing their experiences though I was alert to this risk, and I would have stopped the interview if this arose. I also made sure to conduct the interviews in moments that were convenient for students’ schedule, by avoiding periods that were close to their exams. Since students were asked about their experiences of history courses – and knew that their teaching staff were aware of the research – I reassured them that all the data collected would be subsequently anonymised (BERA, 2018).

3. Findings

3.1. Introduction

This chapter will examine the findings of this study. It is intended to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How do A-Level students and undergraduates perceive their work with primary sources in relation to their experience of studying history?

RQ2. What factors influence the way in which A-Level students and undergraduates engage with primary sources?

RQ3. What kinds of identities are reflected in A-Level students' and undergraduates' discussions of their work with primary sources?

The report of the findings is divided into three sections, discussing the different research questions separately. The findings concerned with each research question are presented by following the different themes that emerged. Additionally, the themes and the sub-themes identified for each research question are summarised in three mind maps, placed at the beginning of each section.

3.2. Research Question One

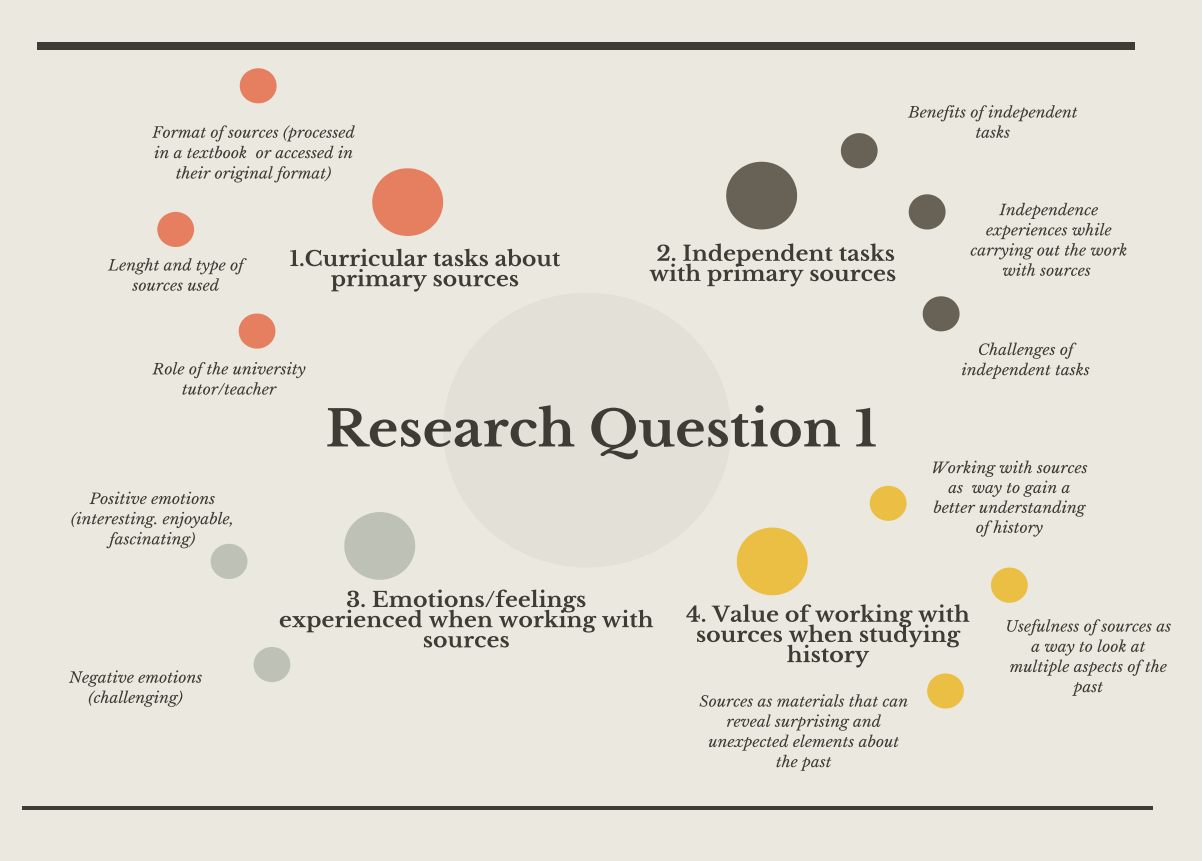

Figure 3.1: Thematic mind map for RQ1

3.2.1. Theme One: Curricular Tasks Involving Primary Sources Required at School and at University Level

A main theme that has emerged from the interviews – at both school and university level – has been the difference between the work on historical sources included in exam papers and that on primary materials the students tackled in other tasks such as class plenaries or think-pair-share activities. This point mainly emerged from the interviews of A-Level students. However, undergraduates also mentioned this element as a focus of comparison between the work they did at school and that undertaken at university.

A-Level students reported how the majority of sources they looked at were either presented in a past exam paper or included in the textbook. AL1SC1 explained how the sources they examined in the textbook were included "in different sections at the

end of the chapter or a long paragraph". The student continued by remarking how the sources were quite "short – around half-page" with a short introduction presenting their context. AL2SC1 remarked how "the activities with sources presented in the textbook were usually exam-questions". A-level students highlighted how their work on primary sources had been constantly related to the same set of exam questions (i.e. evaluating the reliability and the usefulness of a source, assessing the value of some sources for historians' work).

When reflecting on this point, all the A-Level students discussed how they would have preferred to work on sources in a different way. The students argued that – along with the exam preparation – they would have enjoyed more flexible work on sources that could have helped them to look at other primary materials, unrelated to those included in the exam papers. AL3SC2 and AL4SC2, the two students involved in the personal investigation on primary sources, reported that they would have appreciated a more independent type of work – such as that required for the personal study – while AL1SC1 and AL2SC1, who carried out a personal investigation not focused on primary sources but on historical interpretations, expressed the view that they had expected a more flexible kind of work, without referencing any kind of example. All A-Level students explained how the source work they undertook was guided by the need to prepare for the exam.

A-Level students reported that they worked almost exclusively on past papers. Additionally, the students discussed how the knowledge that they gained about how to work with primary sources was informed by the kind of information they had to acquire in order to obtain a certain number of marks (i.e. it was focused on aspects such as the reliability and usefulness of sources). Another element that emerged about source work was the variety of sources on which students had the opportunity to work. AL1SC1 and AL3SC2, who attended different schools, highlighted how they worked only on written sources. These primary materials were not exclusively derived from textbooks and exam papers, but were also included in handouts given out by the teacher. All the A-Level students expressed a regret about not having worked regularly on different types of sources, such as pictorial ones.

All A-Level students discussed how the work done with primary sources – both in class and at home – was mostly led by the teacher, who explained the main features of the source and then guided them on how to answer an exam question on these materials.

AL1SC1 and AL4SC2 mentioned how they looked at sources through the guidance of the teacher. Consequentially, they explained how they always focused on aspects related to the points they had to discuss in the exam question. Two students out of four (AL1SC1 and AL3SC2) also remarked how this approach had already been part of their GCSE course. They mentioned that the only difference they perceived when moving to A-Level was the deeper degree of analysis required, while the teacher's approach to the work on primary sources remained essentially the same.

All the undergraduates explained how the work on sources was the part they enjoyed the most during their history degree. When discussing the way that they approached primary sources at university, students reported how – at degree level – they were given the opportunity to work on broader tasks, not confined to the mere practice of past papers. All students, despite the different structure of their A-Level course – which for two of them had involved personal investigation on primary sources – mentioned their dissatisfaction with the work done with sources at A-Level. They described it as extremely repetitive, and only focused on a selected number of primary sources. They compared the tasks done at A-Level with the work undertaken at university and they explained how at university they were finally asked to use sources as evidence in their essays – and not only to compare or evaluate them. UG1UN1, UG2UN1 and UG3UN2 pointed out how this ability of using sources as evidence is a key one for university studies and how they started to practise it at degree level, whilst at A-Level they had only worked on questions focused on the reliability of the sources or on their usefulness for the study of a certain aspect of the past. UG1UN1 and UG2UN1 – who had undertaken a personal investigation on primary sources at A-Level – highlighted how this work had been a useful occasion to tackle these tasks, while UG3UN2 and UG4UN2 – who had followed an A-Level course without a personal study on primary sources – reported how they encountered research on primary sources only at university.

Another important element that emerged from the interviews was the type of sources that students looked at during their history degree. All the undergraduates discussed how – across the all modules they attended during their honours degree – they had the chance to look at different kind of sources (i.e. oral, visual, pictorial) belonging to various historical periods (i.e. ancient, medieval, early modern and modern). They extensively discussed the importance of looking at a various range of sources,

produced in different periods and in different formats. They explained that this element broadened their understanding of historical periods, by developing their understanding of how people from the past communicated. They also highlighted how during field trips to London libraries and archives (i.e. British Library, National Archives, Lambeth Palace Library) they had the chance to look at sources in their original format and to observe how sources looked to historians undertaking certain research.

Furthermore, the different kind of sources and the various historical periods they looked at when studying sources helped them to consider the different themes (political, economic, social and cultural aspects) that can be studied when looking at primary materials. All the undergraduates discussed how their perspective had been much narrower at A-Level when they always had to focus on a distinct aspect when looking at sources. They also mentioned how the reading of longer sources during their degree – and not only of short extracts included in the textbook or in an exam paper – helped them to develop a deeper understanding of the primary materials and of the contexts in which they were produced.

3.2.2. Independent Tasks (i.e. Personal Investigation and Dissertation) and the Work on Primary Sources

The A-Level students interviewed also discussed the work they did with primary sources when focusing on more independent tasks, such as the personal investigation carried out at A-Level and the dissertation to be completed by the end of the honours degree. The sample selected for this research included two A-Level students (AL3SC2 and AL4SC2) who undertook a personal investigation with primary sources during the A-Level course. When discussing the personal investigation both students highlighted how it provided them with an interesting opportunity to work more extensively on primary sources concerned with a topic that they had chosen.

The A-Level students explained how the teacher had guided them precisely in selecting the primary sources for their personal investigations. They reported that they had some independence in finding the sources, even if every decision had to be discussed with the teacher. Additionally, the students reported that they did not undertake archival research, even though the personal investigation required them to use sources they had chosen. They explained how the teacher helped them to find

textbooks – different from the one they used during the course – and academic publications that included relevant sources for their chosen topic. Students highlighted how the personal investigation represented for them the first time they had the opportunity to use primary sources that were not included in their exam papers or in the textbook they used for the A-Level course. AL3SC2 – who carried out a personal investigation about the role of the Tsars in early modern and modern Russia – discussed how the personal investigation had provided the chance to look both at written documents (edicts and decrees) and at pictorial sources (portraits of the Tsars) and to discuss these sources within her work.

The undergraduates explained how the final dissertation represented a more substantial opportunity to look at primary sources and to prepare an original academic contribution. The undergraduates interviewed worked on very different topics for their final dissertation: Ottoman travel accounts in early modern Bulgaria (UG1UN1), children's conditions in Fascist Italy (UG2UN1), political propaganda during the Napoleonic Empire (UG3UN2) and French foreign policy during the Third Republic (UG4UN2). Despite the very different topics they looked at, all the undergraduates highlighted that the main reason behind their choice was the idea of exploring through primary sources a topic they were interested in.

All the undergraduates also discussed the importance of researching and selecting the body of primary sources needed for their dissertation. They highlighted how important the guidance of their tutor/supervisor had been in selecting a corpus of material appropriate to explore the main theme of their dissertation. They explained how the supervisor helped them to identify a set of materials (i.e. particular archives and/or library collections) appropriate for their topic. They also reported that the selection of the sources had mainly been their own responsibility, while only the final decisions were discussed with their tutor/lecturer. UG1UN1 and UG2UN1 – who had previously carried out a personal investigation at A-Level – reported how they experienced more independence when preparing their dissertation. They explained that they had the opportunity to take more independent decisions, such as the inclusion of certain primary sources in the final work.

They also described as important the moment when they accessed primary sources within a particular archive or library, without the mediation of their tutor/lecturer. The undergraduates looked at sources held by the British Library (Ottoman travel accounts

translated into English) or by particular digital archives (such as Istituto Luce Archive and Gallica – the digital collection of the French National Library). All the undergraduates – regardless of the type of archive they accessed – described the process of selecting the sources as challenging, but at the same time as extremely interesting.

The undergraduates explained how the dissertation was the first occasion on which they looked in depth at a substantial number of different primary sources that they had to select by discerning the themes and the ideas discussed within them. They also pointed out how the dissertation represented a turning point in the work they had done during their degree with primary sources. After having practised the analysis of primary sources on small-scale tasks across the various modules they had followed – and on personal investigation where applicable - the undergraduates considered the dissertation as the only piece of independent work in which they made an extensive use of primary sources by applying the knowledge they had built to contextualise them and develop a grounded interpretation of a certain aspect of a particular historical period. UG1UN1 explained how the study of Christine de Pizan's writings were "an extraordinary source to discover the complexity of women's condition in the Middle ages […] when reading them you understand how women were trapped between social conventions and the desire of being independent".

3.2.3. Students' Different Feelings and Emotions when Working with Primary Sources

During the interviews, A-Level students and undergraduates discussed the emotions that they experienced when working with primary sources. All students described their work with primary sources by using all the adjectives proposed in the interview question except for "frustrating" (See Appendix A).

In describing their work with primary sources as "interesting", the main aspect to which students referred was the possibility of learning something new about a certain topic. AL1SC1 and AL2SC1 provided specific examples of that, such as Elizabeth I's perspective on foreign policy when reading extracts of her letters; or the ideas that cartoonist wanted to spread when designing a political cartoon on the League of Nations.

All the A-Level students also described their work with primary sources as “enjoyable”. They discussed how sources represented a stimulating way to look at the past, by discovering what people thought and how they reached certain decisions. When discussing this point, AL4SC2 mentioned the documents he had looked at in the Churchill Archive. She explained how reading extracts from Churchill’s letters represented a meaningful insight to understand the reasons that led the British Prime Minister to sign a secret informal agreement with Stalin in 1944. AL3SC2 discussed how “enjoyable” his experience of working with primary sources was by mentioning the sources about Levellers he read during the module on the English Civil Wars. He described how looking at extracts from speeches of Lilburne and Overton provided significant help in understanding what the motivations of the Levellers were. AL3SC2 argued that reading the source helped him to get a more precise idea of Levellers’ arguments, while the textbook and other materials provided by the teacher were not sufficient to make sense of it.

All students also described the work on primary sources as “challenging”. In so doing, all the A-Level students remarked how this aspect did not represent something negative. Although they acknowledged that the work with primary sources often represented a challenge, they explained that this challenge was a positive moment that added some significance to their class work in history. Students described the work with sources as challenging with reference to three main reasons: a) the sources were often only a short extract and this was not helpful to understand what the main argument of the source was and why it had been written; b) sometimes the language of the sources was a bit difficult – particularly for the late medieval and early modern sources – and they needed guidance from the teacher; and c) they would have needed more contextual information to analyse the source in depth.

AL1SC1 discussed how he also found them difficult. The student talked about the work on sources he had to carry out during the A-Level module on the Tudors and discussed how understanding the sources was often difficult even if they were short. The student argued that the language of the primary materials was often complex – due to the fact that the documents belonged to the early modern period.

The undergraduates remarked on the same points raised by the A-Level students. They described their experience of working with primary sources as “interesting”. The undergraduates argued that the work on primary sources was extremely helpful to

develop a deeper understanding of a certain historical periods. UG1UN1 discussed how looking at Medieval book of hours represented an unprecedented opportunity to understand the life and the work of Italian monks during the Middle Ages.

In similar responses to those given by the A-Level students, the undergraduates described the work that they did with primary sources as “enjoyable” and “interesting” and “challenging”, without using the adjective “frustrating”. All the undergraduates explained how “fascinating” the work done with primary sources was. They remarked on how looking at primary sources during their history degree had been overall a positive experience. Each student referred to different kinds of sources – and different historical periods – when providing an example of an enjoyable moment related to their work with primary sources. UG3UN2 and UG4UN2 discussed how they developed a growing interest for a certain topic due to particular primary sources they looked at during a module they attended: Napoleon I’s paintings as a way to promote the Empire propaganda and Adolphe Thiers’ political correspondence about French foreign policy during the Third Republic.

UG1UN1 discussed how working with primary sources was “surprising”. She mentioned how studying the Historia Langobardorum by Paulus the Deacon represented a surprising experience, through which it was possible to discover precise and interesting information about the culture of the Lombards and the geography of early medieval Northern Italy. The student pointed out how before reading the Historia Longobardum, she had been convinced that Medieval chronicles were dry and were discussing mainly religion questions. The reading of Paul the Deacon’s work represented instead an opportunity to discover a rich history of the Lombards, in which legendary elements are mixed with other more historically accurate accounts. UG4UN2 also reported how the work carried out with primary sources was “surprising”. He discussed how Nineteenth century French diplomatic correspondence helped him to know about neglected aspects of a certain event.

All undergraduates described the experience with primary sources as “challenging”. In reflecting on challenges he had faced, UG2UN1 mainly discussed work on Latin sources during a module focused on the Ancient Roman Empire. He explained how difficult he had found it to work with extracts written by Titus Livius. The student argued that despite the fact that the texts were translated into English, the meaning was not immediately easy to understand. He mentioned how long it had taken to try to

understand the source and its meaning for an essay on the topic. UG3UN2 discussed how challenging it was to look at early modern philosophical texts, such as those written by Hobbes and Locke. UG3UN2 mentioned how – in order to access this type of source – students would need to build a solid knowledge of previous early modern philosophy. He pointed out how he found these sources challenging since he approached them without the appropriate background knowledge. UG2UN1 and UG4UN2 discussed the length and the numbers of the sources they were asked to look at as the most challenging aspects of the work done with primary materials at university. Both students acknowledged how the work they had previously done at A-Level with sources was much more limited for three reasons: the relative brevity of the documents, their limited number and the less complex nature of the sources.

3.2.4. Working with Primary Sources as a Way to Add Value to the Studying of History

During the interviews, A-Level students spent quite a lot of time discussing the impact that working with primary sources had on their journey in studying history. They explained how reading primary sources was a more stimulating task than learning information through a worksheet or a textbook-based activity.

They reported how primary sources represented "a direct link with what people in the past thought and did". AL1SC1 mentioned how primary materials represented the most direct channel of information about the past, while textbooks included only a collection of information that could be found somewhere else (i.e. other history books or history websites). In contrast, primary sources represented a "unique possibility of looking at the past – because they were produced by a certain individual at a given moment – and therefore can add a significant value to the study of history". He reported how "a primary source is unique because it expresses the feelings and the emotions that people in the past experienced about the events they witnessed".

The theme of the usefulness of primary sources while studying history also emerged during the discussion of the source that the students brought along. Two A-Level students out of four decided to discuss pictorial sources. AL1SC1 presented a portrait of Henry VIII's family by explaining how much he enjoyed working on such a rich source. AL1SC1 mentioned how working on the portrait helped him to understand how

it not only had an artistic value but was also a significant piece of propaganda that depicted Henry with all his children – with Edward and Jane Seymour at the centre and Mary and Elizabeth on the sides – and aimed to reinforce the prestige of the Tudor monarchy. AL2SC1 brought along a visual source, this time a photograph of a WW1 English battalion mainly composed of Indian soldiers. The student explained how working on the source shed a light on an aspect that he had ignored until that moment: the participation of Indian soldiers within the First World War.

AL3SC2 and AL4SC2 each decided to bring along a written source. AL4SC2 discussed "The Ballot or the Bullet" speech by Malcom X. The student pointed out how reading and reflecting on the source was a helpful activity to gain more in-depth understanding of Malcom X's perspective. AL4SC2 discussed how the source was useful to understand the beliefs behind the Black Nationalism that Malcolm X supported. The student also added that after reading the written version of the speech, she decided to watch a clip of it. AL4SC2 remarked how useful the video was in order to understand the effect that his tone of voice and the gestures had on the audience. The student pointed out how – in the class – she would have benefited from the video instead of only reading the written version of the source. AL4SC2 discussed his rationale for this idea by stating that modern history speeches – when possible – should be accessed in a video format. This element could add several interesting elements to the source's interpretation, such as the leadership qualities of political figures, and could be useful to analyse the impact that a certain political movement had on people in the past.

AL3SC2 decided to bring along a speech given by Hitler in 1933. The student described how the work on the source was extremely significant to understand the rise of Nazi power in Germany. He explained that he had found Hitler's speech contradictory and surprising when he discovered that Hitler – a dictator that persecuted Christian churches during his dictatorship – claimed to offer God's protection over Germany at the beginning of his rule over Germany. AL3SC2 discussed how interesting studying the source and finding this contradictory element was and also how useful it was to understand the mechanism of Nazism's political propaganda.

Three undergraduates brought along written sources (UG1UN1, UG2UN1 and UG3UN2), while a fourth student (UG4UN2) decided to discuss visual material. Rather than discussing the usefulness of a source to gain a better understanding of a certain

historical period, the undergraduates argued that the source they brought along was significant in helping them to develop a better understanding of a certain moment of the past.

UG2UN1 discussed an extract of Sylvia Pankhurst's book *Soviet Russia as I saw it* (1911) and commented how reading several parts of it during a university course shed a new light on an historical figure that she always connected only with the Suffragette movement. The student argued that Pankhurst's writings were helpful to get a deep insight into the complex political thought of this woman who decided to embrace Communism in a moment in which only few women had a solid political awareness. UG1UN1 decided to bring along an extract from Christine de Pizan's book, *The City of Ladies* (1405). The student explained how reading this work represented a fascinating experience. UG1UN1 discussed how – before reading this book – she never realised how Medieval women had the possibility of reflecting on their own condition. The student mentioned how modern Christine's perspectives were and how significant the discovery of this book was in changing her personal understanding of women that lived in the Middle Ages.

UG3UN2 decided to discuss a sample from the letters written by Christine of Sweden in the sixteenth century. She wanted to focus on this source because it represented a meaningful occasion to look at political correspondence from another point of view. UG3UN2 argued how these letters represented something unexpected. When approaching the source, she thought that the letters were only discussing political affairs. Surprisingly, reading Christine's letters led to the discovery that a woman governing a country in the early modern period was able to express – and include – her feelings and her emotions about her condition of being a queen: frustrations, amusement, sadness and satisfaction. She also mentioned how reading this source was a chance to find out a different historical approach to sources. She discovered that study of the history of emotions was a very recent approach to history and expressed a lively interest in this idea, hoping to pursue it during further studies.

UG4UN2 – who brought along an example of visual sources – had decided to discuss a picture of the Selma March that occurred in Montgomery, Alabama in 1965. He explained that the source was extremely helpful in making sense of the Civil Right protests. UG4UN2 discussed how accessing photos of the march helped him to understand the tension that people experienced during these events. He mentioned

how looking at the expressions of Martin Luther King and his wife led him to understand how serious – and even solemn – the attitude was that people communicated during the march. He explained how he had never realised before how complex the fight for civil rights in America was and how he now considered the photos of the marches as very significant sources that – along with the texts and the video of the speeches of Martin Luther King – can add a value to the study of people's attitude towards the Civil Rights movement.

3.2.5. Summary

The findings in response to the first research question showed that A-Level students highlighted different and contrasting elements in their work with primary sources. Along with the interest they showed for primary materials and the enjoyment they experienced when working with sources, they reported how the work they accomplished was often repetitive and focused on short sources included in exam papers or in the textbook. The personal investigation with primary sources – conducted by two A-Level students out of four – represented a moment when students experienced more independence, even if the guidance of the teacher played a very prominent role.

Undergraduates explained how the experience of working with primary sources at university was enriching and challenging. They appreciated the broader tasks they tackled, and they described the work with sources as an opportunity to get a deeper understanding of different historical periods. Undergraduates reported how the work with primary materials was also challenging, due to the increased length of the sources and the language in which primary materials – particularly documents produced during the classical period, the Middle-Ages and the early modern period – were written. Undergraduates also reported how the final dissertation represented a significant moment in shaping their approach to their work with primary sources. They argued that the dissertation marked the beginning of a broader and more complex work on primary sources – in terms both of the number and length of the materials chosen.

3.3. Research Question Two

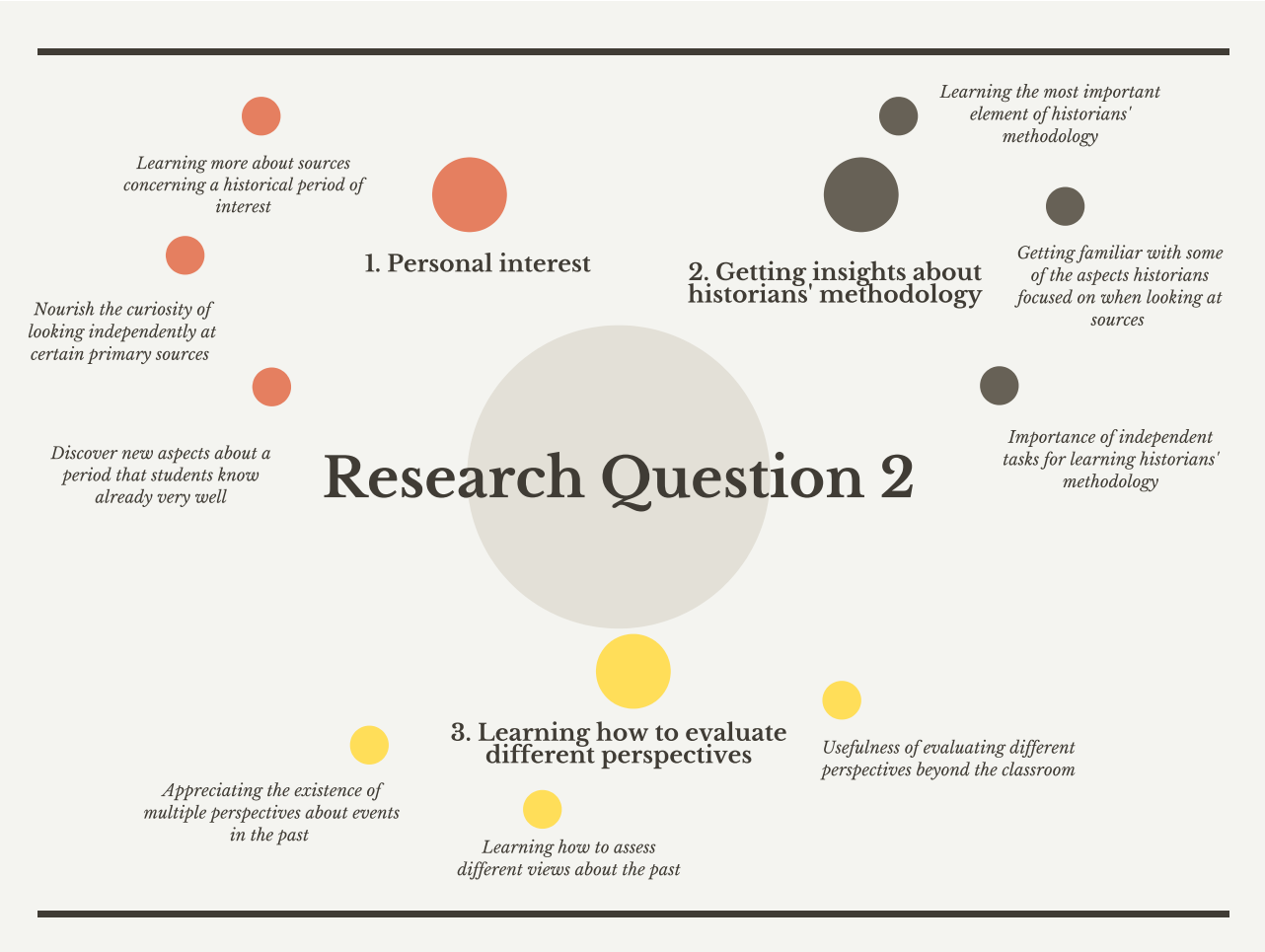

Figure 3.2. Thematic mind map for RQ2

3.3.1. Theme One: Personal Interest in Primary Sources Concerning a Certain Historical Period

Both the A-Level students and undergraduates reported that three factors informed their engagement in the work with primary sources: a) their personal interest in sources concerned with a certain historical period; b) the opportunity to learn how historians would work, which highlighted the perception that A-Level students had of classroom activities and independent study with primary sources when learning about historians' methodology; and c) the possibility of learning how to consider different perspectives and evaluate diverse interpretations.

All the A-Level students reported how personal interests they had in sources related to particular historical periods increased their motivation to study primary materials. AL1SC1 mentioned how the genuine interest he had for early modern sources played a role in the engagement he demonstrated when looking at Elizabethan primary materials. AL1SC1 reported how this strong interest was obvious to the teacher who "noticed a change of attitude between the module focused on Nazi Germany and the one about the late Tudors". He also explained that the enthusiasm he had for sources belonging to the Elizabethan period enhanced his interest in primary materials concerning topics such as foreign policy, that he found "generally quite boring".

Three A-Level students (AL2SC1, AL3SC2 and AL4SC2) also commented on the fact that their interest in primary sources related to a particular historical period served as a trigger to learn about new aspects. For example, AL2SC1 reported that his interest in primary sources concerning different moments of modern British history – such as the governments led by Margaret Thatcher or the 1975 referendum on Europe – prompted him to become more interested in primary sources that revealed something about the past of his country. Subsequently, AL2SC1 reported that he began to look at other important events of British history in the twentieth century, such as the Falklands war. AL2SC1 also highlighted how looking at primary sources related to a period of interest represented a catalyst to discover more aspects of a well-known topic. He mentioned that, when looking at sources about the 1975 referendum on Europe, he was surprised by the fact that "a conservative like Edward Heath was supporting the idea of joining Europe".

Moreover, AL3SC2 commented on how looking at primary sources concerned with a topic of interest, such as the French Revolution, elicited enthusiasm for that topic and prompted a growing curiosity to learn more about the period. AL4SC2 also discussed how his personal interest in sources related to different historical periods on which the A-Level course focused – the English Civil Wars and the American Civil Rights Movement – triggered an enthusiasm for these topics and for activities working with these sources in the classroom.

The two A-Level students who engaged in a personal investigation using primary sources (AL3SC2 and AL4SC2) discussed how their lively interest in the topic of the

independent study – Russian history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – played a role in stimulating their enthusiasm for the primary materials included in the personal investigation. AL3SC2 explained that interest in primary sources about the peasants' condition in late nineteenth-century Russia "represented the real driver for the completion of my personal investigation". AL4SC2 also reported that interest in primary sources concerned with the Tsarist rule in the nineteenth century was very significant when doing his personal investigation.

All the undergraduates also reported how important their interest in primary sources concerned with particular historical periods was when approaching the work with primary materials carried out across different modules. All the undergraduates reported how their enthusiasm for particular primary sources informed their choice of modules. For example, UG1UN1 discussed how personal engagement in early modern European travel writing in the Ottoman Empire led to the decision to undertake a module on that topic. She also explained how "personal interest in any primary source concerned with the Ottoman Empire" was the main catalyst behind the great sense of engagement she experienced in relation to this particular course.

UG3UN2 and UG4UN2 also highlighted how their interest in primary sources concerning modern French history was the main reason behind choosing many different modules looking at French history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For instance, UG4UN2 argued that the study of primary materials about French foreign policy during the late nineteenth century came directly from a genuine passion for primary sources related to that period of French history. Subsequently, UG4UN2 explained how "looking at primary sources was the most natural way to nourish my interest about French foreign policy after 1870".

The undergraduates discussed how their interest in sources belonging to a certain historical period informed their engagement in independent work based largely on primary materials, particularly their final dissertation. All the students established a link between the enthusiasm they had for the primary materials they had decided to focus on and their personal engagement in the work to be done for their dissertation. For example, UG1UN1 argued that her interest in primary sources about the early modern Ottoman Empire – particularly marginalia and colophons – was "the reason why I was

so passionate about my dissertation. UG1UN1 also reported that fascination for these primary materials was the thing that kept her engaged in the work, even when it was challenging. The student explained how, despite the difficulty of reading the marginalia, due to the handwriting of the authors, her engagement in the work was always very positive "since keeping on was the only way to look at many more sources and to understand the complex scenario behind the writing of those colophons".

Similarly, to UG1UN1, UG2UN1 discussed how her interest in sources about the Fascist regime provided the greatest motivation to complete the final dissertation on children's condition in Fascist Italy. UG2UN1 reported that greater interest in primary sources about that historical period helped him to overcome many challenges, such as understanding a foreign language and tackling all the names and events mentioned in the short films produced by the Fascist regime. The student argued that working on sources related to a topic of great interest was like "opening a Russian matryoshka, because sources were somehow all connected to each other and it was essential to uncover these links to get the big picture".

Two students – UG3UN2 and UG4UN2 – also discussed how looking at primary sources concerned with a topic of interest led them to deepen their knowledge and discover new aspects about an historical period they thought they already knew very well. For example, UG3UN2 talked about "the fun" he had learning more in depth about the Napoleonic era through the sources, while UG4UN2 highlighted how looking at primary sources "could help to know more about a topic you considered yourself very knowledgeable about". UG4UN2 explained how the "sources revealed complex scenarios I was not aware of, such as the scandal about the Panama Canal Company".

3.3.2. Theme Two: Getting Insights about Historians' Methodology while Working with Primary Sources

Both A-Level and undergraduates highlighted how the possibility of learning how historians work was a factor impacting positively on their engagement in the work associated with primary sources.

All the A-Level students discussed how working with primary sources represented a real opportunity to learn historians' methodology. They remarked on the importance of primary sources to historians' work and therefore the need to learn how they handled them. They all explained how historical sources represented the foundation for what historians do. For example, AL1SC1 discussed how primary sources were "the essential part of the historians' toolbox". He also reported how he considered primary sources as the first-hand materials on which the entire work of historians was based.

Among the four A-Level students there were, however, contrasting views on the extent to which the modules they attended were modelled on the same principles as those that inspired historians' work. Two of the A-Level students (AL2SC1 and AL3SC2) reported how the course at A-Level was based on the same principles as those informing historians' work. For example, AL2SC1 reported how "at school students worked on the same sources historians looked at". AL3SC2 also discussed the "skills students learnt when working with primary sources" and concluded that A-Level students "had to look at the same things historians focused on". She specified that the abilities that A-Level students developed – such as evaluating sources or assess the validity of certain element included in historical materials – did not differ very much from what historians do when studying a source.

In contrast, the other two students (AL1SC1 and AL4SC2) reported how the tasks involving sources they encountered at A-Level represented only a "limited version of what historians used to do". These two students argued that the work with primary materials at A-Level covered only some of the aspects explored by historians. For example, AL1SC1 commented on the fact that the type of questions historians asked of sources were more diverse in comparison to the ones demanded by the A-Level course. He explained how historians looked at primary materials not only to assess "their value or the validity of historical sources". He explained that – by reading some extracts from academic books, like Norman Hampson's *A social history of the French revolution* – historians would go beyond these aspects and look at a source to understand what it could tell them about diverse elements of a certain historical period.

The significant value that the undergraduates attributed to their work with sources was reflected in their expectations about the possibility of learning, throughout their history

degree, how historians would work with primary materials. All the undergraduates highlighted how the opportunity to look at sources, as historians would do, was a factor that influenced their engagement in the different modules they undertook. One student (UG1UN1) reported that his engagement in his history degree was always very high due to the fact that the course fulfilled his expectations of working regularly with primary materials. Additionally, all the undergraduates explained that a history degree represented the moment at which they began to approach primary sources as historians would do.

Despite all the undergraduates agreeing on the fact that the history degree represented a unique possibility to start learning historians' methodology, they all had rather different conceptions of historians' methodology. One student (UG1UN1) out of the four argued that the specific work done with sources at university – such as looking in detail at the information to be gathered from the source – was the most important element learnt about historians' methodology, while another student (UG2UN1) commented that the most significant thing that she gathered about historians' methodology was "the breadth of themes explored when looking at primary sources". The other two students (UG3UN2 and UG4UN2) reported that both specific analysis and the breadth of the themes explored were the most important elements they learnt about historians' methodology.

All the undergraduates remarked that an element they gathered about historians' methodology was the freedom to explore sources and to assess what they could tell without focusing on pre-set questions, as had been the case with the tasks they encountered during their A-Level courses. For instance, UG3UN2 argued that during the history degree course, the work done with sources was about "examining for what aspect sources were valuable, without thinking about pre-determined questions". Whereas the tasks focused on reliability and validity that they had encountered in their A-Level courses were identified by all the undergraduates as concerned with pre-determined questions. UG3UN2 observed that when looking at Napoleonic propaganda during their university course, undergraduates "did not focus on validity but looked at what that source could reveal about how censorship worked, or the way Napoleon's public image was constructed".

All the undergraduates reported that the final dissertation was the moment at which they learnt the most about – and had the most opportunity to experiment with – historians' methods. Therefore, all the undergraduates claimed that the dissertation was the part of the course in which they engaged the most. They reported that the dissertation represented a unique possibility for them to work like an historian because it represented an opportunity to engage in independent work based mainly on primary sources. Two students out of four (UG1UN1 and UG4UN2) related the enthusiasm they had about working with sources during the dissertation to the possibility of looking at many different sources and analysing what these materials could unexpectedly reveal about certain aspects of the past.

Unlike UG1UN1 and UG4UN2, the other two undergraduates interviewed (UG2UN1 and UG3UN2) related the interest they had about working with sources during the dissertation to the greater independence they were granted. Both UG2UN1 and UG3UN2 remarked how the freedom they had when examining the sources, categorising them and isolating the themes that emerged was the element that mostly increased their engagement and made them think they were working as historians.

3.3.3. Theme Three: Working with Primary Sources as a Way to Learn how to Evaluate Different Perspectives

Both the A-Level and the undergraduate students highlighted how learning to evaluate different perspectives was a factor that contributed to engage them in work with primary sources. They also explained how this enabled them to assess the validity of different interpretations of both past and present events.

All the A-Level students argued that learning to evaluate different perspectives was "a fundamental skill that students could develop when looking at primary sources". Three of the undergraduates (UG1UN1, UG2UN1 and UG4UN2) reported how evaluating different perspectives was the most important ability developed when working with sources. For example, UG1UN1 argued that evaluating different perspectives was not only "a skill that students needed when doing history but also something that they primarily learnt when working with historical sources". One of the A-Level students (UG3UN2) argued, however, that evaluating different perspectives

represented only one of the very important abilities that were learnt while working with primary materials. Despite this difference, all the A-Level students agreed on the importance that learning how to evaluate different perspectives had in motivating them to work with primary sources. Additionally, all the students argued that evaluating different perspectives was a significant skill that students could use beyond the classroom, to reflect critically on the world around them. UG1UN1 argued that assessing the validity of different perspectives had to be considered "a crucial skill to be used in everyday life". She argued that evaluating different perspectives "taught students to not take everything at face value, from what they read in the news to what they hear from their peers of from adults in the community".

Like the A-Level students, all the undergraduates reported how learning to assess the validity of different perspectives "was a skill learnt only when working with primary sources". For example, UG2UN1 argued that understanding what kind of perspectives were demonstrated by different sources on a certain event was "a very good exercise that scaffolded a critical reading and the development of an opinion on many different questions". Moreover, all the undergraduates reflected on how complex it was evaluating different perspectives when working with sources. They explained the challenges they encountered when evaluating different perspectives about a certain event as related to: a) the ambiguity about what a source's author intended to convey; and b) the reasons behind the perspective demonstrated within a certain source, such as the cultural, political and social background that moved a certain author to hold a particular view of an historical event. Additionally, all the undergraduates reported how working with sources was helpful in learning to regard "bias" in different way. One student (UG2UN1) explained how categorising sources as biased was a "short-cut", neglecting the existence of the complex context behind the production of any primary source, while another student (UG3UN2) considered work with sources as "extremely important to reverse the negative judgement that we often developed about bias". When discussing the complexity of tackling different perspectives and of appreciating bias, all the undergraduates commented on how learning to evaluate different perspectives was a key issue in tackling different interpretations of particular historical events.

All the students highlighted how the diverse perspectives embodied in particular sources led people in the past to construct a certain interpretation of events. For example, UG1UN1 discussed that it was important to acknowledge how the background of Paul the Deacon and his position as secretary of king of the Lombards informed the historical interpretation he provided about this people. All the undergraduates also compared the importance of tackling the origins of different interpretations of the past with the need to do the same thing with accounts given of events and processes related to the present day.

3.3.4 Summary

Both the A-Level students and the undergraduates highlighted how different factors informed their engagement in work with primary sources. The students discussed how their personal interest in primary sources belonging to particular historical periods, the opportunity of getting some insights into historians' methodology and the idea of learning how to evaluate different perspectives increased their interest and enthusiasm for tasks that focused on primary materials. Furthermore, both the A-Level students and the undergraduates reported how the opportunity they had to carry out more independent tasks, such as their personal investigation using primary sources at A-Level or the final undergraduate dissertation, represented a moment of high engagement in work with primary sources. The independent tasks enabled students to focus on a topic they were interested in and to tackle what they regarded as the main elements of historians' methodology.

3.4. Research Question Three

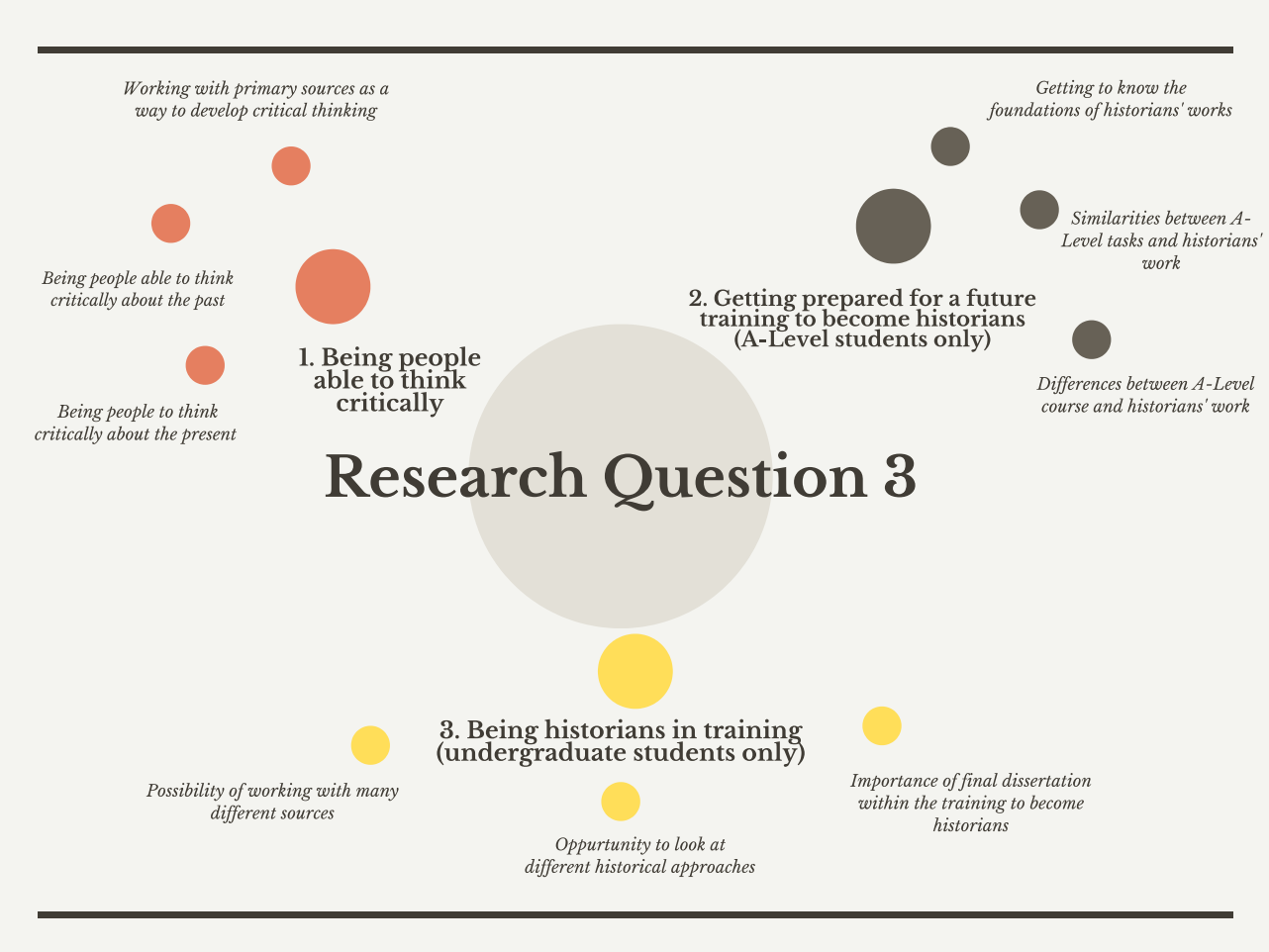

Figure. 3.3. Thematic mind map for RQ2

3.4.1. Theme One: Being People Able to Think Critically (A-Level and Undergraduates).

Three main identities were reflected in the discussions that the A-Level students and undergraduates had about their work with primary sources. Both the A-Level students and undergraduates shared the first historical identity – the idea of being a critical thinker, able to examine claims made about both the past and the present. The second and the third identities that emerged from the interviews were instead related exclusively either to the A-Level students or to the undergraduates. Getting prepared to be trained as historians was the historical identity reflected in A-Level students' discussion of their work with primary sources, while being "historians in-training" or

“baby-historians” was the historical identity that emerged from the interview with undergraduates.

Three A-Level students out of the four (AL1SC1, AL3SC2 and AL4SC2) discussed how working with sources across the modules offered in Year 12 and Year 13 enabled them to evaluate critically what happened in the past, while one student out of four (AL2SC1) highlighted how the A-Level course helped “to consolidate a critical view of the past” already developed at GCSE”. AL1SC1, AL3SC2 and AL4SC2 pointed out how the possibility – offered at A-Level – to look at sources in more depth allowed them to develop their critical thinking about the past. For example, AL3SC2 reported that, despite the similarities in the source questions offered at GCSE and at A-Level, the tasks encountered during the latter led to a more in-depth analysis of the past.

The undergraduates reported that close study of sources in which the opinion of the protagonists were clearly expressed was the essential element in developing a critical view of questions about the past, helping them to understand not only the historical context, but also the factors that contributed to the development or presentation of certain narratives about past events. For example, UG2UN1 mentioned that looking at contemporary and later sources about the American “Gilded Age” led to a different understanding of this historical period, allowing it to be evaluated as a moment both of progress and of regression.

All the A-Level students and undergraduates described themselves as people able to think critically about the present. All the students commented on how looking at primary sources was a very important stage in the development of their critical thinking about the present. They argued that assessing the validity or the reliability of a source enabled them to apply the same criteria when evaluating facts and opinions about the present. For example, UG3UN2 explained that, due to the multiple channels of information people had in recent times, it had become more and more difficult to “evaluate where the truth is”. Subsequently, she reported how tackling the original context of a certain source of information *and* that of the interpretation that originated from it had to be considered as an additional value coming directly from the work conducted with primary sources. She concluded that this element was particularly important when looking at parliamentary debates or elections.

Undergraduates also highlighted how the work done they did with primary sources promoted their critical thinking about the present. Like the A-Level students, the undergraduates discussed how looking at the context in which a source was written – and particularly at the background of the source's authors – was an element they had begun to consider when reflecting on present-day issues. Additionally, the undergraduates discussed how the work they had done with primary sources at university offered an important opportunity to evaluate the way in which historical processes and events were interpreted in present times.

All the undergraduates reported that they had learnt to not take at face value any present interpretation of past events. For example, UG3UN2 argued about the importance of evaluating the different interpretations of the French colonial experience in the twentieth century. She explained how – when listening to French TV talks focused on themes such as immigration and the conditions of refugees – she was aware that French politicians presented a positive view of French colonialism, neglecting the violence that had occurred during the occupation. She concluded that working with primary sources led her to consider critically what they said as "an interpretation of the past based only on sources that were supporting the same view about the problem". Additionally, UG1UN1 reported how working with sources raised awareness about the possible bias concerned with the way modern conflicts, such as the wars in Iraq or even the Cold War, were considered in very recent times. She highlighted how the critical evaluation of primary sources was helpful to discern and make sense of how these conflicts – complex in nature and often used to justify political choices – were presented.

3.4.2. Theme Two: Getting Prepared for a Future Training to Become Historians (A-Level Students Only)

Being students getting prepared to be trained as historians was an historical identity exclusively reflected in data gathered from the semi-structured interviews with the A-Level students. All the students reported how the training they got about analysing primary sources was only a foundation, providing them with the basis for further studies aimed to prepare them to work as historians. Moreover, the A-Level students

who had been involved in an independent study with primary sources considered this experience as the most comprehensive and important in giving them insights about how historians worked with primary sources.

All the A-Level students mentioned that the limited number of sources they handled was an indication of the fact that the course represented only a foundation stage, in order that they could put together, in the future, a more comprehensive picture of what historians do. They all argued that the tasks they were asked to tackle at A-Level were a way to start to build their knowledge of primary sources and become familiar with historians' methodology. Moreover, the A-Level students demonstrated a significant awareness of the fact that historians undertake larger-scale research and work with many different sources at the same time. For example, when commenting on this point AL4SC2 argued that the work with sources carried out at A-Level represented "on a much smaller scale what historians normally could do".

All the A-Level students described the limited number of topics that they dealt with during their modules as an indication of the fact that the course represented only a preparation for a future training to become historians. All the students highlighted how historians worked on sources concerning very broad historical periods, while A-Level modules focused on very narrow topics, such as the Civil Rights movement in America or the English Civil Wars. Two students (AL2SC1 and AL4SC2) out of four (AL2SC1 and AL4SC2) argued that the work on sources carried out at A-Level had a restricted focus in comparison to the wide range of topics historians could deal with.

Despite the criticisms raised about the limited approach to work with sources that they had encountered within their A-Level courses, three students out of four (AL1SC1, AL2SC1 and AL3SC2) highlighted how the narrow historical approach experienced at A-Level was the element that mainly informed their perception of the course as a kind of "pre-training", preparing them for future studies intended to develop their knowledge about historians' work.

Additionally, all the A-Level students discussed the links between looking at primary sources and exploring different historical approaches. They argued that – despite their limited experience in approaching work with primary sources – they would have

benefited from looking at a wider range of historical approaches. Subsequently, they concluded that, in order to get prepared for a future training to become historians, they should appreciate and become familiar with the most important historical approaches that historians used.

As discussed above, the opportunity of undertaking an independent study informed the particular perception that the A-Level students had about the role that the course had in preparing them for future training in becoming historians. Two students out of four – AL1SC1 and AL2SC1 – who did not get undertake a personal investigation using primary sources – considered the tasks about sources that they encountered within the A-Level as quite limited in comparison to what historians would do, since they represented only a way to get initial insights into historical research. AL1SC1 argued that the range of questions students tackled at A-Level was not very diverse and "mostly focused on assessing the validity and the reliability of a sources for a certain purpose". Subsequently, the two students reported that these questions represented only some of the aspects historians would consider when looking at primary sources.

However, AL1SC1 and AL2SC1 argued that reflecting on questions about validity and reliability could represent the first step towards learning how to approach and use primary sources. For example, AL1SC1 explained that the A-Level task of evaluating to what extent a source could be reliable represented a preliminary question that historians considered before undertaking research about a particular issue. Additionally, AL2SC1 explained that A-Level students needed to learn the foundation elements of handling primary sources first and pointed out the importance of reflecting on issues such as reliability or validity before looking at other broader themes conveyed by a primary source.

Unlike AL1SC1 and AL2SC1, the two students involved in the personal investigation with primary sources (AL3SC2 and AL4SC2) explained that the latter was the part of the A-Level course they perceived as a preparation for future training to become historians. Both AL3SC2 and AL4SC2 reported that the personal investigation was the task they considered as the most similar to historians' work. Both argued that the fact that the personal investigation focused on a certain historical topic, and not only on

decontextualised questions assessing the validity and reliability of primary materials, left them feeling they were getting prepared to learn something about how historians worked.

3.4.3. Theme Three: Being Historians in Training (Undergraduates Only)

Being historians in training or "baby-historians" was the historical identity that emerged from the undergraduates' discussion of their work with primary sources. The undergraduates discussed how the work done with primary sources during their honours degree represented a form of training to become historians for three different reasons: a) the number and type of sources they had to work with; b) the possibility of looking at different approaches to history; and c) the opportunity of undertaking a piece of independent research such as the final dissertation.

All the undergraduates reported how the possibility of working with a significant number of sources and the opportunity of regularly approaching primary materials of different kinds (i.e. written, pictorial, video and oral sources) represented a similarity between their work and the research carried out by historians. They all explained how looking at different kinds of sources and learning how to handle a significant number of them, when preparing an essay or a presentation, was a significant aspect that had to be learnt when becoming historians. For example, UG1UN1 argued that historians used different types of sources and looked at many primary materials when producing any kind of research.

Additionally, two undergraduates (UG2UN1 and UG3UN2) explained how dealing throughout their degree with tasks that required them to look at numerous and diverse primary sources led them to consider what they did at university as a real training to become historians. Furthermore, two of the undergraduates discussed the value the university modules had in preparing them to work as historians by comparing them with the A-Level course. UG2UN1 and UG3UN2 argued that the A-Level course did not have the same value in training them as historians. For example, UG3UN2 reported that the work with primary sources encountered at A-Level had "quite a narrow perspective, generally focused on the same questions and on the same kind of written sources".

All the undergraduates described themselves as “historians to be” when discussing the experience, they had during their honours degree of exploring different types of historical approaches. All the undergraduates reported that they had not had the chance to look at different historical approaches before their university course. Three undergraduates (UG1UN1, UG2UN1 and UG4UN2) out of four reported that they were aware of the existence of different historical approaches, such as political, social, economic and cultural, but that they only had the chance to explore some of them – economic and cultural – once they got to university, whereas at school they had mainly worked on political history, with some sporadic references to social history.

Furthermore, all the undergraduates highlighted how their final dissertation represented a summative moment of their training to become historians. They all reported that the completion of the dissertation was a moment in which they had the opportunity to wrap up what they had learnt throughout the degree and explore in practice what it meant to work as historians. Three undergraduates out of the four (UG1UN1, UG2UN1 and UG4UN2) explained that the opportunity of focusing on a topic of interest led them to perceive the dissertation as a work completely similar to what historians would do, although one student (UG3UN2) did not touch upon this element. For example, UG1UN1 reported that choosing a topic for the dissertation represented a very important moment in being trained as an historian. He mentioned how picking a topic to work on independently was a moment that he perceived as very similar to what historians would do when “focused on research topics concerning their field of interest”.

Additionally, all the undergraduates commented on the different aspects that contributed to their view that the experience of getting familiar with physical or digital collections of sources was the most important element in their training to become historians. For example, UG1UN1 commented on how “fascinating” it was to look at a source in its original format and to realise “how the paper was fragile or the size of the books smaller than expected”. He concluded that this experience led to the perception that this kind of work was a way to” look directly at what people in the past produced, as historians would do”. Taking a slightly different angle, UG2UN1 explained that it was the possibility of looking at many primary sources from the same collection that

was the element that marked a strong resemblance between work carried out for their dissertations and the research conducted by historians.

Furthermore, all the undergraduates reported how the independence they were granted when working on primary sources for the dissertation was another element that made them feel that they were working as historians would do. They all explained how the independence they experienced when approaching sources was a very significant part of their training to become historians. They discussed how historians' work was entirely based on primary sources and how it was therefore essential for them to learn to work on sources with only limited guidance.

3.4.4. Summary

The identities reflected in the way both A-Level students and undergraduates perceived their work with primary sources highlighted that this experience contributed both to them developing a critical thinking approach towards the past and the present and to them learning a methodology that could contribute – at different levels – to their training for becoming historians. These identities also emphasised the influence that looking at primary sources could have within their academic courses and also beyond them. Furthermore, the work done with primary sources within independent tasks such as the personal investigation and the final dissertation had an important role in shaping students' perceptions of being trained – at different stages – to become historians.

Students highlighted how studying history – through close work on primary materials – had a certain value not only in the training that it offers for becoming a historian but also in the capacity that it builds both to judge the present critically and independently and to understand how interpretations of the past were built.

4. Discussion

4.1. Research Question One

Research question one focused on the ways A-Level students and undergraduates perceived the work carried out with primary sources. The results of this study highlighted how A-Level students perceived this work as quite limited and focused on the exam boards' requirements, except for their personal study. In contrast, undergraduates showed appreciation for work that they carried out with sources during the course of their history degree, judging it more positively than the tasks they encountered at A-Level.

The data gathered showed how A-Level students had quite a negative perception of the work, highlighting how they considered the tasks they tackled as limited and quite repetitive. The findings about A-Level students' perception of their work reinforced the claim of teachers-researchers in history education, who have for many years advocated the need for a change in the way students approach sources.

Findings from the data analysis showed that the work of A-Level students with sources mainly focused on questions regarding the validity and the usefulness of primary materials. Students' perception of the questions they are asked to tackle confirmed – from a different perspective – a point already discussed by teacher-researchers in history education, who have advocated a different approach to the use of sources, focused on a more substantial resemblance to historians' ways of working (McAleavy,1998; Howells, 2007; McDonnell, 2019). The students' perception of their work with primary sources suggest that Howells' ideas of letting students actually work on sources "without explicitly asking them about the value of the primary materials" (2007, p.33) have had little impact on practice. The use of sources at A-Level seems to be strongly guided by the requirements of the exam boards, rather than letting questions on reliability and usefulness "come out of students' natural use of the sources" (McDonnell, 2019, p. 54). The scenario presented by the A-Level students thus serves to reinforce Fordham's (2015) advocacy of a more systematic focus on historians' methodology in both exams and classroom activities.

This study highlighted the limited range of tasks with sources that students encountered at A-Level. Primary materials were mainly used as information or illustration, as the tasks proposed at A-Level very rarely offered the opportunity of linking evidential working and interpretation, by looking at the way sources can support a certain historical interpretation. These results echo those found in Hibbert's (2006) research, confirming A-Level students' perceptions of the limitations of most of the tasks designed for work on primary sources. Additionally, the A-Level students' discussion of their work highlighted the lack of tasks aimed at encouraging a deeper analysis of primary materials, by "using sources to work out things the authors did not intend to show and recognising that the weight evidence will bear depends on the questions asked of it" (Pickles, 2010, p. 139). A-Level students also expressed some criticism of the limited range of sources – mostly written – that they encountered during the course, confirming Hibbert's (2006) findings in this respect. However, this study did show some inclusion of digital collections in classroom practice, as advocated by Conway (2019).

The criticism raised by the A-Level students drew on their perception of source work as tasks focused on "short extracts and decontextualised exercises that are a poor way to model what historians do" (McAleavy, 1990). Students perceived their work with primary sources as isolated questions, lacking emphasis on how materials were linked to each other– a challenge that Byrom (1998) and Kitson (2003) had highlighted in claiming that a more regular approach to sets of sources would enable students to build narratives. The A-Level students' accounts also showed how limited the focus on contextualisation seemed to be within source analysis – another element that teacher-researchers have advocated in eliciting students' historical thinking (Huijgen & Holthius, 2018; Pickles, 2010).

Overall, the data analysis suggested that A-Level students perceived their work with sources to be disconnected from historians' ways of working – a gap that was previously noted in the Report of the Historical Association Curriculum Development Project: History 14-19, which raised significant concerns about the questions set for source analysis, claiming they bore "little relation to actual historical practice" (2005, p.27). A-Level students perceived their work as very limited in comparison to what

they considered be done by historians. Students expressed the need to go beyond the tasks they performed – mostly guided by exam requirements – and to look more in depth at what sources could tell about a certain aspect of an historical period. Nevertheless, A-Level students' claims were quite generic and did not draw on particular questions or tasks students wanted to tackle. Despite that, A-Level students highlighted the need of looking at historians' way of working when approaching primary sources. This element was already discussed – from a different perspective - by some teachers-researchers in history education such as McDonnell (2019) and Fordham (2015). They strongly suggested that students should approach sources in a more meaningful way, by acknowledging both the rich knowledge historians use when looking at sources and the way they interpret and reinterpret particular sources by considering insights coming from other primary materials.

Additionally, the strong interest that the students who volunteered for this research had for history informed the expectation they had about the A-Level course, showing how their fascination for the subject influenced the perception students developed about their learning journey (Nijhuis et al., 2005). Overall, A-Level students expected a rather different approach to primary sources, demanding both a more in-depth analysis of the sources and the possibility of looking at primary materials belonging to different historical periods. This element – supported also by the undergraduates' discussion on the same point – drew mostly on the expectation of looking at a larger variety of sources, as already discussed by Hibbert (2006). Furthermore, the undergraduates expressed some criticism about two other elements encountered during their A-Level courses: a) the limited range of questions used to analyse sources; and b) the restricted number of topics studied. This scenario confirmed what had been concluded by Hibbert (2006) about the limited range of topics explored at A-Level and the importance of the personal study in allowing students to make a personal choice.

The results of this study highlighted how A-Level students had a more positive perception of the personal investigation, which encouraged them to contextualise a certain set of primary sources. The personal investigation thus represented a real opportunity to work in depth with primary materials, highlighting how the opportunity for purposeful work with sources is linked to schools' particular choice of exam boards.

This element reiterates Hibbert's conclusions about the relationship between "doing special papers with prescribed documents" (2006, p. 155) and conducting extensive work on primary sources. Even though Hibbert's research was conducted before the 2015 changes to the A-Level exams, this study suggests that meaningful work with sources still "depends largely on the syllabus followed" (Hibbert, 2006, p. 155) as she had found.

The data analysis showed that the positive perception that students had of the personal study relied on two different factors: a) the possibility of working in depth on a set of sources; and b) the opportunity of investigating a certain question or hypothesis through the analysis of primary sources. A-Level students' interviews highlighted the demand of working on a collection of sources in order to get "inside a period" (Kitson, 2003, p.14). These results also give support to Fordham's suggestions (2015) about the value of using a "source anthology" for public examination, enabling students to work with longer texts or sections of sources (rather than just the short texts that they could read in the exam itself) and to develop more substantial contextual knowledge.

Additionally, the work undertaken during the personal study enabled students to build what Pickles called an "event model" (2010, p.49): the possibility of testing a hypothesis about a certain question, by looking at primary materials. Through the personal study, the students also have to perform a certain level of "historical contextualisation" that facilitates the development of "historical reasoning" (Huijgen and Holthius, 2018, p. 33). The personal investigation allows more "meaningful historical contextualisation" involving students in "comparing, interpreting, and evaluating historical phenomena and sources" (Huijgen and Holthius, 2018, p. 33).

The A-Level students also expressed negative views of the guidance that they were offered by their teacher, relating it, to a lack of independence in approaching the analysis and the interpretation of primary sources. This view – which was supported by the undergraduates' reflections on the same point – highlighted the limited nature of the independence that was granted to A-Level students when approaching primary materials. This element echoes Hibbert's conclusions (2006) about a context in which "the teacher was likely to interpret sources for the students or guide them towards the

"right answer" (2006, p. 155). Even though the A-level students involved in this research did not imply that the teacher's direction was quite so overwhelming, they mentioned how the teachers' guidance strongly informed the way they conducted their personal study and the analysis of primary sources on which it was based.

The data analysis showed how the undergraduates perceived the work carried out during their honours degree as an advance on what they had done at A-Level. The undergraduates were quite positive about the range of sources they encountered during the course of their degree – mentioning how they accessed a variety of sources that included "oral sources, visual sources (including films) and computer databases" (Hitchcock et al., 2000, p. 57). The undergraduates' views also echo the views that university lecturers shared about teaching and learning history at university (Higher Education Academy, 2015). They highlighted how students could access "certain excellent collections" (Higher Education Academy, 2015, p.3) and how the British Library and the National Archives represent a "vital" resource for the different modules and for the final year dissertation (2015, p.3). My findings confirm that it was only after they had gone to university that the students first accessed such archives and libraries, showing how students had a limited awareness "of the nature of the original documents and of the kinds of physical archive in which they may have been preserved" (Higher Education Academy, 2015, p. 10).

Furthermore, the undergraduates were positive about the opportunity they had to access digital collections of images and films. While the report carried out by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the Historical Association (HA) (Higher Education Academy, 2015) had identified some difficulties experienced by students in making use of digital databases – and had linked that to a lack of subject-related research skills – the data gathered for this study did not highlight any issue in using on-line collections. Instead, it showed how these resources represented a valuable way of exploring primary materials that the students were interested in. The undergraduates perceived their final dissertation as a key moment in terms of their progress in the analysis and interpretation of primary sources, highlighting the crucial role that the final dissertation had in students' journey, offering them a progressive independence in handling sources and orientate them towards the "historical method" (Hitchcock, 2000, p. 56).

Both the A-Level and undergraduate students were positive when talking about the emotions that they experienced when working with primary sources. For students at both levels, working with sources represented a fascinating opportunity to look directly at what happened to people in the past, as discussed by O'Neill in a piece of action research focused on how to analyse cartoons at KS3 (1998). But both groups also referred to different challenges that prompted some negative emotions, which the A-Level students linked to the difficulty of understanding the unfamiliar way in which people in the past framed their thoughts. This element highlights the challenge of immersing oneself in the past and abandoning presentism (Wineburg, 1998).

The undergraduates' experience of negative feelings was quite limited and mostly related to their lack of specific research skills, such as palaeography and knowledge of ancient languages. The results that emerged from this study about the lack of research skills thus permit a more specific definition of the problems encountered by undergraduate students when approaching documentary work at university. Where previous studies – that aimed to provide a general picture of how studying history at university was structured, without considering students' voice – mentioned a lack of more generic skills (i.e. analytical and argumentative writing), they did not look at the specific skills required for undertaking certain kinds of source-based historical enquiry (Booth & Hyland, 2000).

The limited negative emotions experienced by both A-Level and undergraduates were also linked to the significant interest they have for history as a discipline. As already mentioned at the beginning of this section, the students who volunteered for this research were highly motivated in pursuing an A-Level course or an history degree. As very recent studies demonstrated for both school and university (Lam & Zhou, 2019; Vanthournout et al., 2012; St. John & Musoba, 2011), passion and perseverance have a very important role in helping students to overcome challenges related to different issues (such as a low-income background, or problems in tackling the tasks required by a certain course).

4.2. Research Question Two

Research question two focused on the factors that engaged A-Level students and undergraduates when working with primary sources. Students placed great emphasis on the opportunity that working with sources offered for understanding historians' methodology, but only demonstrated a partial awareness of historians' ways of working. The possibility of learning how to evaluate different perspectives also had a significant impact in generating engagement and in eliciting students' interest for a particular topic.

Although the chance to become more familiar with historians' methodology was seen in this study to boost A-Level students and undergraduates' interest in primary sources, both groups showed only a limited awareness of historians' ways of working. They perceived historians' practice as based almost entirely on primary sources, neglecting the role that secondary materials play. The misconception was more evident among the A-level students, with the undergraduates more alert to the fact that that historians' methodology is grounded on the interpretation of primary materials "in the light of new understandings from other sources" (McDonnell, 2019, p. 60).

The way A-Level students perceived historians' work was highly influenced by exam questions, since they tended to compare the tasks they practised – focused on the issues of usefulness and validity of primary materials – with the questions that historians "asked" of sources. As Fordham has argued (2015), reliance on exam questions as their model leads students into misconceptions about historians' methodology, promoting him and other teacher-researchers to advocate a tighter focus, when working on source-based exam questions, on what historians actually do.

Despite their rather generic understanding of historians' methodology, both A-Level and undergraduates related analysis of sources to the development of historians' interpretations. This suggested some appreciation of the holistic connection between primary sources and interpretations within historians' ways of working, demanding a more substantial link between evidential thinking and interpretations in the classroom (Hibbert and Patel, 2019; Foster and Goudie, 2015). Additionally, both A-Level students and undergraduates demonstrated an awareness of the diverse historical

interpretations that could be developed, stressing the importance of encouraging students to evaluate different interpretations (Hammond, 2007; Brown and Massey, 2014), by evaluating "the conceptual and methodological frameworks that form the basis of historical knowledge and interpretations" (Booth, 2003, p. 69; Collins & Stearns, 2020).

The undergraduates were aware of what Tosh described as the "uses of history" (Tosh, 2010, p. 33). Additionally, they shared quite an explicit vision of history as "magistra vitae", as historians such as Bloch (1949) and Evans (1997) have presented it. They discussed the way in which history – and particularly certain historical events – are re-read in the present in public spaces, in order to provide biased and distorted interpretations of the past (Collins & Stearns, 2020).

When discussing the way primary materials can be used to build historical interpretation, the undergraduates showed also a certain awareness of the agency that sources' authors had in developing a certain perspective about the events. The undergraduates also appreciated the role that biographical and contextual details about the authors played, "illuminating why different authors reported the same things in different ways" (McDonnell, 2019, p.55). The undergraduate students also showed a constructive approach to bias, by highlighting its value in illuminating the perspectives of its author or creator.

The results of this research showed how personal interest played an important role in engaging both A-Level students and undergraduates with primary sources. It revealed how students come to the classroom with prior knowledge and personal perspectives that can be naturally applied to the way they interpret primary sources. But those sources could, in turn, reveal new aspects of the past to the students, prompting new interest and encouraging the students to abandon some "present-oriented perspectives" (Hujigen & Holthius, 2018, p. 30). Additionally, the results of this study showed how students deployed a certain degree of empathy when looking at primary sources. Often the interest they demonstrated in a certain source – or set of primary materials belonging to a particular historical period – was related to what Lee and Shemilt categorised as elements of empathy in history education: a) "making sense of human behaviour" and b) understanding why practices that seemed irrational and

unreasonable today were common in the past (2011, p. 143). The findings of this study highlighted how this empathetic component was significant "in both alerting students to distance and to the complexity of the past" (Pickles, 2010, p. 51).

4.3. Research Question Three

Research question three focused on the identities that A-Level students and undergraduates developed when working with primary sources. The A-Level students perceived themselves as students getting prepared for future training to become historians, while the undergraduates looked at themselves as historians in training. Despite the substantial difference between these two different identities, both the A-Level students and the undergraduates perceived themselves as people able to think critically about the past and the present.

Both the A-Level students and undergraduates explained how working with primary sources led them to become people able to think critically about the past. This element is linked to the development of abilities that could enable students to think "like an historian" (Collins & Stearns, 2020, p. 28; Ekecrantz, 2017).

The A-Level students connected the idea of learning how to think critically to the opportunity of gaining a better understanding of the world around them, showing how "history's knowledge, skills and attitude are friends of a critical, active and reflective citizenship" (Wrenn, 1998, p.6) and could lead to the development of "cognitive and active political skills in history lessons" (Davies & John, 1995, p. 78). Additionally, the way in which students connected the evaluation of historical interpretations to the development of their own critical thinking represented a powerful way to enhance their reflective citizenship (Davies & John, 1995). Assessing the sources of information when making a claim (Costa-Savich, 2009) elicited students' critical thinking, raising their awareness of multiple perspectives. These elements are linked to the idea of "thinking individually", enabling students to develop a personal perspective when evaluating different sides of a problem it (Seixas and Peck, 2004). Both A-Level students and undergraduates started to "apply substantive historical knowledge when scrutinizing their own cultural understanding of themselves and their contemporary times" (Thorp & Persson, 2020, p. 4), promoting their role as "social and political actors

fully aware of the constraints and possibilities history places on them, as citizens of societies" (2020, p.4).

The undergraduates' claims about the development of critical thinking when working with primary sources led them to "deconstruct arguments and assess their validity" (Battersby & Bailin, 2015, p.9), which researchers have described as an essential foundation of subject-specific critical thinking skills (Collins & Stearns, 2020). This element demonstrated how the idea that the study of history cannot not be reduced to some kind of "generic trainability", highlighting how historians "come to possess a set of discipline-specific analytical skills that are not generic in nature but are still highly useful outside of the discipline and academia" (Green, 2016, p. 97). Ultimately, the students' reflections about the way in which sources elicit critical thinking could be linked to what is argued by Green, when claiming that specific critical thinking developed through the study of history leads to "a critical, sceptical approach to enquiry − alert to differences of perspective, to gaps, ambiguities and agendas" (2016, p. 97). While explaining the ability to think critically (that came from work with sources), undergraduates argued that this element represented the possibility of an "informed exercise of agency" (Green, 2016, p. 97), allowing them to judge claims or to make decisions.

Additionally, the undergraduates' reference to the fact that their work with sources helped them to evaluate the reliability of certain statements and ideas supported the arguments of Battersby and Bailin, about the ability that history students gain "to scrutinise the reliability of truth claims" (2015, p.9). The students linked critical thinking to an informed analysis of the present, as Ekecranz has advocated, when discussing the fact that "political propaganda, news reporting and commercial messages required not only informed voters and consumers, but also critically thinking ones as well" (2017, p. 2). The significance of this element is linked not only to the possibility of considering critically a range of historical approaches to the discipline, but also to the idea of critically evaluating claims about the world around them, such as public statements of fake news (Collins & Stearns, 2020; Ekecranz, 2017). While researchers in secondary history education have tended to neglect this point, scholars looking at history in higher education have argue that one of the important skills of history graduates is "the ability to understand complexity" (Booth, 2000, p. 36) and "accepting

that drawing a definitive conclusion is not a straightforward process" (Collins & Stearns, 2020, p. 31).

Findings from this study highlight how both A-Level and undergraduate students perceived their studies as a form of training – done at different stages and with different purposes. A-Level students perceived themselves and other individuals as getting prepared to undertake specific training to become historians. This finding partially supports the results from Nzeribe-Nascimiento's (2018) research with her own A-Level students, which demonstrated that they tended to perceive themselves as "students" rather than as "historians". If the A-Level students involved in this research did not look at themselves as "historians", they certainly perceived their role as something between history professionals and secondary students. The students had started to feel part of what Seixas described as a "community of enquiry in the classroom" (1993, p. 310), in which "the teacher was responsible for the form and content of cultural authority imposed from beyond the classroom", including what is produced by academic historians.

The undergraduates' perception' of their historical identity as historians–in-training relied on the more robust analytical work they carried out with sources, including their focus on a certain number of sources that represented the basis of their final dissertation. Undertaking the final dissertation appeared to be – in relation to documentary work – the key moment within undergraduates' training to become historians.

The degree of independence granted at university was another element that led students to identify themselves as historians-in-training, a finding that was also observed by Hibbert (2006) who noted both the independence and the more solid analytical work enjoyed by undergraduates during their history degree. Students' expectations of sourcework at university were certainly positive, expressing a strong need to become more familiar with the methodology used by historians when working with sources. Hibbert too found that students expected that their work with sources at university would go beyond the mere requirements set by exam boards (2006) and would involve a broader range of topics, overcoming the "lack of chronological spread" in their previous experience. The undergraduates' perception of their identities showed

how they felt themselves to be in between the "community of enquiry in the classroom" and "historical community of enquiry" belonging to the academic environment (Seixas, 1993, p. 313).

Both the A-Level students and the undergraduates thus perceived their studies in history as a journey, during which they progressed from a course providing a basic preparation to a degree training them as historians. This idea of progression has also been discussed by Hibbert (2006) in her examination of the kind of preparation that history undergraduates had received from their A-Level history course. The findings of this study showed how this journey was marked by overcoming the limitations that the students reported in relation to their A-Level. The A-Level students expected to broaden their study of history at university, by looking at different questions to use when approaching sources; they expected to work with a higher number of sources and to explore more diverse topics. A-Level students had various expectations from a university course: more regular analytical work on sources; the opportunity of looking in depth at many different topics; and a greater choice of the topics they could tackle. As discussed in the section 4.2. of this dissertation, the students involved in this research had a genuine interest for history, leading them to have high expectations of their courses.

All students linked historians' work to research and analytical skills, (Nzeribe-Nascimiento 2018). However, the students also showed a stereotypical perception of what historians are, mainly connecting their work with analysis of primary sources and neglecting the role that secondary materials play in informing their approach. Additionally, the A-Level students perceived historians as researchers with a breadth of knowledge across historical periods, without considering the fact that historians are generally quite specialised in studying particular themes or historical periods. Both the A-Level students and the undergraduates showed a limited awareness of what historians do and of the differences between professional research and work carried out in the history classroom. They connected historians' practice to the study of a high number of sources – something that tended not to happen within the A-Level curriculum (McDonnell, 2019; Fordham, 2015), but that began to feature in undergraduates' final dissertations (Booth & Hyland, 2000) Additionally, both A-Level and undergraduate students showed an awareness of what historians brought to

history. The students highlighted how primary sources needed to be interpreted, recognising, as Nzeribe Nascimiento discussed in the conclusions of her research (2018), that interpretations of the past are not based simply on records from the past but also on the way historians read them.

The A-Level students showed a very limited awareness of historians' methodological approach – a view that the undergraduates themselves confirmed, in highlighting the lack of knowledge they had about that at A-Level and the enjoyment they experienced when engaging in the process at university. The lack of this element in school practice highlighted the need for a more regular – and even comparative approach – to historians' methodology in the classroom (Hibbert & Patel, 2019). The awareness of historians' different approaches seemed to become more significant at university level, when students could look explicitly at a wide range of approaches employed within historical research. The findings of this study supported the view that that school history offers very limited insight into different historical approaches – even very influential ones, such as cultural history (Foster, 2014; Driver, 2020).

5. Implications for Practice

The findings of this research suggest three main implications for practice: a) the significance of paying attention to students' voice when designing teaching and learning practices in history; b) the need to reassess the place of evidential work in the history classroom; and c) the importance of evidential work – and of the encounter with historians' methodology – in shaping students' historical identity.

The findings of this study highlighted the complexity of students' perspectives about the work carried out with sources at school and at university. Unlike other pieces of research focused on the use of primary sources in history education, this study does not consider teachers' perspectives. Instead, it offers a very vivid account of students' voice, conveying a clear sense of their expectations and advocating the importance of paying attention to students' perspectives when shaping teaching and learning (Bahou, 2011). The research has also revealed that in discussing the place of evidential work in the history classroom students are often advancing the same concerns as those already conveyed by the history teaching community (e.g. Fordham, 2015; Sellin, 2018). While supporting the same claims as those raised by teachers, students' voice offers a unique insight into the expectations and the needs of those learning history at school and at university. It therefore encourages stake-holders to acknowledge the needs of *both* teachers *and* learners when designing teaching and learning in the history classroom.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that due to its focus on students' perspectives, this study has not explored the views of other stakeholders who could offer insights into the balance of different objectives and into the way history courses are structured at school and at university. Additionally, the small scale of this research means that it has only explored the views of a very limited number of students. There is a need for future research that examines students' perspectives on the learning and teaching of history at university more broadly and that includes an analysis of teaching staff views. This approach would be helpful for designing university programmes that consider both course designers' objectives and students' needs.

The direct insight into students' experiences and the strengths of their views highlighted the need to rethink the place of evidential work and the ways of assessing it. The students themselves argued strongly that evidential work should be given a more central role within the history curriculum. Evidential work should not be focused on the mere use of sources in isolation. Instead, it should be supported by the development of substantive knowledge about the relevant topic that could enable students to make a meaningful contextualisation of primary materials (Pickles, 2010). By linking sources and contextual knowledge, constantly bouncing between the two as Sellin (2018, p.40) suggests in his metaphor of students on a trampoline – taking off from the source, but regularly returning to it in light of their contextual knowledge to keep reviewing the claims that can be made – students will gain a better understanding of understand historians' methodology (Sellin, 2018, p. 40). If sources became the focus of teaching and learning history – and were not simply used as an initial stimulus – students would be equipped with the necessary "substantive and disciplinary tools" (2018, p. 39) to use sources as evidence.

The students also highlighted the need to broaden the range of tasks that they encounter during their A-Level studies in order to prepare them more adequately for an honours degree in history. The current range of activities tend to be more oriented towards the requirements prescribed by the exam boards, than focused on learning about – or how to engage in – historians' methodology. Students argued that they needed to work on *collections* of sources (or within particular archives) rather than simply focusing on individual sources already selected for them. They also suggested that they needed to look at what different historical approaches could reveal about the past, as previously suggested by some teacher-researchers, such as Fordham (2015).

The other suggestion that students made – which would make accommodating these requests more feasible – is that examinations should be altered so that they better reflect what historians actually do. Again, this is an argument that has been made by others – such as the teachers involved in Fordham's (2015) and McDonnell's (2019) research. A-Level history should provide the essential foundation for further study of the subject at a higher level, helping students to learn to use sources in ways that align

better with that historians do. Such an approach would improve students' capacity to make sense of the world today, thinking critically about the basis of other claims that they read. Consequently, working with sources would help students to understand the importance of evidence in constructing claims, within and beyond the history classroom (Husbands, 1996; Barton and Levstik, 2004). The value of evidential work would be not only related to an understanding of the nature of historical knowledge – and of the role that evidence has in building historical claims – but would also enable students to adopt the same approach when testing any kind of argument (Husbands, 1996; Barton and Levstik, 2004).

The research also highlights the demand for tasks that link evidential thinking and historical interpretation. In tackling these questions, students would explore the very foundation of historians' methodology. Independent tasks – modelled on what is required by the personal investigation – should be more regularly included both in exams and in the tasks given to A-Level students in the classroom. By providing students with a certain level of independence, such tasks would be helping students to become more familiar with historians' methodology (McDonnell, 2019).

Another point that this research has highlighted is the significance that the work done with primary materials had in shaping students' historical identity – in the sense of seeing themselves as an actual or potential historian. Working with sources did not only enable students to become familiar with historians' methodology; it also informed the way they looked at themselves while studying history. Students did not only consider evidential work an interesting part of the history curriculum. Instead, they perceived their work with sources as a meaningful moment that could actually link their practice with that of historians.

This study has revealed the need to systematically incorporate the work of specific historians' into students' learning – rather than simply expecting students to work *as* historians without sufficient individual models of the process of in action. It draws attention to the importance of structuring school students' encounters with historical scholarship throughout their school career as a means of making them familiar with historians' methods, illustrating in detailed and specific ways how their approach is informed both by primary sources and by secondary materials. Students need to see

how particular historians turn to new sources or how they re-interpret existing sources in response to the work of other historians. They need to see how the engagement with other historians' accounts shapes the questions that they ask or the inferences that they draw as the engage with archive materials. As Hibbert and Patel claimed, teachers should reflect on "which historians and which methods we want our students to engage with and in which sequence they should encounter them" (2019, p. 14). Jenner also argued that this careful incorporation of specific examples of historical scholarship could more systematically build children's "knowledge and understanding over the course of their study" (2019, p. 48).

Additionally, as Hammond (2007) claimed, working with historical scholarship could help students to understand the way different methodological approaches inform the questions that historians "ask" of sources. Teachers should include more regular and meaningful work on historical scholarship as a way to create a rigorous connection between the school history community and that of academic historians (Hibbert & Patel, 2019). A-Level students' encounters with historical methodology should be also promoted through more regular use of different kinds of primary sources, which students could access through digital databases or through visiting physical archives. A-Level courses should also take into the consideration the opportunity of helping students to look at different historical approaches, in order to provide a more diverse picture of historians' methods (Olivey, 2019; Benger, 2020).

Due to the significance that the encounter with historians' work had in shaping students' historical identities, teachers should also consider different factors – such as historians' gender, cultural and ethnical background – when deciding what pieces of scholarship, they want to include in history courses. Elements such as the ethnicity or gender of the historian whose work a student is reading, or that their teacher is citing, can inform students' perception of who can join in the practice of academic history and thus also shape the way they engage with historians' way of working (Nzeribe-Nascimiento, 2018) and the extent to which they begin to visualise themselves as potential historians.

Finally, the complex scenario described by both A-Level and undergraduates in relation to their work with sources suggested the need for further research about this

topic, particularly at university level. The studies already completed – both at school and at degree level – drew mainly on teachers' and lecturers' perspectives. Instead, research focused on students' perspectives of their work with sources will support purposeful changes to current practice.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Students' interview schedule

Year 13 students

1. Why did you choose to study history at A-Level?
P. What were the main reasons that led you to this choice?

2. Are you using any primary sources in the classroom?
P. When are you using them? (homework, tasks in the classroom, independent study)

3. What sort of primary sources are you working with?
P. Written sources, oral sources, pictorial/photographic sources?

3.1. Task: Please bring along a primary source on which you have worked. I would like you to talk freely about the reasons why you decided to discuss this particular source and what you have been doing with it.

4. What feelings do you experience when working with primary sources?
P. I will show students the following list of emotions and I will ask them to pick the 3 or 4 that they feel most applied to them: challenging, frustrating, boring, enjoyable, interesting, exciting, surprising, amusing.

5. What differences and/or similarities do you think there are between studying history with and without primary sources?
P. Could you give me an example of that?

6. How does working with primary sources affect your understanding of history?
P. Could you give me an example of that?

7. What role do you think working with primary sources plays in historians' work?
P. could you give me an example of that?

8. To what extent do you think that working with sources is helping you to learn what historians do?
P. Could you give me an example?

9. Apart from learning to use sources in studying the past, are there any kinds of broader skill or understanding that you feel you are learning from this work (i.e. this work with sources)?
P. How? Could you give me an example?

10. Are there any other ways in which you think that studying history may be valuable for your future life?
P. Ask specifically about primary sources if they don't mention them here.

11. Are you planning to carry on with history next year?

12. [If so] How well do you think your study of history at A-level – particularly in relation to primary sources – is preparing you for what you'll face at university?

Third year undergraduates

1. Why did you choose to study history at university?
P. What were the main reasons that led you to this choice?

2. Are you using any primary sources during the current year of your course?
P. When are you using them? (homework, tasks in the classroom, independent study) What sort of primary sources are you working with?

3. What sort of primary sources are you working with?
P. Written sources, oral sources, pictorial/photographic sources?

3.1. Task: Please bring along a primary source on which you have worked. I would like you to
talk freely about the reasons why you decided to discuss this particular source and what you
have been doing with it?

4. How did you use primary sources in the previous two years of your course
P. Could give me an example of that?

5. In what ways – if any- has your experience of working with sources changed over time?
P. Depth of analysis, length of sources, degree of difficulty, number of sources, translation or transcription needed, who finds and selects them, purpose in working with them.

6. In what ways (if at all) do you feel that your A-level work with primary sources prepared you for using sources at university?
P. May prompt about what they did at A-level e.g. personal investigation)

7. What feelings do you experience when working with primary sources?
P. I will show students the following list of emotions and I will ask them to pick the 3 or 4 that they feel most applied to them: challenging, frustrating, boring, enjoyable, interesting, exciting, surprising, amusing.

8. What differences and/or similarities do you think there are between studying history with and without primary sources?
P: Could you give me an example of that?

9. How does working with primary sources affect your understanding of history?
P. Could you give me an example of that?

10. To what extent the work with primary sources is helping you to learn what historians do?
P. Could you give me an example of that?

11. Apart from learning to use sources in studying the past, are there any kinds of broader skill or understanding that you feel you are learning from this work (i.e. this work with sources)?
P: How? Could you give me an example?

12. Are there any other ways in which you think that studying history may be valuable for your future life?
P: Ask specifically about primary sources if they don't mention them here.

13. Are you planning to carry on with history?
P. A further degree in history (i.e. master) or a history-related job?

Appendix B: Six phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

PHASES OF THEMATIC ANALYSIS	DESCRIPTION OF PROCESS
Familiarisation with the data	Transcribed data sets Checked transcripts against voice recording Re-read transcripts A list of initial ideas was created
Generating initial codes	Systematically assigned codes across the entire data set, by highlighting extracts and making notes. Collated data relevant to each code
Searching for themes	Each code presented on a post-it note Organised post-it note codes into potential themes
Reviewing themes	Checked data extracts corresponded with coded themes Created a thematic map of potential themes
Defining and naming themes	Read the collated extracts within each theme to ensure the themes are "internally coherent, consistent and distinctive" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 96) To ensure themes were clearly defined and reflected the meanings evident in the data set, recordings were listened to and transcripts were re-read in relation to the thematic map Re-organised themes and data extracts where necessary
Producing the report	Final analysis of themes Related the analysis to the research question Wrote up the data analysis to be included in the findings section

Appendix C: Fifteen-points checklist for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

PROCESS	NO.	CRITERIA
TRANSCRIPTION	1	The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for 'accuracy'.
CODING	2	Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process.
	3	Themes have not been generated from a few vivid example (an anecdotal approach), but instead the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive.
	4	All relevant extracts for all each theme have been collated.
	5	Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set.
	6	Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive.
ANALYSIS	7	Data have been analysed, interpreted, made sense of, rather than just paraphrased and described.

	8 9 10	Analysis and data match each other. The extracts illustrate the analytic claims. Analysis tells a convincing and well-organised story about the data and topic. A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided.
OVERALL	11	Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over-lightly.
WRITTEN REPORT	12 13 14	The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis are clearly explicated. There is a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done, i.e. described method and reported analysis are consistent. The language and concepts used in the reports are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis.

	15	The researcher is positioned as active in the research process; themes do not just 'emerge'.

Appendix D: Stages of inductive coding theorised by Thomas (2006)

STAGE	PROCEDURE/S INVOLVED
Stage 1: Preparation of raw data files	Format the raw data files in a common format; print and/or make a backup of each raw data file.
Stage 2: Close reading of the text	The raw text is read in detail until the evaluator is getting familiar with its content and gains the understanding of the themes and events covered in the text.
Stage 3: Creation of categories	The evaluator identifies and defines categories or themes. Categories are commonly created from actual phrases or meanings in specific text segments.
Stage 4: Overlapping coding and un-coded text	The evaluator identifies: a) segments of texts coded into more than one category and b) segments of texts with no category assigned.
Stage 5: Continuing revision and refinement of category system	Within each category, the evaluator searches for sub-topics, including contradictory points of view and new insights. Appropriate quotations conveying the core theme or essence of a category are selected.

Appendix E: Exemplar of Coding Process



Appendix F: Themes and sub-themes emerged during the coding process

THEME	QUOTE ILLUSTRATING THE MEANING	SUB-THEMES
Curricular tasks about primary sources	"in class we looked at many tasks to be done with sources. For example, we used tasks proposed by the textbook or exam questions"	• Format of sources • Type of task done with the source (textbook, exam) • Length and kind of sources • Role of teacher/tutor.
Independent tasks with primary materials	"I also looked at sources for the dissertation, which was different from what I have done for normal assignments"	• Advantages/disadvantages of independent tasks • Level of independence experienced • Guidance by teacher/tutor
Value of working with primary sources when studying history	"Primary sources are unique, because they were produced by people in the past"	• Way of getting a better understanding of the past • Looking at multiple aspects of the past • Revealing unexpected aspects of the past
Emotions experienced when working with primary sources	"I was fascinated by the idea of looking at primary sources"	• Positive and negative emotions experienced
Personal interest for certain sources	"I was interest for primary sources came from the curiosity of looking at sources from a certain historical period"	• Learning more about the past • Stimulate interest to look at sources independently • Find out more about a well-known period
Getting insights about historians' methodology	"Sources are important: they represent the	• Learning the most important element of the methodology

	foundation of what historians do”	• Getting familiar with some ways historians have of looking at sources • Importance of independent tasks for learning this methodology
Learning how to evaluate different perspectives	“When looking at sources, I learnt how to assess different perspectives about a certain event”	• Appreciating multiple perspectives about the past • Learning to assess views of the past • Ability to use beyond academic context
Being people able to think critically	“Working with sources helped me to think critically about things”	• Working with sources as a way to develop this ability • Think critically to the past • Evaluate critically the present
Getting prepared for a future training to become historians	“We learn some of the basic aspects of historians’ work”	• Know foundations of historians’ work • Similarities and differences between A-Level and historians’ work
Being historians in training	“We looked at sources as historian would do”	• Working with many sources • Looking at different approaches • Importance of final dissertation

Appendix G: Draft Letters of Recruitment

G1: Draft Letter of Recruitment for Head-teachers

Date here

Dear X,

Students' Experience of Using Primary Sources at A-Level and in an Honours Degree in History: A Cross-Sectional Study

My name is Stefania Gargioni and I am currently a MRes candidate in the Department of Education at the University of Oxford. My research is looking at students' perspectives on the use of primary sources when studying history at A-Level and in study of the subject for an undergraduate honours degree. The research will include a series of semi-structured interviews.

The participants in my study will be Year 13 students. In accordance to the guidelines of Central University Research Ethical Committee (CUREC) of University of Oxford, people under 18 participating in research projects that don't raise complex ethical issues and are based within the EU could be classed as "competent youth". This means that they would be allowed to give their own consent to take part in the research without parental approval. I am writing to you to seek your permission to approach them (though their history teacher) to take part in the research, using this procedure, provided that you regard it as compatible with your school's internal regulations. If you would prefer me to seek informed consent of parents (through an opt out procedure or by seeking signed consent), I would be happy to provide a different consent form that will include parental approval.

I attach a Participant Information sheet that gives further details about the project's aims, activities and intended outputs. If you have any questions about the project and the consent procedures, you can contact me via email or via phone.

Yours sincerely,

Stefania Gargioni
MRes candidate,
Department of Education,
University of Oxford,
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford
OX2 6PY
E-mail: Stefania.gargioni@education.ox.ac.uk
Mobile: 07460224084

G2: Draft Letter of Recruitment for Year 13 Students – Semi Structured Interviews

Date here

Dear X,

Students' Experience of Using Primary Sources at A-Level and in an Honours Degree in History: A Cross-Sectional Study

My name is Stefania Gargioni and I am currently a MRes candidate in the Department of Education at the University of Oxford. My research is looking at students' perspectives on the use of primary sources when studying history at A-Level and in study of the subject for an undergraduate honours degree. The research will include a series of semi-structured interviews.

The interview will take approximately 60 minutes. During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions concerned with the work on primary sources required in A-Level. You will also be asked to bring along a sample of a sources/or of a task concerned with sources that you have found particularly interesting in your course recently.

If you are willing to go ahead with the interview, there is an additional consent form to sign. You can find more detailed information in the Information Sheet attached to this letter. Again, if you do have any questions, please do ask me before making your decision. You can contact me via email or via phone.

Yours sincerely,

Stefania Gargioni
MRes candidate,
Department of Education,
University of Oxford,
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford
OX2 6PY
E-mail: Stefania.gargioni@education.ox.ac.uk
Mobile: 07460224084

G3: Draft Letter of Recruitment for Third Year Undergraduates – Semi Structured Interviews

Date here

Dear X,

Students' Experience of Using Primary Sources at A-Level and in an Honours Degree in History: A Cross-Sectional Study

My name is Stefania Gargioni and I am currently a MRes candidate in the Department of Education at the University of Oxford. My research is looking at students' perspectives on the use of primary sources when studying history at A-Level and in study of the subject for an undergraduate honours degree. The research will include a series of semi-structured interviews.

The interview will take approximately 60 minutes. During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions concerned with the work on primary sources required at undergraduate level. You will also be asked to bring along a sample of a sources/or of a task concerned with sources that you have found particularly interesting in your course recently.

If you are willing to go ahead with the interview, there is an additional consent form to sign. You can find more detailed information in the Information Sheet attached to this letter. Again, if you do have any questions, please do ask me before making your decision. You can contact me via email or via phone.

Yours sincerely,

Stefania Gargioni
MRes candidate,
Department of Education,
University of Oxford,
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford
OX2 6PY
E-mail: Stefania.gargioni@education.ox.ac.uk
Mobile: 07460224084

Appendix H: Participant Information Sheet

University of Oxford
Department of Education
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY
Tel: +44(0)1865 274024 Fax: +44(0)1865 274027
general.enquiries@education.ox.ac.uk www.education.ox.ac.uk



Stefania Gargioni
MRes candidate,
Department of Education,
University of Oxford,
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford
OX2 6PY
E-mail: stefania.gargioni@education.ox.ac.uk
Tel: 07460224084

Students' Experience of Using Primary Sources at A-Level and in an Honours Degree in History: A Cross-Sectional Study

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

(This Information Sheet is addressed to students; a different version will be prepared for the teaching staff)

Ethics Approval Reference: ED-CIA-19-200

1. *Background and aims of the study*

My research focuses on the ways in which primary sources are used when studying history at A-Level and in the study of the subject for an honours-degree at undergraduate level. My thesis will explore students' perspectives' of their journey from doing history in school – within a very structured programme that is intended to prepare students for a A-Level examination – to doing history for an honours degree, with all the challenges associated with a more independent way of studying the subject.

2. *Why have I been invited to take part?*

You have been invited because you are a student involved in studying history at A-Level or undergraduate level.

3. *Do I have to take part?*

It is your decision to take part in this study or not. You can decide to stop participating at any time, and you don't have to give me a reason for stopping. You do not need to answer questions that you do not wish to answer. Every effort will be made to give you confidentiality and anonymity.

4. What will happen in the study?

The data for this research will be gathered through interviews focusing on the experiences of using primary sources at A-Level or at university. If you do decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. Once you have given your consent, you will take part in the interview (45-60 minutes). During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions concerned with the work on primary sources required in A-Level courses or in undergraduate modules. Also, you will be asked to bring along a sample of a sources/or of a task concerned with sources that you have found particularly interesting. The interviews will be audio-recorded and all the data collected will be anonymised. There will not be any further follow-up visits.

5. Are there any potential risks in taking part?

There are no risks in taking part in this study.

6. Are there any benefits in taking part?

This study will not directly benefit you, but its findings may be shared with teachers and university lecturers to help them understand how their A-level and undergraduate students think about using sources and what aspects they find most challenging.

7. Expenses and payments

There will be no payment for taking part in this study.

8. What will happen to any samples I give?

With your permission I will take copies of the examples of sources and source-based tasks/assignments that you bring along to the interview. These will help me later to make sense of your comments in the interview.

9. What happens to the data provided?

While the research is ongoing, all documents with notes from my interviews will be kept in a locked drawer. Any electronic file or recordings will be stored in a password-protected computer. After the interview, the data will be transcribed and all your information will be anonymised, so that nothing you say can be linked back to you. The results from this research will form the data on which my thesis will build and will be included in my final thesis submission. It may also be used in publications in academic journals. The anonymous data will be stored for up to three years after the publication of my MRes thesis.

10. Will the research be published?

If you agree to participate in this project, the research will be written up as a part of a MRes thesis. On successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited both in print and online in the University archives, to facilitate its use in future research. The thesis will be deposited and published on ORA (Oxford Research Archive). After a three years default embargo, the thesis could be consulted on open access mode and will be available to every internet user.

11. Who has reviewed this study?

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. (reference number: ED-CIA-19-200). More detailed questions for the questionnaires and the interviews have also been reviewed by my supervisors. If you wish to see a copy of the results prior to completion and publication of the thesis, please let me know.

12. ***Who do I contact if I have a concern about the study or I wish to complain?***

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please speak to Stefania Gargioni [stefania.gargioni@education.ox.ac.uk or 07460224084] or one of her supervisors [katharine.burn@eduction.ox.ac.uk or jenni.ingram@education.ox.ac.uk], who will do their best to answer your query. The researcher should acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how they intend to deal with it. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the relevant chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford who will seek to resolve the matter:

Chair, **Social Sciences & Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee**; Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk; Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD

13. Further Information and Contact Details

If you would like to discuss the research with someone beforehand (or if you have questions afterwards), please contact:

Stefania Gargioni
MRes candidate,
Department of Education,
University of Oxford,
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford
OX2 6PY
E-mail: stefania.gargioni@education.ox.ac.uk
Tel: 07460224084

Appendix I: Participant Consent Form

University of Oxford
Department of Education
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY
Tel: +44(0)1865 274024 Fax: +44(0)1865 274027
general.enquiries@education.ox.ac.uk www.education.ox.ac.uk

Stefania Gargioni
MRes candidate,
Department of Education,
University of Oxford,
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford
OX2 6PY
E-mail: stefania.gargioni@education.ox.ac.uk
Tel: 07460224084



PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

(The following questions would only be included in the version for the teachers and the lecturers and in the second consent form issued to students who agreed to participate in the interview. The consent form for the students that will participate to the questionnaire survey will not include any references to audio recording).

CUREC Approval Reference: ED-CIA-19-200

Students' Experience of Using Primary Sources at A-Level and in an Honours Degree in History: A Cross-Sectional Study

Purpose of Study:

My research focuses on the ways in which primary sources are used when studying history at A-Level and in the study of the subject for an honours-degree at undergraduate level. My thesis will explore students' perspectives' of their journey from doing history in school – within a very structured programme that is intended to prepare students for a A-Level examination – to doing history for an honours degree, with all the challenges associated with a more independent way of studying the subject.

Please Initial Each Box

1	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	☐
2	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences or academic penalty.	☐

3	I understand that research data collected during the study may be looked at by designated individuals from the University of Oxford where it is relevant to my taking part in this study. I give permission for these individuals to access my data.	☐
4	I understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.	☐
5	I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	☐
6	I understand how this research will be written up and published.	☐
7	I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.	☐
8	I consent to being audio recorded	☐
9	I understand how audio recordings will be used in research outputs	☐
10	I agree to take part in the above study.	☐

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Name of person taking consent	Date	Signature