



THE PLACE AND IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL HISTORY IN THE SECONDARY HISTORY EDUCATION

(ORTAÖĞRETİM TARİH EĞİTİMİNDE YEREL TARİHİN YERİ VE ÖNEMİ)

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ABSTRACT

The teaching of local history in schools as the part of the history curriculum has been advocated since the beginning of the twentieth century. Local history has been recommended as an active way of history learning in some countries. Local history has become popular again with debates on globalisation and postmodernism in recent years. The importance of local history is emphasised in the new Social Knowledge and History Curriculum in Turkey. The aim of this article is discuss the place and purpose of local history in history education. It will review relevant literature to elicit the potential benefits and problems of using local history in schools. Some suggestions to use local history during history lessons more effectively also will be given.

Keywords: Teaching history, history education, local history, teaching local history

ÖZ

Tarih derslerinde yerel tarihin kullanımı yirminci yüzyılın başından itibaren eğitimcilerin gündeminde olmuştur. Bazı ülkelerde aktif tarih öğrenmenin bir yolu olarak önerilen yerel tarih konusu, son yıllarda küreselleşme ve postmodernizm tartışmalarıyla birlikte yeniden gündeme gelmiştir. Ülkemizde kabul edilen yeni Sosyal Bilgiler ve Tarih dersleri öğretim programlarında da okullarda yerel tarih konularına önem verilmesi gerektiği vurgulanmaktadır. Bu makalede uluslararası literatürden hareketle tarih derslerinde yerel tarihin kullanılma biçimleri, yerel tarihin faydaları ve yerel tarih kullanılırken karşılaşılan problemler ve bunlara yönelik çözüm önerileri tartışılmış ayrıca yerel tarih konularının tarih derslerinde daha etkili kullanılması için önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

Anahtar sözcükler: Tarih öğretimi, tarih eğitimi, yerel tarih, yerel tarih öğretimi

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INTRODUCTION

Local history can be defined as ‘The study of the past of some significant local unit, developing as a community, in its context and compared with such other units’ (Rogers, 1977: 4). Stephens (1977) defined local history as the study of the past of smaller communities such as a town, rural, or suburban area, or a city neighbourhood. In school education, local history ‘generally means the study of a limited area within the compass of a short journey, using materials to which the pupil has ready access.’ (The Incorporated Association of Assistant Masters in Secondary Schools (IAAMSS), 1975:217). The teaching of Local history in schools as the part of the history curriculum has become increasingly popular in many countries. There is a great amount of work on local history and its place in teaching history (Douch, 1967 and 1972; Stephens, 1977; Lowe, 1977; Lomas, 1988; Collicot, 1993). While changing primary and secondary school curriculum in Turkey, local history topics were included in History and Social Knowledge Curriculum and the necessity of using historical environment (historical buildings, monuments, museum-cities, war ruins) during lessons was emphasised (MEB, 2005 and 2007). Different researches done in Turkey showed that the potential of local historical sources around the schools are used sometimes but due to the lack of systematic approach expected educational benefits could not be gained from those activities (Safran and Ata, 1996; Safran, 2002; Aktekin, 2004). The student centred and constructivist approach in the new History and Social Knowledge Curriculum has made local history important again in Turkey. Because local history has been used and supported in many countries as a way of active learning. The aim of this article is discuss the place and purpose of local history, which has been implemented in many countries for several years, in history education. It will review relevant literature to elicit the potential benefits and problems of using local history in schools. Some suggestions to use local history during history lessons more effectively also will be given.

LOCAL HISTORY AND HISTORY EDUCATION

According to Rogers (1977:1) although not different from any other traditional branch of history, ‘Local history occupies that stratum in historical studies below the national level but above the level of individual.’

The study of a family or of a village at a certain date; the narrative of a business firm or a canal; the account of a country or region; the study of an estate or a house- all this is embraced within the term local history (Rogers, 1977:1).

The importance of local and regional history and the necessity of maintaining a balance between local, national, European and world history has been mentioned in the Council of Europe's conferences on history education at different times (Slater, 1995). In those conferences, local history was recommended as 'the best basis for active methodology' (Slater, 1995:34).

Local history has also gained new impetus in Eastern European and Russian schools, signalling a shift from the universal generalities of history teaching under communist regimes (Hawkey, 1995; Kaplan, Agmon and Ermolaeva, 1999). Ermolaeva, for example, argued the importance and necessity of balance between world, national and local history in Russian schools:

She (Ermolaeva) proposes to focus study on the students' surroundings, in accordance with the principle: 'Me- My town- My region- My country- My world.' This will allow students to develop new ways to connect to the past (Kaplan, Agmon and Ermolaeva, 1999: 6).

Similarly, in Latvia, which was under occupation of Soviet Union and gained its independence in 1991, two different history textbooks were used in schools: one is History of Latvia the other one is History of Europe and World. Topics related to Latvian history were given in the following order: Local History- History of Latvia- History of Baltic region- History of Europe- World history (Aktekin, 2005).

In the U.S.A., courses in local history have been incorporated into the curricula of history and social studies at virtually every level (Metcalf and Downey, 1982; Giese, 2000). Local history in the U.S.A. schools is taught in different ways depending upon the availability of source materials and the knowledge and interests of individual teachers. The most popular strategies are: walks designed to study neighbourhoods and particular buildings; interviews with local people, especially with the elderly; presentations of slides and historical photographs; and the analysis of various local documents (Metcalf and Downey, 1982).

In the UK, the inclusion of local history in history education has been advocated since the beginning of the twentieth century (Plymouth, 1933). In 1908 the Board of Education issued a circular on the teaching of history in secondary schools. It appears to have been the earliest state paper to accord local history a place in school education. The Board said, 'It is essential that in each school attention should be paid to the history of the town and district in which it is situated' (cited in Finberg, 1967:25). The teaching of local history in the early days was limited to illustrating important national events in a particular locality or local associations with nationally important people (Skip, 1967; Stephens, 1977).

Despite support for local history as an essential part of the school curriculum since the early years of the twentieth century, its adoption in primary and secondary schools has been slow. This is because, 'local history was regarded as a second-rate study by most universities, to be left to the parson and the enthusiastic amateur' for many years (IAAMSS, 1975:217). Since 1945, the study and teaching of local history have become very fashionable and the educational value of the historical study of the locality in its own right was being widely accepted in secondary schools (Hoskins, 1984). Many books and articles were published urging practising teachers to include local history into their work in schools (Douch, 1967 and 1972; Jamieson, 1971; Stephens 1977). The establishment of the first Department of English Local History at the University of Leicester in 1948 promoted local history as a respectable academic subject, in particular for adult education (Hoskins, 1984). Apart from the school curriculum, local history is also pursued by different groups, individuals and societies. Various clubs and societies have local history activities including historical, archaeological, architectural, cycling, photographic and field study groups (Douch, 1967). In England and Wales, the Department for Education and Science advocated the study of local history for firstly the local illustration of national, European and world history and secondly the comprehensive study of local area and its community (DES, 1991). In particular, the National History Curriculum contains a separate local history study unit in Key Stage 2 (Köstüklü, 1997). Examples given for the local history in the Curriculum are:

Aspects in the local area that have changed: education; population movement; houses and housing; religious practices; treatment of the poor and care of the sick; law and order; sport and leisure. Effects of national events or developments: prehistoric settlers; the building of a castle or the development of a town; the Civil War; the plague or a cholera epidemic; the settlement of people from different cultures in the area (DfEE and QCA, 1999:19).

In the UK local history is mainly taught at primary level, although it is argued that local history teaching is likely to be more effective in secondary education since older children are already more knowledgeable about general history and are therefore more capable of understanding the significance of local developments (Stephens, 1977; David and Huggins, 1992). Although it is not compulsory at Key Stage 3, local history is compulsory at Key Stage 4 (Aktekin, 2001). For schools doing the Schools History Project for GCSE, students prepare two coursework units: one for Modern World Study and one for History Around Us unit (Culpin, 1999). History Around Us is a study of a local historical site in its historical context (AQA, 2000). This study must be based on a locality or site which will be investigated by the student during the course. The purpose of this study is 'to facilitate the study of history from its

visible remains in order to provide a vivid and immediate way of encouraging and helping candidates to learn how to use and evaluate sources of evidence' and 'help candidates become more aware of the aspects of historical development of the environment in which they live, providing opportunities to relate the investigation of a site to the wider context of changes in British history' (AQA, 2000:30).

The interest in local history has grown over the years and especially in recent decades, debates about the potential threat of globalisation to the local culture and identity have prompted a growth of local and regional studies in social science and history (Hudson, 1999). Black and MacRaild (2000) argued that some historians, preferred local/regional history to differentiate the history of smaller communities from the national or international emphasis of history. 'Thus the emphasis is shifted from the singular nation to the plural region.'(Black and MacRaild, 2000:92).

Another reason for the growing emphasis on local and regional analysis is the current intellectual climate of post modernism:

Postmodernism involves a concern for otherness and difference and a rejection of overarching theories of society or of economic change. It stimulates an interest in the totality of people's lives rather than a privileging of the public over the private sphere or the material over the cultural... it focuses upon multiple identities grounded in everyday habits and understandings that are normally rooted in local vernaculars. Only at local, regional and subregional levels can these subjects be adequately addressed, at least in the first instance. (Hudson,1999:6).

In this context, local history has achieved far higher status:

Studies in local history have necessitated revisions of universalist interpretations of the past. They have challenged stereotypes and metanarratives, offering insights into the contributions and participation of small communities in large events (Claire, 1996: 182).

BENEFITS OF LOCAL HISTORY

Why is local history so important? Many advantages of teaching local history are mentioned in the literature.

Traditionally, local history was seen to address a number of aims: It provided a training in historical methods, using materials which often motivated students; it served to connect the past with the present through, for example, a building or a family; it provided a frame within which students could establish their roots or identity (Hawkey, 1995:33).

The 1969, Council of Europe, Braunschweig Conference spelt out its advantages as:

The locality deals with the pupils' own background, provides the best basis for introducing historical methodology and consciousness, offers opportunities for close collaborative work with geography and is a realistic introduction to social and economic issues in their European and world context (Slater, 1995: 33).

The belief that local history had to be done rather than learnt made local history popular for the educationalists who support active learning, in which the children, rather than the teacher, do the work (Lomas, 1988:175). Active learning leads to understanding and usage of source-materials and thus, helps pupils to feel for the topic they are studying (Fines, 1994). Preston (1969:88) argued that by including local history 'history need no longer be dry chalk and talk'. He added that studying and analysing the local documents, map reading and map-making, visits to local libraries, museums, manor houses, elderly inhabitants, or field visits make history a practical, lively and active subject and those activities free history from 'the chains of the classroom and endless note-taking'. Douch (1967) described the benefits which children may obtain from local history studies as educational, historical and psychological.

Educational and historical Benefits

Local history is a useful vehicle for building partnerships with the local community in which the school resides and it can help to break down the barriers between school and the world outside (Douch, 1967; Giese, 2000). During field visits and project work in local history, pupils will need to get in touch with experts such as museum curators, archivists, archaeologists, members of local historical societies and the like. This emphasises the fact that history has a wider significance outside the classroom: it is an on-going business in which real people, professionals, earn a living and the learning process extends beyond the realms of history textbooks (IAAMSS, 1975; Stephens, 1977). As Crace (2001:3) emphasised 'visits are a wonderful way of letting pupils know that learning can be fun' and it is 'not a process that just takes place within the four walls of the classroom. It encourages them to make their own links with the outside world and to take control of their own learning.' The same point is emphasised by Slater (1995:38):

If local and regional history are going to be taken seriously, young people will have to walk and look as well as read and write. If they are going to use a greater variety of primary source material, they will find much of it outside the classroom, in buildings, in street and pub names, in field patterns, in the memories of old people and on archaeological digs.

Another important value of local history is in providing links between history and other subjects (Stephens, 1977). Studying history outside the classroom enables pupils to develop cross-curricular skills and interests (Anderson and Moore, 1994). Environmental studies, geography, art, social studies and civics and economics all have an historical element, and often local history can play an important part in their teaching (Stephens, 1977).

Although local history is frequently used to illustrate broader historical developments, it has also been recommended for technical and methodological reasons. Stephens (1977:18) argued that the general objectives of local history should include ‘not only understanding of the national and local history of a certain period or a certain theme and their interrelationship but also, skills and interests which they intended to develop’. Local history studies encourage pupils to research, analyse and report their observations. As a result they acquire ‘more real, as opposed to merely verbal, knowledge, and often leads to the development of more logical thought’ (Douch, 1967:8). Work on local history also entails working in groups and so promotes close relationships amongst the pupils (Douch, 1967). Field trips are a good way of gaining those skills. When pupils carry out research in museums, historic buildings and sites and bring back information and ideas they are having valuable experience which will help their general development as well as their understanding of history (Mainstone and Bryant, 1972).

Researches on teaching history have shown that most children throughout their school life find abstract concepts difficult to understand (Stephens, 1977).

History lessons ought to be interesting, but too often they are dull. Frequently one of the reasons for this dullness is remoteness, the content of the lessons having no contact, emotional or material, with the children’s lives and experience (Douch, 1967:8-9).

Stephens (1977) argued that the teacher should teach the abstract topics by using concrete and general examples and local history offers great opportunities in this respect. The importance of local history is that it allows pupils to move away from generalisations of broad topics and concentrate on the study of real people and situations in more detail (Jamieson, 1971). According to David and Huggins (1992:3):

It is easier to make history come alive when one’s own locality is being studied in some detail. Change through time, and the large elements of continuity between the present and the past are then most clear to pupils.

Local history provides many kinds of activities involving contact with different tangible and visible objects, materials and places (Stephens, 1977) and

by adopting varied approaches and introducing new and more practical techniques, local history brings interest as well as bringing relevance (Preston, 1969). Douch (1970:109) said ‘children need to be involved in history, to see it, not as a film which they simply watch, but as a continuing play in which they themselves are actors’. Collicott (1993) argues that local history attracts and interests pupils. He thinks that seeing the local maps and reading evidence which mentions places that pupils know will excite them and involve them in historical studies. In addition, Douch (1967) argued that instead of a vague sense of time by simply referring to significant events, teachers should link past, present and future events to encourage the growth of an awareness of change and a sense of development. In some areas local remains may help in developing a time sense. Too much school history has no relationship to the world in which pupils live but when the local community is surveyed as part of school history, the present situation will receive attention of pupils. Local history studies take the pupils out into their own district on fieldwork and visits, and brings to their notice places they know (Preston, 1969). Local history studies can give opportunities for using inquiry methods such as observation, discovery, collection, evaluation and classification of evidence, deduction from evidence and presentation of conclusions (Mainstone and Bryant 1972; Anderson and Moore, 1994). Haydn et al (1997) argued that in order to understand what history is, and how it is constructed, pupils need to experience history outside the classroom. Haydn et al (1997: 203) pointed out that ‘Participation in history field trips can increase awareness of the nature of history through exposure to a rich variety of sources’. One group of history teachers emphasised the importance of local history for similar reasons. They believed that in school history one of the aims should be inculcation of historical method and local history is one of the best vehicle for pupils to ‘begin with their own experience: to attempt observation and investigation: to use ‘boot as well as book’: to evaluate evidence and deduce therefrom: to be made wary of national historical generalisations’ (IAAMSS, 1975: 219).

Psychological benefits

Many of the advantages of local history which have been described as educational might also be classified as psychological. There is an additional psychological advantage that studying local history helps the pupils to know and to understand the environment and the community of which s/he forms part (Douch, 1967).

It is often said that local studies are valuable because they utilise the surroundings which a pupil knows: it is truer to say that they first help him (sic) to see this environment and then to

use it. Such experience is likely to help his (sic) development both as an individual and as a member of the community by providing some roots and a sense of belonging as well as a feeling of responsibility (Douch, 1967:8).

Stephens (1977) and Bage (2000) also mentioned the importance of local history in the development of pupils' personal development and their sense of identity.

Local history can help to satisfy the apparently increasing need felt by people today to identify themselves with groups smaller than the national (Stephens, 1977:13).

History offers roots and identities, especially through family history or local history, which are increasingly important for social cohesion at a time of rapid and millennial change (Bage, 2000:133).

Apart from the benefits mentioned above, learning about local history might have some long-term effects as well. Educationalists agreed that pupils should be made conscious of their heritage (IAAMSS, 1975). If pupils appreciate their local past it may help them develop a better understanding of the general past and encourage the acquisition of a more meaningful historical vocabulary and an idea of time sequence (Douch, 1967 and 1972). Local history studies and outside the classroom activities represents an introduction to possible leisure pursuits especially in later life (IAAMSS, 1975). It can be argued that those activities may support the heritage and tourism industries and more specifically, they are essential to the survival and expansion of museums and the historic environment in the long term (Bage, 2000).

The use of historical landscapes, buildings and museums will demonstrate to pupils that the physical evidence of the past is under continual threat from ever present and ever changing human interaction with the environment. Pupils can be encouraged to develop an attitude of responsibility towards their cultural heritage which will also make them aware of elements of their past in their own environment that have been destroyed (Anderson and Moore, 1994:199).

Stephens (1977:20) reminded that activity and discovery methods should not be adopted uncritically:

The reaction against the overbookish didacticism of the past is in danger of going too far. Local history, perhaps more than other aspects of history has a valuable practical side to it, but this advantage must not be abused. By itself, without any intellectual underpinning, the value of practical work is limited.

Although those benefits can be gained from local studies, it should not be forgotten that:

The benefits to be derived from a study of local history and the problems involved in such work will vary with the content and organisation of specific studies and the age and ability of the participating

students. In particular, a great deal depends on how much, and what sort of, work the pupils themselves undertake (Douch, 1967:6).

PROBLEMS OF USING LOCAL HISTORY

Although many advantages of the study of local history have been mentioned in the literature, there are many difficulties associated with work in the field of local history. In this section the most common problems will be mentioned.

Resource problems

One of the problems mentioned in the literature about using local history is resource problems. As Stephens (1977) mentioned the availability of suitable resources would affect the topics the teacher can utilise. Douch (1967) mentioned two major problems relating to local history resources. The first group of problems is related to the source materials with which teachers and students may need to be familiar. Any student of local history has to deal with different printed and unprinted types of sources, such as maps, place names, and architecture, which are unfamiliar to him/her and those sources may present many difficulties. Some materials cannot be accessible or cannot be understood without guidance (Douch 1967). The second group of problems is related to the introduction of local material into the work of particular kinds of schools and colleges. Again it might be difficult to find guidance about some practical questions such as: ‘What can be done? How is local history to be fitted into syllabus? How can particular pieces of work be organised?’(Douch, 1967:11).

Time Factor

One difficulty in the secondary school is the shortage of teaching time. The use of local history for schools’ benefits assumes that ‘teacher and students are prepared to invest time in doing research, in writing and in revising their reports’ (Metcalf and Downey, 1982:206). As Anderson and More (1994:199) emphasised ‘for learning to take place outside the classroom, sufficient preparation must take place inside the classroom.’ They also added that fieldwork visits must be followed up with appropriate activities to reinforce students’ learning.

Worthwhile local history studies, the preparation of local history visits, the visit itself and the work in writing, discussion, drama or art, which will result from the visit requires time but the amount which can be undertaken in school time is limited (Barwell, 1990). Those studies can affect the timetable and the required syllabus or established programme of history teaching (Mainstone and Bryant, 1972). Preston (1969) emphasised that there are strong arguments for teaching world history and also for retaining a national approach in history

syllabus for schools. Also examination syllabi which restrict the history teacher influence the time that can be devoted to local history (Peplow, 1978). Because of those factors teachers have difficulties to find enough places for local history in the heavily loaded curriculum and to decide how local history can be fitted in to the history syllabus. Preston (1969) offers co-operation and co-ordination with other subjects and timetable blocking as a possible solution. It is also suggested that in a rigid and inflexible system, teachers can show willing by arranging local studies to be done during week-ends, or summer evenings, or in the holidays (IAAMSS, 1975). It is obvious that, for doing this ‘the history teacher will have to be a strong advocate to achieve such concessions for his (sic) subject’ (Preston, 1969: 90). It also needs to be recognised that, during extra-curricular local history activities, some pupils are automatically excluded from its benefits since some of them will not be able to take part in out-of-school activities for different reasons (Douch, 1967). Time is not only necessary for teaching but also for teachers to produce effective resources. To use local history in class a teacher will need to understand the history of this region in the national context. Obviously, looking at one or two books for a few hours would not be enough for such a study. Stephens (1977) advised that after settling down in a school and feeling able to cope with the normal school curriculum, a teacher should begin to prepare in a disciplined way to introduce local history into the syllabus. The time spent on local work can be minimised by different means. For example, a camera or a portable tape-recorder, on which to record the words of inscriptions, or visual descriptions of the sites visited, will save outdoor note-making (IAAMSS, 1975). Also if pupils read what has already been written beforehand they will save time during the visit.

Limited Opportunities

The part of the country in which the school is situated will affect the sort of local history taught (Stephens, 1977). Some areas offer fewer possibilities than others do. Schools in the middle of new towns are poorly placed compared with those in the heart of historic towns (Douch, 1967). However, this should not be used as an excuse for not using local history. Teachers can find interesting topics to study:

The reasons for the establishment of the new town, its water supply, its communications, its parliamentary constituencies, all can be profitable studies (IAAMSS, 1975:221).

Douch (1970) and Rogers (1977) said that there is no universal prescription in local history and the topics of local studies will vary according to circumstances in different localities and for different purposes. Since

environments, schools, teachers and children all vary schools should decide according to their own conditions.

Antiquarianism

Claire (1996:182) defined antiquarianism as ‘the indiscriminate collection of facts for their own sake, without any sense of questions to be answered, or relationships to wider issues’. In the literature it is agreed that antiquarianism can be a danger in local history studies and local history must not be included without serious thought.

The worst kind of ‘local history’ one observes being conducted in schools is as part of a ‘local study’ where the scraps of random history involved do not fit into any structure of knowledge the child already possesses, are not a reasoned part of any new body of knowledge, and are therefore significant at best only to the teacher (Stephens, 1977:18).

To avoid antiquarianism Lowe (1977) suggested that local themes should be chosen very carefully according to their importance. Stephens (1977) argued that not all knowledge is worthwhile knowledge so in using local history the subject matter must be relevant to the whole course and the local material must be in itself worthwhile. Claire (1996) said that effective local history teaching requires asking and trying to answer specific historical questions. Rogers (1977:6) also emphasised that ‘the task of the local historian is to go further than just chronicling of events; he (sic) has to explain just what is the significance of these events in the context in which they took place. Why are they important? What do they mean?’ Stephens (1977) pointed out that the teacher must always be aware of the reason for the study of any particular topic and any activity undertaken as part of the study, and should be able to justify those studies. He added that the teacher must always ask himself (sic), ‘Why am I doing this? What will the children learn from it? Could the time be more fruitfully spent?’ (Stephens, 1977:19).

Parochialism and oversimplification

Another problem mentioned in the literature about local history is a narrow inward-looking parochialism (Jamieson, 1971; Douch 1972; Stephens, 1977). Local history can be parochial when it is done for its own sake or it is so narrowly focused that one loses sight of the larger context of which it was a part (Giese, 2000). Several local historians have reminded us of the need of keeping the national background always in mind while teaching local history (Jamieson, 1971; Lowe, 1977). If local history topics are not identified with national or international trends, there is a danger that pupils will exaggerate the importance of their own locality. Pupils will need to be aware of the normality or uniqueness

of their region. There should be constant cross-reference from national to local and from local to national. Studied in that way, local history is less open to the charge of parochialism (IAAMSS, 1975; Lowe, 1977). Stephens (1977:19) argued that the adult historian with a good general knowledge of history can spend much time on the details of local history without getting its significance out of proportion but since children do not have this background, ‘their local studies must always go hand in hand with learning about general history’. Claire (1996) and Hawkey (1995) also said that to guard pupils against a narrow parochialism, it is important to focus and contextualise the local history within wider analysis. Lowe (1977) argued that local history must be considered as the study of broad problems from local evidence or of the local community in its national context and in both cases it should involve an exploration of the relationship between local and more general trends. Stephens (1977) and Rogers (1977) warned that although great events and great persons have some significance in the history of any locality, the success story is only one side of experience and an approach to local history which deals only with important events is partial. The use of local history only when local experience agrees with the national trends is also a distorted view of historical reality. The pupils should not leave school only knowing the history of their own region or having a distorted view of the significance of their own locality in the past.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a problem related with resources and project work in local history (Preston, 1969). During their project work pupils sometimes copy directly from a guidebook or some little known articles. A group of teachers recommended that teachers can reduce those events by two means: ‘by insisting on a reading-list and knowing the sources himself (sic): and by the frequent setting of written work in class under his (sic) supervision so that the writing style of his (sic) pupils is easily identifiable’ (IAAMSS, 1975: 223.)

Perceptions of the importance

A book written by one group of teachers gave some of the reasons often given for neglecting local history as ‘mobility of staff, lack of time, lack of resources, lack of enthusiasm for the neighbourhood, the pressures of external examinations, the increasing demands for world-wide history, and the need to do something different from that which is done in the primary schools’ and claimed that all those are ‘extenuating circumstances rather than real barriers’ (IAAMSS, 1975:218). They believe that ‘the greatest obstacle will be in the mind rather than in reality’ (IAAMSS, 1975:221).

Many teachers have exaggerated the dilemma of 'parish pump' versus wider horizons. 'The Reformation is a more worthwhile study than the railway lines of Crewe.' Thus teachers are willing for their pupils to spend a few hours studying local history, but only as a respite from 'real' history' (IAAMSS, 1975:218).

After mentioning many of the problems discussed above, Douch (1967) said that these criticisms refer to unsatisfactory methods of using local material rather than the nature of the material itself. Preston (1969) also said that courage is necessary to break free from tradition and it is possible to overcome all those problems.

Controversial and sensitive issues

If local history is used in Turkish schools widely what kind of problems teachers could face? Aktekin (2006) interviewed with 17 history teachers in different schools in Turkey and asked them what kind of problems they would face if local history is used in schools widely. History teachers mentioned mainly about seven problems. The problems Turkish history teachers mentioned are time, bureaucratic problems, resource problem, financial problems, the negative perception of parents and society towards local history, crowded classrooms and the existence of controversial and sensitive issues. Apart from the last one the other problems are similar with the problems mentioned in the relevant literature. By sensitive and controversial issues teachers meant the possibility of any contradiction between school knowledge and the findings of local history studies. Two teachers said that the findings of local history studies might contradict the official interpretation of history and it might be a problem in some cases. One of the teachers emphasised that the most important problem might be ethnic problems whilst teaching local history. For instance, in some regions the Kurdish or Armenian issues might be interpreted as different from the official school knowledge. Another teacher said that whilst giving history essays, some students learn controversial facts from their relatives or grandparents about historical knowledge from textbooks. For example, during the Revolutionary History of the Turkish Republic and Kemalism subject, some students mention their grandfathers' ideas of Atatürk or Turkish National War. Those opinions may contradict the textbooks and official interpretations. Although it is problematic in some cases, teachers believed that it is beneficial sometimes, since it gives teachers a chance to correct students' misunderstandings or false information about historical facts (Aktekin, 2006).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

To conclude, as literature has suggested local history has many benefits for schools. On the other hand, 'it would be unrealistic to claim that these benefits are to be obtained best or only through the study of local history; but, it is clear that local history can do much to increase the likelihood of the history teacher's success in achieving them (Stephens, 1977:9). Although the inclusion of local history in the school curriculum is beneficial, it 'should not displace other aspects of history teaching in the school, but rather should add to and enrich the teaching of the subject as a whole' (Stephens, 1977:8). As the literature pointed out including local history in the school curriculum does not mean it should replace the other history topics. Local, national and world history studies should be complementary and not in competition (Douch, 1972; Aggiornamento, 2002).

Although the inclusion of local history in the school curriculum is beneficial, it would be unrealistic and 'foolish to imagine that local history is the answer to the history teacher's prayer.' (Gosden and Sylvester, 1968:44). In order to get maximum benefits of local history studies for history education, topics and methods should be chosen very carefully. In order to have successful and beneficial results, Bage (2000:134-135) summarised ten principles 'developed during collaborations for local history projects with teachers, archivists and museum education officers to underpin any local history project.' The same principles could be applied to the Turkish context. Local history study would be beneficial if the following principles were taken into consideration (Bage, 2000:134-135):

1. **Local history is resource-led.** Teachers should find out the possible available sources in a particular topic and then decide whether or how to focus upon it. Teachers should know whether there is sufficient or appropriate evidence to support an educational enquiry.
2. **Local history should be child-centred.** The teacher should allow pupils to do more work than himself/herself. Teachers' main role should be supporting students' enquiries.
3. **Local history should be enquiry-led.** Researching familiar local areas can give students good opportunities to 'act as historians' and teachers should use this opportunity widely.
4. **Use the widest range of historical sources possible.** Local history studies can use different sources such as, museum and site visits, oral history, artefacts, maps, photographs, pictures, publications, and printed

and hand-written documents. The teacher should highlight them and discuss them with students.

5. **Find romance.** Most children love a mystery and finding small clues such as ‘faded lettering on a wall, a bump in a field, an entry in a school logbook, a name on a map’ (Bage, 2000:135) can attract them and lead them into wanting to know more.
6. **Evaluate evidence.** Local history projects should evaluate evidences during the project. Some localities can have legendary stories of local buildings and events. Local history projects can collect them as well but they should try to be tested.
7. **Involve local experts.** Local authors, amateur archaeologists, archivists, antique dealers, builders or architects, radio or newspaper journalists might have interesting stories and expertise. Their expertise and knowledge should be included in local studies.
8. **Involve local community.** Sources from local community such as, record offices, libraries, websites, buildings, parish magazines or newsletters, letters home, contacts with ex-teachers or pupils, local history groups, local newspapers and supplements, the church, old people’s homes etc. can be interesting information sources. Local people can also be used as consultants, classroom helpers and audience.
9. **Aim for an end-product.** The results of any local history project can be shared in many ways: an exhibition, open evening, publication, school museum, radio programme and group presentation in assembly. Those activities are educationally beneficial and also they can give the local community something back and improve the image of the school.

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