Surfing the past: digital learners in the history class
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I met David le Clercq in February 2010. Le Clercq is a history teacher at the Helen Parkhurst Dalton School [HPDS] in Almere. To be more precise, I came across him after a Twitter exchange with an acquaintance of mine who was working on an education digital media project and had drawn my attention to a project underway at the HPDS under Le Clercq’s coordination. I started exchanging e-mails with Le Clercq. In one e-mail he sent me some information about the project with a link to a YouTube clip. In that 3-minute clip Le Clercq announces that teachers have put textbooks aside, and that each pupil has received a portable computer or notebook both for schoolwork and homework. He then went on to claim:

By dropping textbooks, teachers and students are provided with much more freedom of choice. Students have more topics and assignments from which to choose. It fits in better with their perceptions, and teachers can offer a lot more.

This claim, by itself, summarises to a great extent two of the three claims into which I am enquiring. The suggestion that ‘Students have more topics and assignments from which to choose’, is claiming that online resources offer more and varied sources; the suggestion that ‘It fits in better with their perceptions’, is claiming that pupils like computer-mediated learning and thus find it attractive.

I took on the role of observer at one of Le Clercq’s history classes once a week from April to June 2010, and again from September to November 2010, at which time it had been taken over by his colleague, Lisanne Beekman. In this chapter, I shall first briefly sketch the background to the Dalton Plan which underlies the teaching

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201 Le Clercq explained that, for didactic materials, the school received a 300-euro subsidy per child from the government. To purchase the laptops, which cost about 300 euros each, the school funded half the amount, the other half being paid by the pupils [their parents] over a period of two years. The pupils practically owned the computers from the beginning – they took them home everyday – though theoretically, they would only become fully-fledged owners in the third year, that is, after having paid 150 euros [75 euros per year] (Author interview [9 March 2010] and e-mail correspondence [10 March 2011] with David le Clercq, Almere).
and learning processes at the HPDS. I shall then describe the interactions between pupils and digital media to check how [if at all] attractive they are, how [if at all] they foster pupils’ historical thinking, and how [if at all] varied the sources are that they offer. I shall analyse the findings in the next chapter.

6.1 The Dalton Approach

It is enough to look at one and the same child at home, in the street, or at school: now you see a vivacious, curious child, with a smile in his eyes and on his lips, seeking instruction in everything, as he would seek pleasure, clearly and frequently strongly expressing his thoughts in his own words; now again you see a worn-out, retiring being, with an expression of fatigue, terror, and ennui, repeating with the lips only strange words in a strange language, – a being whose soul has, like a snail, retreated into its house. It is enough to look at these two

Figure 6.1: Teacher providing a personalised explanation while other pupils are busy doing their assignments, often pausing to select a new tune on their iPods (Photo: O.N., 27 April 2010).
conditions in order to decide which of the two is more advantageous for the child’s development (Tolstoy, [1862] 1967: 16-17).

The pupils of the class I observed were aged 13-14 years and attended the lower cycle that would lead them either to hoger algemeen voorgezet onderwijs [general secondary education, HAVO] or voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs [pre-university education, VWO] (see Chapter 5, Section 5.1). Although they attended history classes in both their first and second years, history was not a stand-alone discipline, as it alternated with social studies, geography and civics, which together make up the course in Mens en Maatschappij [Mankind and Society]. History, like each of the other sub-disciplines, was taught for a period of six weeks, returning to it again after the other sub-disciplines had been taught, which explains why I was not able to conduct my field research in one go. In order to understand my account of the atmosphere and events that took place in the history class I observed, it is indispensable to first understand the so-called Dalton Plan, implemented by the school. The school is known as a Dalton school, having been named after the plan’s initiator, Helen Parkhurst. In this section, thus, I shall trace the origins of that plan and discuss its key principles, while simultaneously describing how these were being applied in the history class during the period of my observation.

The idea had been germinating in the mind of American reformist Parkhurst [1886–1973] since her own school time around 1900 (Van der Ploeg, 2010: 10-11). Her school experience had not been a positive one, as she, like so many other pupils, would sit and either listen to the teacher or repeat what he or she had ordered them to memorise. The school atmosphere was repressive and far from stimulating. According to Parkhurst’s contemporary and education scholar S.C. Bokhorst (1924b:19), the same was true in nineteenth-century Netherlands, where the educational system allowed ‘a series of mistakes’ to develop, one of them being ‘the tendency of the system to shift child-development activities from the child to the teacher’. The system stressed the transmission of ‘encyclopaedic knowledge’ and neglected the ‘child’s independent thinking capacity [zelf-denk-capaciteit]’, and ‘self-confidence [vertrouwen in het eigen kunnen]’ (Ibid.: 19-20; see also Ibid.: 23). It was however in the early 1910s that Parkhurst, then a primary school teacher, started experiments that would later result in the Dalton Laboratory Plan:202

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202 The concept of ‘laboratory’ was not new in the discourse on educational reform. Comenius ([1657] 1953: 61) used it in his Didactica Magna to describe what the new education system should look like. To truly achieve its goal, he maintained, the school should be ‘a true laboratory of men’.
From its inception the laboratory plan, as I continued to call it even after perfecting it in 1913, aimed at the entire reorganization of school life. My idea was to substitute for the top-heavy machinery actually in use a simple reconstruction of school procedure under which the pupils would enjoy more freedom as well as an environment better adapted to the different sections of their studies in which each instructor should be a specialist. Above all, I wanted to equalize the pupils’ individual difficulties and to provide the same opportunity for advancement to the slow as to the bright child (Parkhurst, [1922] 1924: 10-11).

The aim, as the initiator explained, was ‘to make school as attractive and as educative as play, and ultimately, to create those fearless human beings’ (Ibid.: 22). The initial idea was to rethink the school structure, the prevailing approach based on the one hand on the authority of teachers, and on the other hand on the passivity of learners, and to create more room for self-regulated, self-initiated, and self-directed actions of learners. Instead of a classroom with a teacher as instructor and pupils as receivers, she wanted to create educational laboratories, where teachers helped pupils do their work (Van der Ploeg, 2010: 15-16). The way to do that was to organise learning activities around assignments, which the pupils would do independently and at their own speed (Ibid.: 16; see also Bokhorst, 1924b: 33).

As this approach was being explored in the mid-1910s, the similar but already established Montessori Method was being applied in Italy and other European countries. Parkhurst ([1922] 1924: 11-12) admitted having refined her own approach during her stay in Italy in 1914, where she served as Maria Montessori’s assistant, and during the teacher-training she organised back in the United States on Montessori’s behalf. As earlier experiments with crippled children in primary schools were showing positive results, other educationalists, including those involved in secondary education, became increasingly excited and interested in this approach. Boys and girls attending a High School in Dalton, a town in the State of Massachusetts, were the first be part of an experiment in secondary education that started in February 1920 (Ibid.: 13). The plan became associated with Dalton High School because news of the new plan spread from there to other parts of the world: ‘I then decided to call my plan Dalton Laboratory Plan, by which it has since been known’ (Ibid.). The first European country to conduct experiments – from 1920 onwards – was England, under the auspices of educationalist Belle Rennie, who was to become the secretary of England’s Dalton Association (Ibid.; see also Bokhorst, 1924a: 4). From there, it spread to other parts of Europe and the world.
The Netherlands was among early adopters in the 1920s and quickly emerged as the country with the most robust and popular Dalton tradition in the world (Van der Ploeg, 2010: 7). A commission, set up in early 1924 and which included education scholars, travelled to England to visit primary schools that had been implementing the Dalton Plan. Accompanying the commission, Bokhorst visited secondary schools, including the County Secondary School for Girls in Streatham, London, the first secondary school to implement the Plan in Europe under principal Rosa Bassett (Bokhorst, 1924a: 3). In the early 1950s, when the Netherlands’ Dalton Association wanted to start an international training institute, Parkhurst herself wanted to come over and work as a teacher-trainer. In a letter to the Association, she wrote: ‘I sincerely believe Holland to be the best place in size and culture and sincerity … Through Holland the world’ (quoted in Van der Ploeg, 2008). In the end, she did not actually come to the Netherlands due to an as yet unexplained misunderstanding with the Dalton Association leaders (Ibid.). Her interest proved that the seeds of the Dalton Plan had fallen onto fertile soil in the Netherlands: by the summer of 2010, the country had about 400 Dalton schools, about 350 of which were primary schools (Van der Ploeg, 2010: 7).

The Dalton Plan, as initially conceived, is based on a number of principles, the most important of which are pupils’ freedom, self-regulation, and cooperation (Van der Ploeg, 2010: 124-132). The concept of freedom is based on the assumption that a child naturally ‘prefers independent action with simple tools, being more like primitive man in his creative outlook’ (Parkhurst, 1951: xvii). If freedom and independent action are part of a child’s nature, then it follows that freedom will generate interest and interest, learning. Parkhurst ([1922] 1924: 16) conceptualised this notion of freedom as the first principle of the Dalton Laboratory Plan. From the academic, or cultural, point of view, the pupil must be made free to continue without interruption his work upon any subject in which he is absorbed, because when interested he is mentally keener, more alert, and more capable of mastering any difficulty that may arise in the course of his study … Unless a pupil is permitted to absorb knowledge at his own rate or speed he will never learn anything thoroughly. Freedom is taking one’s own time. To take someone else’s time is slavery.

Apart from the freedom to organise one’s own learning style and rate, freedom also involves freedom of movement, freedom to talk with classmates without disturbing the class, freedom to ask for the teacher’s help, etc. Thus conceptualised, various forms of freedom were evident in the class I observed. For the sake of this chapter,
and in keeping with the media-focused approach of my research, I shall describe only those freedoms that are related to media. For example, one day of April [2010], the teacher was discussing monks and knights in the Middle Ages, and he told the pupils that everything he was telling them could be found on the Web and in the textbook. When he asked who was interested in searching for more information using the Web, about two-thirds of the pupils raised their hands. Among those who preferred books, one boy said he was uncomfortable with the Web ‘because everything is in English’. For him ‘it is easier to find information in a book’. Even as he spoke, he reached out for the textbook, which suggests that he was referring to the textbook. The teacher said that everyone was free to use sources and materials with which they felt comfortable. The last section discusses in more detail the types of sources pupils used for their assignments.

Pupils’ freedom vis-à-vis media use was also evident from the access point of view. The pupils’ laptop computers had no firewall or other control software to prevent them from accessing ‘unsuitable’ websites. Le Clercq explained that it was a conscious choice because ‘anyway, they would always find a way to overcome any hindrance so placing them would be a waste of time’. The logic behind this is that when pupils feel and realise that nothing is being hidden, they do not ‘waste’ much time on what adults deem ‘unsuitable’ for their age and education.

In addition to using media as information carriers or as tools allowing access to that information, the pupils were free to choose the medium in which they would hand in their class assignments. The majority of them, approximately the same two-thirds, preferred to use their laptop computers to type their assignments and upload them to the school’s electronic platform as Microsoft Word files. The rest, who almost corresponded to the one-third who felt more comfortable with books – and by extension with analogue media –, preferred to use analogue means until the very last stage of handing in the assignment. Mendie seldom took her laptop out of her bag and almost never used it to type: ‘It’s uncomfortable’. On one occasion, when she had completed an assignment, without saying a word, she and another girl with whom she shared a desk, stood up and walked out, both of them holding their handwritten assignments. I followed them and realised that they had gone to the central hall where the photocopier – which also served as a scanner – was located. While they were scanning and saving their work on a USB stick, I asked them why they preferred that method:

203 Author interview with David le Clercq (Almere, 9 March 2010).
204 None of the names attributed to pupils are their actual names.
Figure 6.2: Pupils working with media technologies of their choice (Photo: O.N. 14 September 2010).

Figure 6.3: Pupils scanning their handwritten assignments (Photo: O.N. 20 April 2010).
-Q: Why do you prefer to write by hand and scan your work?

-Mendie: It’s easier

-Q: But you have a laptop!

-Mendie: Yes, but for History and French, I prefer to write on paper. I am scanning it because the teacher said that we should upload the assignments.

Susan, another girl, explained to me that the reason why she preferred to write her assignment manually on paper was that the misspelling detection tool of the text-editing software [MS Word] was user-unfriendly:

… in the end I have red underlining instead of text. Each word with a capital letter is underlined and I can’t do anything to change it. I sometimes type with a computer, but pen and paper are far better.

From Susan’s response, it seemed likely that the red reminded her of the teacher’s underlining and crossing-out with a red pen that she knew from primary school. She could at least do something to avoid or prevent further underlining with a red pen – e.g., by asking why and where she had gone wrong –, but she couldn’t do anything about the software-prompted underlining that underscored her text in red, which to her mind, meant that she had made errors. This could be the reason why she chose the pen-and-paper option for her assignment.

Self-regulation is another key principle of the Dalton Plan. It is closely related to the previous principle in the sense that pupils are free to set their own aims, and to devise their own plan to achieve them. A.J. Lynch, who was headmaster at West Green School, Tottenham in England and one of the early experimenters using the Dalton Plan in the 1920s, conceptualised self-regulation as empowering learners to be masters of their own learning process:

Have not the pupils, in the past, regarded the teachers, and not themselves, as responsible for their education? Is there any valid reason why the pupils in the schools of the future should not be encouraged to work ‘on their own’, silently consulting books, and making experiments? Their progress may be slow, but it will be real and solid, and, what is most important, it will be the result of their own doing, experience, and learning. They will develop initiative, versatility, and become responsible in a great measure for their own progress (Lynch, 1924: 15).
Three phrases summarise this concept of self-regulation: ‘to work “on their own”’, ‘their own doing’ and ‘for their own progress’. The stress on ‘own’ suggests a certain degree of individuality and independence in the process and excludes ‘mere imposition of work by the teacher’ (Ibid.: 26). Parkhurst ([1922] 1924: 15) herself described the process as ‘the pursuit and organization of his own studies in his own way’ [Italicisation is mine]; as absorbing knowledge ‘at his own rate or speed’ and ‘taking one’s own time’ (Ibid.: 16. Italics is mine).

The history class I observed offered many instances of self-regulated learning. The most important one was the structure of the lesson itself. A lesson lasted 70 minutes and consisted of two main parts: the first part lasted 10–15 minutes [25–30 for Beekman] during which time textbook-based, teacher-led instructions were given. One after another, pupils would read paragraphs aloud from the textbook. The teacher would provide some explanations, as well as asking or answering questions. One girl once told me that 10–15 minutes of lecturing or textbook-reading was too long. She said: ‘Today was better [the lecture part had lasted 7 minutes]. Other times we have to read from the textbook and I find it boring’. The second part would start with a 10-minute period of absolute silence. Neither the pupils nor the teacher were allowed to move around or speak. Pupils were supposed to concentrate and work on whatever they wanted to work on.205 This part would end with 40–45 minutes [30–35 for Beekman] dedicated to ‘independent work’.206 The teacher would either sit behind his or her desk waiting for pupils who needed help, or walk around. Pupils were also expected to do their own work, based on their own plan.207 In this respect, at the beginning of the six-week period, each pupil had to write down his or

205 Lisanne Beekman explained that all types of pupils can be found in each class: some learn better in a hectic environment, others concentrate better in absolute silence, yet others prefer to isolate themselves from the rest of the class by putting on their earphones and listening to music. She said that the ten minutes were specially meant for the learners who required absolute silence, as they would otherwise have no opportunity to concentrate. When I asked her whether a ten-minute period was not too short, she agreed but suggested that children could not remain silent while sitting in one place for more than ten minutes (Author interview with Lisanne Beekman, Almere, 14 September 2010).

206 ‘Independent work’ time is also referred to as ‘free-study’ time (Bokhorst, 1924b: 33).

207 This ‘independent work’ time is the direct result of Parkhurst’s ([1922] 1924: 20) view that ‘The Dalton Laboratory Plan permits pupils to budget their time and to spend it according to their need’. Writing in the early years of the implementation of the Plan, S.C. Bokhorst (1924a:14; Bokhorst, 1924b:29) suggested that the best system would be a good compromise between the old, classical educational system and the new Dalton working method. Class structures comprised of both the traditional teacher-led instruction and the learner-controlled part could be perceived as a compromise between the old system and the new.
her plan. A plan consisted on the one hand of setting goals that the pupils wanted to achieve and, on the other hand, of setting a time frame in which each goal would be achieved. This means that there were as many personal plans as there were pupils.

The pupils devised their plans based on a course overview and description the teacher had posted on the school’s electronic platform prior to the six-week period of history classes. The MS Word document indicated that the course would be about ‘Monks and Knights, Cities and States’ in the Middle Ages, and it would focus on, among others, the following key concepts: feudalism, Christianity, Islam, and the Crusades. The general goals were that the pupils should be able to define the ‘Monk and Knights’ and ‘Cities and States’ periods and provide examples of characteristic events relating thereto.

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208 J. Strijbos, ‘Middeleeuwse stad’. This personal site was offline at the time of writing, and could not be accessed from its original URL: home.wanadoo.nl/j.strijbos/Middeleeuwen/Hoofdstuk1.htm. However, it could be accessed via Web. Archive.org at this URL: http://web.archive.org/web/20080512170345/home.wanadoo.nl/j.strijbos/Middeleeuwen/Hoofdstuk1.htm (Accessed 19 January 2011).
(see discussion on the 10 historical eras in Chapter 1, Section 1.2); to recognise the difference between – and apply the concepts of – continuity and change with regard to historical developments; and to explain historical developments through cause-and-effect reasoning. Evaluation of the pupils would take into account their personal summaries of each of the course components, two free-choice assignments, and a final test.

Based on this general overview, each pupil had to choose a film or a book on which they would report and, as the course progressed, they were to make summaries of the texts in the textbook. In this respect, on April 6 Carol planned to work on her book and film reports – two free-choice assignments; on April 13, she planned to carry on working on the film report and make two summaries. The progress column beside each activity has four checkboxes: ‘Work done’; ‘Finish during Dalton Hour’; ‘Finish next week’; and ‘Homework’. Unlike Carol, Tom dedicated the whole of 6 April to summaries. The first entry for April 13 was a telegraph-style entry that clearly showed how he intended to proceed: ‘Hand over the summaries, begin report own topic’. Unlike these two pupils, Bert checked the ‘Work done’ box for summaries 5–14, planned for 6 April. On 13 April, he planned to finish summaries 15–18 and to ‘begin with own topic’.

![Figure 6.5: Pupil’s planning (Photo: ON. 13 April 2011).](image)

209 The Dalton Hour was planned every day except on Tuesday. Pupils chose a course on which they wanted to focus outside the usual class time. Pupils made their plans in advance and indicated the course or assignment on which they would concentrate during the 70 minutes known as the Dalton Hour. Teachers would be present in the various rooms, ready to help where and when needed. Beekman described it as ‘a sort of homework time during which pupils receive more attention for a specific course’. This leads to the deduction that a pupil who planned to finish his or her assignment during the Dalton Hour was in need of more explanation or help with the assignment (Author Interview with Lisanne Beekman, Almere, 14 September 2010).

210 The original Dutch text read as follows: ‘Inleveren doelen beginnen verslag eigen onderwerp’. In the teacher’s course overview the term doelen, which normally means ‘goals’, was presented as meaning the same thing as samenvattingen, ‘summaries’. To avoid confusion, I translated it with ‘summaries’ rather than with ‘goals’.
The last key principle of the Dalton Plan is cooperation. The idea behind this concept is that the school should ‘function like a community – a community whose essential condition is freedom for the individual to develop himself’ (Parkhurst, [1922] 1924: 15). In comparison with other key principles, Parkhurst did not extensively elaborate on cooperation. Its conceptualisation could even be criticised as self-contradictory: the stress is put on the individual, whose own work, own time management, own learning style, etc., should result in his or her own development. Nevertheless, this should be an essential condition for a school that is to function like a community. That is most likely the reason why, when referring to ‘co-operation’, Parkhurst preferred ‘to call it, the interaction or group life’ (Ibid.: 16). Interaction in this sense implies an awareness of the actions of other individuals that inspire, influence, and integrate, etc., the group, without necessarily involving any form of cooperation among individuals. Analysing the key characteristics of the Dalton Plan in its early years, Bokhorst (1924a: 13) mentioned first ‘individualisation and differentiation of education’, before self-regulation and cooperation. The order in which these characteristics are presented could be interpreted as reflecting the order of their importance.

During my field research, cooperation as interaction manifested itself in a very limited number of forms. The most common form of cooperation, the joint assignment, was very scarce. Also, during interviews with the pupils, not a single instance of collaborative work was mentioned. Instead, some, like Mark, would inform their classmates about their progress and share completed assignments. After completing his world map of the VOC [Dutch East India Company] and WIC [Dutch West Indies Company] shipping routes, Mark proudly showed it to his rather amazed classmates, Peter and Al (Figures 6.6 and 6.7). The conversation went as follows:

-Al: How did you manage to make it brownish?

-Mark: I used coffee to … I just rubbed it with coffee. The coffee [powder] was wet.

-Peter: Coffee?

-Mark: Yes, coffee [laugh]

-Peter: Why did you do that?

-Mark: To give it an aged look.

-Al: What made you think of that?
Mark: My sister once had a similar assignment and at the time she used tea bags. This time [when I was working on this assignment] I thought: ‘I will use coffee instead’.

Peter: And what did you do to make the edges like this?

Mark: I burnt them with fire … you have to be careful…
This exchange could not be called cooperation in the sense of ‘working together’, but rather in the sense of ‘interacting’. Mark shared his artistic exploits with his classmates, who would later be able to build on his experience, as he had done himself vis-à-vis his sister. In the end, then, this form of interaction would lead to some form of experience-based learning that the Dalton Plan strives to achieve.

To conclude this section, I should mention that none of these principles were new at the time they were put together to form the Dalton Plan in the 1910s. They can be traced back to 17th-century Czech theologian and education reformer Jan Amos Komenský [1592–1670], commonly known as Comenius, and to other subsequent reformers. In his Didactica Magna, for instance, Comenius ([1657] 1953: 110) had advocated, among other things, less teacher-led instruction and more pupil’s independent work time, and a freedom-based teaching approach. Like him, Jean-Jacques Rousseau ([1768] 1966: 79) also suggested that pupils should enjoy much more freedom and be subjected to much less authority; that the teacher should be as a companion to pupils and win their trust through sharing their amusement (Ibid.: 55; see also Comenius, [1657] 1953: 105); that pupils should learn much more from their own experience than from textbooks (Ibid.: 328); that a self-directed process would yield far better results than a teacher-directed one (Ibid.: 90–91); etc. Similarly, the 19th-century Russian thinker and reformer Leo Tolstoy ([1862] 1967: 12; see also Comenius, [1657] 1953: 62) criticised schools as being institutions where children were tortured, where ‘they are deprived of their chief pleasure and youthful needs, of free motion’. One cannot help linking these ideas with attitudes I observed in the class, especially in view of the omnipresence of iPods and earphones, and the music that is constantly on, as these are some of the chief pleasures of the Internet Generation. The notion of free movement in the classroom is also perceptible.

The closest thinkers whose philosophy of education greatly inspired Parkhurst’s laboratory plan were Ralph Waldo Emerson, whom she regarded as her mentor (Van der Ploeg, 2010: 31) and John Dewey, who had previously conceptualised the idea of self-regulation. For him, ‘It is as absurd for the latter [the teachers] to set up their “own” aims as the proper objects of the growth of the children’ (Dewey, [1916] 1926: 125). If the teacher has to determine an aim at a certain level, as was the case in the class I observed, it is valued by the pupils only in as ‘far as it assists observation, choice, and planning … if it gets in the way of the individual’s own common sense … it does harm’ (Ibid. Italicisation is mine). It has been suggested that the Dalton Plan contributes not only to a more efficient
learning process, but also to the education of citizens who understand the ideals of democracy. This is because, according to education scholar Piet van der Ploeg (2007), who published ‘Citizenship education is in good hands with the Dalton Plan’, the Dalton Plan inculcates democratic principles such as participation, engagement and responsibility, together with necessary cognitive, reflexive, and communicative skills. The next three sections focus more specifically on the three claims that I had set out to explore, namely that digital media make the history class more attractive as well as fostering historical thinking and offering a variety of sources.

6.2 Attractiveness

... To be interested is to be absorbed in, wrapped up in, carried away by, some object. To take an interest is to be on the alert, to care about, to be attentive. We say of an interested person both that he has lost himself in some affair and that he has found himself in it. Both terms express the engrossment of the self in an object ... (Dewey, [1916] 1926: 148-149).

During the period of my observation, the interactions between the pupils and media were ubiquitous and almost permanent. As I already mentioned, each pupil had received a laptop computer for
both schoolwork and homework. This fact of using the same computer both at home and at school, together with the sentiment of ownership, created a strong intimate relationship between the pupils and their computer. Furthermore, they were aware that almost anything was allowed with those computers, including for instance downloading and playing music, and downloading and using whatever software they wanted. Not only had all of them administrator rights, but also there were no firewalls to restrict their Web-surfing activities. All these elements had created a feeling of confidence in the computer during lessons. Though other portable devices were also used to play music or such like, these fall outside the scope of this section. I would rather describe the patterns in which the different Web-related attitudes can be placed, and by doing so, check whether and how they made the history class more attractive.

To begin with, I should stress that the two main parts of the class structure led to two types of attitudes towards using of the Web. During the teacher-led lecture part, pupils would often engage in multitasking – e.g., reading the textbook or listening to the teacher while searching the Web –, whereas during the time spent on ‘independent work’ they would engage in more sophisticated multitasking, which would now include listening to music, text-editing, e-mailing, Web-surfing, etc. For the sake of clarity, I shall deal with these two patterns separately.

In late September, history teacher Beekman was teaching the pupils about ‘Regents and Monarchs’. One day in particular she was discussing ‘Kings and Parliaments’, getting pupils to read one paragraph each from the textbook, pausing now and again to explain. At a given moment the pupils laughed when they came to a page with an illustration showing Louis XIV in high-heeled shoes. While the teacher was explaining that that was fashion for wealthy people during Louis XIV’s time, many pupils were listening while their eyes were focused on their laptops’ screens and their fingers were typing. Sitting one desk in front of me, Bas was already on the Dutch Google Images site, typing in ‘Lodewijk xiv’.  He obtained 926,000 results, which he quickly scanned before clicking on the fourth picture on the second row. That picture showed Louis XIV with his high-heeled shoes. He zoomed in, focusing on the ‘curious’ shoes. All this happened very quickly.

By the time Beekman mentioned how Louis XIV had built the Palace of Versailles not only to live there but also to bring top-ranking officials, including his rivals, closer to him for better and more permanent control, Lianne, a girl sitting at the desk next to Bas, was already on Bing.com, the Microsoft search engine. She typed

211 ‘Lodewijk’ is the Dutch for ‘Louis’
in ‘Versaille’ [sic!] and, she too, clicked on ‘Images’. Of the eight images on the first page, she opened one and zoomed in on it for better inspection (see Figure 6.9). The URL bar showed that it came from www.world-travel-photos.com, a French tourist information

Figure 6.9: Pupil searching for information over the Palace of Versailles while the teacher was discussing that same palace (Photo: O.N., 28 September 2010).

Figure 6.10: Pupil showing a picture of the Palace of Versailles to a classmate during the lesson (Photo: O.N., 28 September 2010).
website. Lianne was so impressed by the palace that she lifted her computer and turned it to show the picture to a classmate sitting in front of her (see Figure 6.10).

As Figure 6.10 shows, the pupil was engaged in at least four activities and her facial expression suggests that she enjoyed them: she was [1] reading the textbook under her elbow, [2] listening to the teacher, and based on what the textbook showed and what the teacher indicated, she [3] surfed the Web for more information, mostly in the form of pictures, and lastly she [4] shared her findings with a nearby classmate. Bas and Lianne did not disrupt the lesson. In fact they used the Web to supplement the information provided by the textbook and the teacher. Each pupil used a different search engine, driven by their desire to find a visual representation that allowed a closer inspection, for instance by zooming in. Given that all these steps took place in a very short time span, the same cycle was continually repeated as more information came in, either from the book or from the teacher.

The consequence of this triangular – textbook-teacher-Web – interaction was a livelier, less boring and calm history lesson. There are two major reasons that can be cited: on the one hand, the atmosphere favoured multitasking, which enabled the pupils to diversify their intellectual activities. When pupils felt that the teacher’s talk was getting boring – as some pupils claimed—, the Web offered other possibilities for learning without disrupting the class and without getting bored. On the other hand, the Web contributed to what I would call the dis-abstraction of the history class (see Chapter 7, Section 7.1). A piece of information as abstract as the fashion of wealthy people during Louis XIV’s time was immediately supplemented by a visual representation, which neither the textbook, nor the teacher had space or time to provide. The Palace of Versailles, which the teacher introduced as being the home to hundreds if not thousands of nobles, remained abstract until the pupils were amazed to discover how sumptuous it actually is. However detailed the teachers’ explanations, they could not create a concrete image that would enable the pupils to proceed with the narrative knowing exactly how large and prestigious the palace was. The explanations that followed made more sense because they built on this disabstracted information. Having discovered the styles, fashion, and prestige of those old days, the pupils actually wanted to hear more. When they heard more, they immediately wanted to get concrete visual representations of the things about which they had heard, which resulted in a never-ending cycle of hearing, reading, and surfing the Web.

212 This is another form of ‘cooperation’ in the sense of ‘interaction’ discussed in the previous section.
Unlike the teacher-led instruction time, the time spent on ‘independent work’ was pupil-controlled. Pupils would follow their own plans and the teacher would be available for any questions and requests for help. During that time, the Web played a central role, not only as a source of information for class assignments, but also

Figure 6.11: Pupil reading a book for his book report assignment (Photo: O.N., 20 April 2010).

Figure 6.12: Pupil playing an online game to ‘relax’ between two book-reading sessions (Photo: O.N., 20 April 2010).
as a means of relaxation. Most pupils combined both features, for instance by surfing the Web while listening to Web-based music. Nina, for example, while working on her film report assignment on *Kruistocht in spijskerbroek*, would surf the Web in search of relevant information and images, but she would also go to YouTube to select music clips. She was playing 17-year-old R&B singer Justin Bieber’s *Favorite Girl* via YouTube, with her earphones plugged in, when I asked her if she was not distracted by the music. After removing an earplug, she replied that she concentrated better when music was playing. Most pupils whose ears were almost always plugged cited this same reason relating to concentration. The teachers made no problem about pupils doing their schoolwork with plugged ears. As far as they were concerned, if music meant pupils could concentrate better, then they should be allowed to listen to it, provided it was not so loud that it disturbed their classmates.

Other pupils, like Tim, would pause a few minutes to play online games. Tim was playing *Bubble Trouble* when I asked him if that was compatible with classwork (Figure 6.12). He explained that he planned to work on his book report assignment on Anne MacCaffrey’s *Zwarte paarden voor de koning* (1997). He had read a few pages (see Figure 6.11) but needed a rest before going on: ‘A few minutes of gaming help you relax a bit’, he said, while playing at the same time.

As the cases of Nina and Tim show, the Web played the two most important roles that made the history class attractive for pupils. Although their assignments were about other media – films and books – the Web appeared inescapable as a source not only of information, but also of pleasure. According to the pupils, the pleasure or relaxation they gained via music or playing games helped them either to better digest the information they sought and used, or to recover from their intense intellectual efforts. All the reasons that pupils brought forward as to why they played games or why their ears were constantly plugged, converged in one direction: all these

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213 The title means ‘Crusade in Jeans’. It is a 2006 film directed by Ben Sombogaart and which is based on a book with the same title by Thea Beckman (See the trailer on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wsjEDQ1Q8g , [Accessed 23 January 2011]).

pleasure-generating activities contributed to their schoolwork. In other words, their raison d’être was to increase the efficiency with which schoolwork was done. The teachers felt that preventing pupils from using or accessing their sources of pleasure and relaxation would hinder their productivity. Perceiving and mapping what happens inside the minds of pupils who play games or listen to music via earphones remains a difficult task, one that led some scholars to use the ‘swimming duck’ metaphor (Van Velzen, 2002: 6; see next section) to describe the situation. However, as the next section shows, the pupils do actually engage in historical thinking while dealing with information found on the Web.

6.3 Historical Thinking

... we can distinguish the process of research from the process of reflecting historically upon it. In practice, the two processes take place together: a historian is already reflecting on his material when he chooses a subject and identifies his sources. But they are nevertheless different processes, and an interest in the skilled activities of production should not obscure the fact that the key to the whole activity is in the reflection (Watts, 1972: 46-47).

Unlike the obvious attractiveness of digital media, many and various forms of which could be seen in the class, historical thinking was not as easy to perceive, as it takes place hidden from view. While working on their assignment during the time spent on ‘independent work’, pupils would mostly keep quiet, surf the Web, often isolated from the rest of their classmates by the incessant music via earphones (see Figures 6.1 and 6.8). This is to make it clear that most of the thinking that took place was internal and internalised, and thus not easily perceptible. In her research into self-regulated learning and reflective thinking, education scholar Joke van Velzen (2002: 6) metaphorically described learners in this situation as swimming ducks. Indeed, though one can see that ducks are moving, their underwater paddling remains invisible. This description might be applied to Figure 6.8 which shows pupils intensely engaged with at least three

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\[215\] These findings contradict part of the findings of a recent report by the National Academy for Media and Society [NAMM], an initiative of two foundations, the Stichting Media Rakkers and the Stichting De Kinderconsument. Conducted from January–May 2011 in 42 primary schools and 78 secondary schools, the research concluded that surfing the Web for, e.g., music or games, which two-thirds of the pupils do during class time, affects pupils’ attention and concentration (NAMM, 2011). In my research, music and games appeared to be part of the learning process and, according to the pupils and their teachers, helped them concentrate better.
different media forms – the computer [Web or text-editing], the textbook, and music [either from the computer of other portable devices] – though it is not always perceptible exactly what impact these media have on their thinking. However, there were some occasions on which external signs betrayed their inner thinking process. In this section, I want to describe some of the most representative cases of historical thinking that resulted from, or were facilitated by, using the Web.

In late April the pupils were busy working on their assignments. The teacher had in the meantime provided them with more details about the assignments. The pupils had three open-ended options from which to choose: a book report, i.e., reading a book about the Middle Ages and analytically summarising it; a film report, i.e., watching a self-chosen film or the one provided by the teacher about the Middle Ages, and analytically summarising it; and own-topic assignments. In the latter category, Ben decided to write his assignment about faith in the Middle Ages. The work-in-progress had no title yet, but the file was named ‘Own Report’. It contained a picture that reflected the kind of historical thinking in which Ben
had been engaged. The picture (Figure 6.13) showed far-right Party for Freedom leader Geert Wilders in white clothes beside a veiled Muslim woman. The previous pages contained a summary of the history of the Crusades and the picture was placed in continuation of that history. In other words, it represented the present-day Crusade, as Ben explained to me:

- Q: How did you find this picture?
- Ben: On Google
- Q: Which website exactly?
- Ben: Google Images
- Q: What topic are you working on?
- Ben: Christianity
- Q: How do you intend to use this picture?
- Ben: It shows Christianity and Islam … and intolerance, which were also there during the Crusades.

The cartoon is the work of Adriaan Soeterbroek, a cartoonist of great renown whose work features politicians and social issues, among others. On his website,216 the ‘Wilders-vs-Islam’ cartoon appears in a gallery alongside other political cartoons.217 Although Ben ignored the exact source of his cartoon, he nonetheless made a choice from Google Images, where there were an abundance of other images showing Wilders together with veiled Muslim women. A search with ‘geert wilders islam’ on the Dutch Google Images site returned [on 21 January 2011] ‘about 120,000 results’ and the ‘Wilders-vs-Islam’ cartoon was third on the second page or thirty-third counting from the first page. Thus, Ben must have gone through a number of images before deciding which one to use in his assignment. It is possible that aesthetic considerations played a role; perhaps the double black-and-white contrast both with regard to clothing and to background were what prompted him to select it; or maybe his choice was prompted by the way the two eyeless persons are looking into one another’s eyes. What was clear in his mind was that the cartoon symbolised ‘Christianity and Islam … and intolerance’ and that these could be traced back to the Crusades.

The process behind the choice of this cartoon and the interpretation it was given are an instance of historical thinking. A present-day social and political issue was explained and linked to what the pupil regarded as one of its historical origins. The process that led to the choice may have followed this line of thought: Ben was looking for a picture that could reflect both Christianity and Islam as well as reflecting the intolerance he thought evident in both. Knowing that Wilders had been preaching for an Islam-free, Christian Netherlands, he associated him with Christianity. Knowing also that the *Niqaab* – the veil that covers all but the eyes and which is worn by women in some Muslim cultures – was at the centre of political debates in this country, he associated it with Islam. This reasoning, based on associations, is essential for historical thinking. It also seems that the Web and Google Images in particular played a crucial role. In fact, the entire reasoning process is hard to imagine without the display of many pictures from different sources, all at the same time. The thumbnail display feature allows one to scroll up and down, compare pictures, preview or open pictures that one wants to examine closely, zoom in for more details, etc. In a matter of minutes or even seconds, a reasoning process takes place, similar to the one I have just described and results in integrating pictures loaded with meaning into the assignment.

I should also mention that other factors may have played a role in this process, for instance, factors that influenced pupils’ ideas about ‘hot’ political issues. At the time that I was conducting the first part of my field research – that is from April-June 2010 – the city of Almere, where the class I observed is located, had emerged as a Geert Wilders’ bastion. His party had won the municipal election held in March, though it was unable to govern the city because the remaining parties formed an alliance against Wilders. One electoral promise that had been made by Wilders’ party was to either ban the *Niqaab* or instigate a *Niqaab* tax. This then could explain the associations Ben had made and which he thought were reflected by the ‘Wilders-vs-Islam’ cartoon. Moreover, as Figure 6.13 shows, at the moment Ben was sitting opposite a Socialist Party campaign poster reading: *Steun Afghanistan. Stop de oorlog* [Support Afghanistan. Stop the War]. As Afghanistan is often associated with Islam and the *Niqaab*, it is also possible that the poster played a role in his thinking process. Thus, though all these factors came in from different directions, they all converged on one point: the Web. They created,

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218 Many political parties, including the Christian Democrats (CDA), the Liberal Party (VVD), the Labour Party (PVDA) and the Party for the Animals, had posters hanging on the walls. Curiously, Wilders’ Party for Freedom (PVV) had no poster in that classroom.
or at least, influenced a certain view on the issue and based on this view, search terms were chosen and entered onto the Google Images site. Of all the images available there, the ‘Wilders-vs-Islam’ cartoon corresponded best to the point Ben wanted to make.  

Later in October, when the class had been taken over by Beekman, the pupils were working on other assignments. Like the previous ones, these too were based on pupils’ choices. The options were as follows: a world map showing the routes followed by the VOC and WIC ships; a WebQuest,\(^{220}\) i.e., a Web-based assignment about a specific topic with specific guidelines and instructions on steps to be followed; and a fictional story on a freely chosen topic relating to a child of the same age as the pupil during the Golden Century [17\(^{th}\) century]. Everyone was expected to make an assignment based on a combination of two of the three options. While the WebQuest demonstrated many instances of Web-fostered historical thinking, the map-drawing, and to a greater extent, the story-writing assignments, though abound with cases of historical thinking, gave almost no clue as to the role played by the Web. For instance, one pupil wrote a story with the title: ‘A new beginning: the story of Koen’. Koen lived in Spain with his father, a blacksmith, and his mother, a health worker. When his mother died, Koen, who survived by stealing, left Spain to go to the Republic [the Netherlands] together with his father. He found a job in a shop selling ‘foreign products’, while his father was employed as a blacksmith. They became rich, bought a house and ‘had everything [they wanted]’. Having reached adulthood, Koen fell in love with a girl, with whom he later got married. The story ends by showing Johannes Vermeer’s *Girl with a pearl earring*, whereby Koen’s ‘wife’ was presented as the girl in the painting.

Although fictional, this 556-word narrative contains a number of cases of historical thinking: the use of the term ‘Republic’ instead of ‘the Netherlands’, and its portrayal as a better place to which one might run in order to begin a new prosperous life, shows that the

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219 History education scholars Keith Barton and Linda Levstik (2004: 17 and 18) argued that ‘we will be able to make sense of how students have developed their ideas only if we understand the settings in which they have encountered the past’. Cognitive psychologists Robert Siegle and Martha Wagner Alibali ([1986] 2005: 108) added that ‘the social world has a profound effect on what children do, on what they think about, and on how they think.’ It is clear that the encounter with religions in the Middle Ages took place in a social environment dominated by anti-Niqab politics in Almere and by debates on Afghanistan, which [debates on Afghanistan] ultimately resulted in the fall of the then cabinet.

220 All WebQuests were taken from Histoforum, a website for ‘ICT and History’ run by history teacher Albert van der Kaap. Van der Kaap was among the early adopters of the Internet in the history class (See Chapter 2, Section 2.4). http://histoforum.digischool.nl/ (Accessed 21 January 2011).
pupil could locate her story in a specific historical period and context; the description of professions and such details as ‘foreign products’ – which is a reference to the VOC and WIC – are indirect connections with the Golden Century. The question one needs to pose is how the Web intervened in the thinking process behind this story. One thing that is certain is that it did intervene in some ways, as this is clear from the use of the *Girl with a pearl earring*, which was most likely downloaded from the website of the *Mauritshuis*, a historical arts museum in The Hague. The historical reasoning that may have led to incorporating this painting could be the following: portrait painting is generally associated with prestige and wealth, which brings one back to the pupils remark that Koen and his father ‘had everything’, including wealth and prestige. Understood from this perspective, the ‘foreign products’ that made Koen wealthy form a hidden reference to the VOC and WIC which were responsible for importing them from abroad. Choosing the painting was then a way of reflecting the status Koen had acquired. It could be said then, that through a fictional narrative and with some help of the Web, the pupil engaged in historical thinking by indirectly associating different but related aspects of the Golden Century.

Drawing the map with VOC and WIC routes was less challenging than the story-writing assignment. Almost all those who chose it said they had used the Web to determine the routes the ships used to follow. Mark – the boy who created the antique effect by using wet coffee powder (Figures 6.6 and 6.7) – explained to Peter and Al how he had used the Web:

**Peter:** Where did you get [the information on] these pieces of paper [glued here and there on the map]?

**Mark:** I just searched on the Internet and re-wrote what I found in my own words. I also gave the map a brownish colour [with coffee].

**Al:** Which site?

**Mark:** Ehhhh mostly Wikipedia … I found so much information there.

Unlike Mark, who had completed his assignment at home – thus offering no chance to see him at work – Peter had planned to complete his own assignment during the ‘independent work’ time at school. He spent a few minutes surfing the Web and at a given mo-

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ment he stopped to take out his pencil. He had already coloured the different continents and was busy drawing lines across the oceans (Figure 6:14). He would look at the screen and then draw a line. Every now and again he would take hold of the mouse and scroll up and down. He looked to the left of the screen, then to the right and

Figure 6.14: Pupil drawing a VOC route map based on online images shown in Figure 6.15 (Photo: O.N., 6 October 2010).

Figure 6.15: Screenshot of images resulting from a search by a pupil for his map-drawing assignment (Photo: O.N., 6 October 2010).
then he would draw another line. Peter was on the Dutch Google Images site (Figure 6:15) where he had searched using the words ‘voc route’. The search had returned ‘About 40,200 results’. After scrolling up and down, he decided to focus on the second image (see Figure 6:15, second picture on the first row). This image came from the National Library of Australia [NLA] and showed the route the VOC ships took from Amsterdam to Jakarta [called Batavia at that time], in present-day Indonesia and Ceylon [now Sri Lanka, formerly part of India] via the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa, and along either the eastern coast of Africa or the western coast of Australia. It also showed the route back to Amsterdam, which was slightly different.

Peter explained why that particular map was interesting for his assignment:

-Q: I saw you looking at the screen and then drawing lines on your map. What are you doing actually?

-Peter: There is an image [on the screen] and when I saw it, I thought immediately: I am going to use that.

-Q: On which website is it?

-Peter: This one [showing the Google images on Figure 6.15, pointing his pencil towards the NLA image.]

-Q: [Placing the cursor on the NLA image] Ah, I see it: nla.gov.au …

-Peter: No, no. I don’t know. I just searched on Google Images

-Q: Why choose this particular map?

-Peter: I don’t know. Because … all the routes are visible. Also the names [of the seaports]. Here [showing two maps below and one on the right (Figure 6.15)] you can see the routes but there are no names. Here [showing the NLA map] you can see which ship it was. Here [showing two maps below and one on the right] you can’t.

-Q: Did you use any other websites?

-Peter: I simply chose from the overview … I think that for this [VOC] route I shall use only this one [NLA map]. I shall search for another for the WIC.

The judgments that Peter made in choosing his source constitute a form of historical thinking. Peter knew what he was looking for: the ‘voc route’, as the search terms show. From the Google Images
‘overview’, one particular map drew his attention and for one rea-
on: it showed not only routes but also names, which other maps
in the ‘overview’ failed to offer. In his mind, the lines crossing the
oceans became routes when they connected two or more places with
names. The comparisons with neighbouring maps externalised the
thinking process that was going on in his mind. Similarly to the
case of the ‘Wilders-vs-Islam’ cartoon, one sees Peter engaged in the
compare-and-eliminate process, which ends in the selection of one
media object – cartoon or map – that is deemed to be the best.

The last form of assignment was the WebQuest. The various
WebQuests had two parts: the pre-research part, and the research-
proper part.222 In the pre-research part, the pupils were asked to in-
dicate their sources, their relevance to the assignment, and the level
of their reliability, which I shall discuss in the last section dedicated
to sources. I should mention here that all these sources were neces-
sarily Web-based. In their research-proper, the pupils had to write a
piece of text with some illustrations.

In general, the WebQuests, which were either on seventeenth-
century painters or on the VOC, appeared to be summaries of in-
formation that can be found on different websites. Following the
instructions for their research-proper, the pupils had to ‘collect data
for each aspect about the painter’ and, since they could ‘only use a
few data’ to produce a poster, they should ‘make a good selection,
so that the person viewing your poster will have as precise an im-
age of the painter as possible’. All 8 WebQuests that were returned,
including two that were the joint efforts of two pupils, were short
summaries on the various aspects – early and later lives, paintings,
or the inception of the VOC, its aims, its history, etc., and none of
them contained quotations. Generally speaking, summarising more
than one text into a coherent narrative about a painter or the VOC
involves different levels of historical thinking. The important ele-
ments involved in this process include identifying sources (see next
section), paraphrasing, and harmonising data taken from different
sources. Unfortunately, the pupils did not provide in-text references
or footnotes/endnotes which would have allowed me to study the
kind of mixture that took place. They simply indicated at the end of
their work: ‘For my own research I used the following sites’ and ‘for
the pictures I used the following sites’.

One pupil chose the WebQuest on the VOC. In 59 words and
with one portrait of Johan van Oldenbarneveld [the VOC head
upon its establishment], he answered the question ‘What was

222 See the example of Schilders uit de Gouden Eeuw [Painters of the Golden Century].
http://histoforum.digischool.nl/lesmateriaal/internetgids5.htm (Accessed 21
January 2011).
the VOC?’, which was also the first sub-title of his work. Then, in 98 words illustrated with a painting of the ‘VOC ships before the Batavia roadstead’ and a map showing the ‘VOC trading posts in the Middle East’, he answered another question: ‘What was the aim of the VOC?’ After this, in 40 words, illustrated with two pictures of nutmeg and one of pepper, he discussed products traded by the VOC. Finally, in 81 words, accompanied by a map showing the WIC routes – the Triangular Trade – he spoke of VOC successes in Asia and the birth of the WIC in 1622, concluding that ‘The WIC would not have the same political influence as the VOC’. Almost all the WebQuests followed this model of short, no-quote, summaries with illustrations.

One aspect that was apparent in these summaries was the use of comparison. The WIC was compared to the VOC and, based on the various sources the pupil consulted, he was able to conclude that the VOC was more influential. This judgment of his is a form of historical thinking: not only did he connect economic, commercial power with the political power, but he also compared two commercial powers. A similar comparison was apparent in one girl’s WebQuest on Johannes Vermeer. The 430-word research-proper text contained 3 of Vermeer’s paintings, including the Girl with a pearl earring. The girl introduced the assignment, explaining why she had chosen that painter:
I chose to work on this painter because I was not familiar with him. I enquired about him and I was impressed by his painting, *Girl with a pearl earring*. In my opinion, many people do not know about him. In contrast, Rembrandt [*sic*!], for example, is very famous and I know a great deal about him. This is why I chose Johannes Vermeer.

She then provided a short biography [205 words] of Vermeer, a summary of his work [56 words] and ended by concluding [in 70 words] that

... I have learned so much about him and it was interesting to enquire about a different painter whom I had previously ignored. I found it unfortunate that there is not so much to say about his life. But now I know much more and I think he's great!

This pupil made a very short summary from six websites and started with the expectation that she was going to discover another Rembrandt. This expectation, on its own, shows that the pupil was thinking historically, because she wanted to discover and understand the work of Vermeer by comparing him with another contemporary painter whom she knew better. The comparison failed in part because, as she wrote in her conclusion, none of the websites she visited offered information on Vermeer that was extensive enough to allow such a comparison.\(^{223}\) This claim implies that she had been looking for some specific details, similar to the ones she had on Rembrandt, but she had been unable to find enough. Another strong indication that an attempt at historical thinking had taken place is the pupil’s judgment that the sites told little about Vermeer, although they did help her achieve part of the goals she had set: she was happy that she ‘know[s] much more’ that led her to believe that he was ‘great’, but ‘unfortunate[ly] there is not much to say about his life’. In other words, some knowledge of Vermeer had been acquired, but much more could have been achieved, if more information had been available on the Websites she consulted. The next section discusses those websites and the variety of the information they offer.

\(^{223}\) While the Wikipedia site entry on Johannes Vermeer was extensive – 2,374 words, excluding notes and references [see: http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johannes_Vermeer (accessed 22 January 2011)] –, the Rijksmuseum’s website, which she listed as second source after Wikipedia, contained two very short texts about the painter: one contained 296 words and the other 178, which is indeed relatively short [see: http://www.rijksmuseum.nl/aria/aria_artists/00017083?page=0&lang=nl&context_space=&context_id= (Accessed 22 January 2011)].
6.4 Sources

When I wish to write on any topic, 'tis of no consequence what kind of book or man gives me a hint or a motion, nor how far off that is from my topic (Emerson [1876] 2010: 151).

The situations described in the two previous sections suggest that the Web was used very often both during the teacher-led lecture time and the ‘independent work’ time. The few cases mentioned as an illustration of how the Web has made the history class more attractive while also fostering historical thinking are also evidence of the fact that pupils made comparisons and selections from the objects they found via various sources. While the previous sections did pay some attention to sources, mostly as used in ‘live’ situations – e.g., searching for supplementary information while the teacher was still explaining – this section discusses sources as referenced by pupils themselves in their assignments. As the pupils were free to choose from a number of options and, within those options, to make other choices and then combine those choices, any attempt to make a systematic study of the sources used during all those assignments would at the very least be challenging. Moreover, in many cases the pupils were not explicitly asked to mention their sources.
Although my observations made it obvious that most pupils would surf the Web for their book or film reports, their own-topic stories, or their VOC and WIC route maps, there was no way of tracing which sources had been used. For this reason, I decided to focus on the WebQuest assignments for which pupils were explicitly asked to use Web sources. The following is, therefore, a discussion of the kind of Websites pupils used, the ways in which they were used and the descriptions of the sites as provided by the pupils.

As already mentioned, the WebQuest comprised of the pre-research part, dedicated to sources and their descriptions, and the research-proper part, in which the pupils presented summaries of the relevant information and pictures found on the websites they visited. The instructions for the pre-research part of the assignment on painters were as follows: the pupils had to choose a painter from among Johannes Vermeer, Jan Steen, Frans Hals, Jacob Isaacksz. van Ruisdael, and Rembrandt van Rijn. Then they must ‘choose and describe a total of 6 websites that offered the most usable (and reliable) information about one or more aspects of the painter’. Each selected site had to be described in a table comprising fields for the URL, language, type of information found there, owner of the site, a description of his or her background, and a rating.224 Similar instructions were given to those who would preferred the WebQuest on the VOC, except that they could use up to eight websites.225 In total, 8 WebQuests were returned. 6 of them were done by individuals while 2 were each jointly done by 2 pupils. Thus, 10 pupils out of 28 chose the WebQuest, which they combined either with the VOC-WIC route map or with their own-topic story about a same-age child in the Middle Ages. In this section I shall refer to the joint WebQuests pairs as Pair 1 and Pair 2, while individual pupils will be referred to as Pupil 1, Pupil 2, etc.

It should come as no surprise that all pupils used Web sources, although Pupil 4 failed to mention and comment on her sources. However, considering the fact that she included Rembrandt’s paintings – 2 self-portraits, *The Night Watch*, and *The Anatomy Lesson* – it is certain that she used Web-sources. The same goes for the ‘Summaries’ column where I was unable to check her text against her sources. Similarly, in accordance with the instructions and tips provided for the pre-research part, 8 out of 10 pupils used images to illustrate their assignments. Generally, the images corresponded with the nearby text. The picture of *The Anatomy Lesson* appeared fairly near to the paragraph commenting on it. However, since sum-

maries were very short, pictures sometimes had to be condensed one after the other.

**Table 6.1: Overview of websites and images used in WebQuest assignments together with the use of online materials for summary purposes.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Websites</th>
<th>Number of Images</th>
<th>Summaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupil 1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil 2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil 3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil 4</td>
<td>No source mentioned</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil 5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil 6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apart from serving as a source for images, the Web also and most importantly served as a source for raw materials for the textual part of the assignment. All pupils, with the exception of Pupil 6, provided very short, multiple-source, summaries. Pupil 6’s assignment ended with the pre-research part, as the pupil only mentioned and commented on her sources. Unlike her, the remaining nine pupils used the textual information they found on the Web, re-writing it in their own words. The aim of the WebQuest, as described in the instructions, was to select the most relevant information from the

**Figure 6.18: Excerpt from a WebQuest assignment on Rembrandt.**
various sources and to produce a poster that would convey the image of the painter or the VOC most accurately. Pair 1, for example, provided a very short biography of Rembrandt using four Web pages – including both the Dutch and the English Wikipedia pages – that were all dedicated to that painter. The comparison below shows how the pupils’ summaries originated, in one way or another, from the texts they found on the Web. The column on the left shows the first four sentences of the biographic texts from the four Web pages, while the column on the right shows the pair’s summary that resulted from them:

Table 6.2: Example of the use of the Web as a source of raw material [left column] for pupils’ multiple-source summaries [right column].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wikipedia.nl:</th>
<th>Rembrandt van Rijn was born on 15 July 1606 in Leiden on the Weddesteeg, as the ninth child of a miller, Herman [sic!] Gerritz and Neeltje van Zuytbrouck, a daughter of a well-established baker. Rembrandt attended the Latin school and was about 14 years when his parents registered him at the University of Leiden. Obviously the venture stopped there because Rembrandt had indicated that he wanted rather to become a painter. By 1619 he was already an apprentice of the Leiden-based history-painter Jacob van Swanenburgh.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People.zeelandnet.nl/acoomens:</td>
<td>The Dutch most famous artist was born in 1606 in Leiden to Hermen [sic!] Gerritz van Rijn, a well-established miller. After a few short experiences as student in Leiden and Amsterdam, he settled in 1625 in Leiden as an independent painter. In 1632 he moved to Amsterdam, where he stayed at arts trader Hendrik van Uylenburgh’s. One year later Rembrandt got married to Saskia, his host’s niece.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wikipedia.org:</td>
<td>Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn was born on July 15, 1606 in Leiden, in the Dutch Republic, nowadays the Netherlands. He was the ninth child born to Harmen Gerritz van Rijn and Neeltgen Willemsdochter van Zuytbrouck. His family was quite well-to-do; his father was a miller and his mother was a baker’s daughter. As a boy he attended Latin school and was enrolled at the University of Leiden, although according to a contemporary he had a greater inclination towards painting; he was soon apprenticed to a Leiden history painter, Jacob van Swanenburgh, with whom he spent three years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spreekbeurt.info:</td>
<td>Rembrandt was born on 15 July 1606 in Leiden, Rembrandt his father [sic!] was owner of a mill. This mill was not suitable as a residence. Their house was near the mill, on the Weddesteeg. Rembrandt his parents [sic!] were not rich but also not poor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

227 It is worthwhile mentioning that the pupils chose the right spelling of this name – Harmen – while two of the sources got it wrong – Herman and Hermen, which implies that some checks may have been carried out.
A comparison of these 20 sentences shows that each of the sources in the column on the left provided an element that the pair used for the summary in the column on the right. All sources mentioned the date and place of birth, which gave the pair the confidence to repeat the same information, though in less detail. The Dutch and English Wikipedia pages seemed to offer so many details, which the pair preferred to ignore or to shorten. For instance, instead of mentioning that Rembrandt became an independent painter after a three-year period of apprenticeship with Jacob van Swanenburgh, they simply stated that ‘he went to settle in Leiden in 1625. There he became a painter’. The wording of the statement about Rembrandt’s short school experiences was inspired by the text from People.zeelandnet.nl/acoomens, while the formulation ‘There he became a painter’ summarised the two Wikipedia texts which suggest that he stopped his studies because he was more inclined to become a painter.231

I should stress that close study of the online sources used by the pupils reveals that they were of very different sorts. Table 6.2 contains two of them: an online encyclopaedia [Wikipedia] and the personal websites http://people.zeelandnet.nl/acoomens/index.htm and http://www.spreekbeurt.info [which also happens to be a child-generated content site, hence the few grammatical errors]. Many other sorts of websites were used as sources, including the Historical

Table 6.3: Categories of Web sources used for the WebQuest assignments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pupil 1</th>
<th>Pupil 2</th>
<th>Pupil 3</th>
<th>Pupil 4</th>
<th>Pupil 5</th>
<th>Pupil 6</th>
<th>Pair 1</th>
<th>Pair 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wikipedia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal sites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heritage sites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Heritage Inst.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial sites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Educ. sites</td>
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<td>Official sites</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Media sites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canon of the NL</td>
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<tr>
<td>General Info sites</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic sites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

231 By moving back and forth between various sources of information and selecting details from each source, the pupils were performing what Jenkins and colleagues (2009: 85-85) called ‘Transmedia Navigation’, which consists of ‘The ability to follow the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities’. They were ‘hunters and gatherers’ encountering ‘the same information, the same stories, the same characters and worlds across multiple modes of representation’.
Canon of the Netherlands, educational sites, the sites of heritage institutions, those of news media organisations and others. Table 6.3 provides a complete overview.

Of the ten categories of Web sources used, Wikipedia emerged as the most popular. All pupils used it at least once, except for Pupil 4 [whose sources are uncertain due to the lack of references]. In all cases, the Wikipedia page was always dedicated specifically to the subject, that is, to one of the painters or the VOC. For instance, Pupils 1 and 6 both worked on the VOC and they cited the VOC Wikipedia page as the first and second source, respectively. Pupil 3 worked on the same subject and cited Wikipedia twice, providing the following comment: ‘For my own research I used the following sites: www.wikipedia.nl [and] www.geschiedenis.vpro.nl’. He then provided the names of sites from which he had downloaded pictures, which included another Wikipedia page.

Personal Web pages and those of heritage websites were the second most frequently used sources. Personal websites are those which explicitly indicate that they are owned and run by an individual. Two pupils and the two pairs used personal sites as sources for their assignments. Pupil 2 mentioned www.statenvertaling.net, a personal initiative of Ronald Klip, for her assignment on Rembrandt. Pupil 1 consulted www.VOCsite.nl, another private initiative by someone named Jaap van Overbeek, for his assignment on the VOC. The heritage sites can be put into two categories: those owned and run by memory or heritage institutions such as museums and archives, and those owned and run by other organisations [associations, foundations, clubs, etc.] but which focus on cultural heritage or cultural memory. Among the institutional sites were those of the Rijksmuseum, which Pair 2 used twice for their assignment on Rembrandt. The sites of non-heritage institutions included http://voc-kenniscentrum.nl, a 400-year jubilee project of the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies [KITLV].

The next most frequently used categories were commercial and educational sites. Commercial sites are sites whose explicit goal is to generate profit either through selling information directly or through advertisement. For example, Pupil 2 used a text on Rembrandt originating from www.kunstkennis.nl for her assignment. This is explicitly a profit-driven site because under each Rembrandt painting is a ‘Buy posters at AllPosters.com’ link. The homepage indicates that the site is owned by Kunststrip v.o.f, a company involved in history and culture-related business which specifically targets travellers and tourists in Western Europe. Educational sites are sites that explicitly claim to target pupils and teachers for educational purposes. In this respect, Pupil 5 used www.scholieren.com to obtain information about Johannes Vermeer.

Official sites were also among the sources pupils used. Official sites are those owned and run by an administrative institution, which could be governmental, provincial or municipal. For his assignment on Vermeer, Pupil 5 consulted both www.delft.nl, the official site of the city of Delft and www.ontdeknederland.org [discover the Netherlands], a website run by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs which specifically calls upon young people to ‘become acquainted with the Netherlands’. News media sites are those that are owned and run by established mainstream newspapers, broadcasting companies, etc. Pupil 3 not only downloaded the picture of VOC director Johan van Oldenbarneveld from the forum page of Amsterdam AT5 TV, but also consulted www.geschiedenis.vpro.nl, the history site of the VPRO TV channel. The general information website www.info.nu was cited twice, as was the Canon of the Netherlands, whose primary education page on the VOC was used. The sole academic source was the page on ‘De VOC: Dutch-Asiatic Shipping 1595–

236 Kunstkennis.nl, ‘Rembrandt van Rijn’.


238 This website states that the managing and webmastering of the site are ‘in the hands of the webmaster of the municipality of Delft’ http://www.delft.nl/ConfiguratiefOOTeF/Colofon. The page Pupil 5 consulted is: ‘Werk van Johannes Vermeer’, http://www.delft.nl/vermeer/2_1.html (Both accessed 25 January 2011).

239 Ontdeknederland.org, ‘Over de site’.

240 AT5 News, ‘Blauw bloed is zwart bloed (1500–1789)’.

241 The Canon of the Netherlands, ‘De VOC 1602–1799: Nederland breidt uit over zee’.
1795’ from the website of the Huygens Institute of Netherlands History [Huygens ING], which is ‘a scholarly institute engaged in stimulating research into the history of the Netherlands’.

The above survey of categories of websites used by the pupils leaves no doubt as to the variety of sources for historical information. The short summaries were the result of a combination of information emanating from various provenances. The last interesting point is to find out what the pupils thought of those provenances and how they justified their choices. Generally speaking, Wikipedia prompted much more enthusiasm among the pupils. Pupil 1 rated Wikipedia’s information on VOC with an 8/10 and commented in these terms: ‘[It provides] A lot of information about its history’. The Historical Canon of the Netherlands, which he also used, also received an 8/10 together with this comment: ‘[It discusses] How the VOC expanded’. Pair 1, who used both the Dutch and the English Wikipedia pages on Rembrandt, rated both with a 5/5, commenting as follows: The Dutch page provides ‘[Information] About his life and his paintings’ and the English page ‘[tells you] Everything about Rembrandt van Rijn’. Toon Oomens’ personal website received a 4/5, with this comment: ‘[It tells you] A little bit about his [Rembrandt’s] life, but more about his work’. These few comments and ratings, which could be generalised for all the WebQuest assignments, show that the pupils valued Wikipedia highly. Of all the pupils, Pupil 6 – the one who only commented on the sources – was most eloquent in praising Wikipedia:

As is almost always the case, Wikipedia is the best, [because] there is always a lot of information. It seems as if all the professors have written their information there. The 2nd [best site] was ento.e.nu [Canon of the Netherlands], which is also a sort of Wikipedia though it is much less well-known. You can find everything there too. There are other useful sites as well but they are not as elaborate as the 1st and the 2nd. I judged these sites simply by typing ‘The VOC, the United East India Company’ in Google.

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This comment implies that Wikipedia is beyond any possible comparison. It also implies that the information is ‘almost always’ reliable and authoritative, as it seems to emanate from ‘professors’. The ‘almost always’ suggests that the pupil may have some reservations, but that these are overwhelmed by the amount and the authority of the information found on Wikipedia. Unlike Pupil 6 and most of the other pupils, Pupil 2 is both enthusiastic and critical of Wikipedia. For her,

Wikipedia is often clear but sometimes a little bit difficult. It is mostly reliable but everyone can publish something. The site is well-structured and you can choose what you want (such as history, arts, biography, etc.) [Italicisation is mine].

The ‘is … but …’ reasoning shows that Pupil 2 knows how Wikipedia works, in particular the fact that everyone, including both credentialed and non-credentialed authors, can publish and edit articles. She appears to be more enthusiastic than critical, however, as her last ‘is’ [well-structured and you can choose what you want] was not accompanied by a ‘but’. Her general feeling is that the site is ‘mostly reliable’. As Table 6.2 shows, other websites seem to have compensated for these reservations. When the same information kept coming up on various sites, it was deemed reliable and taken into account in the summaries.

### 6.5 Summary

In this chapter I discussed how the Dalton approach to teaching and learning, in combination with the one-child-one-connected-laptop policy, led to an atmosphere that stimulated the pupils to use the Web frequently during both the teacher-led lecture time and the ‘independent work’ time. It appears that the freedom that the pupils enjoy in terms of media uses has led to various forms of interactions with digital media in general, and the Web in particular. During the teacher-led lecture time, pupils would search for details about information that was either provided by the teacher or gleaned from the textbook. During the ‘independent work’ time, the interactions of pupils would be even more varied, ranging from Web-surfing in search of relevant information for assignments to using it as a means of relaxing from their intellectual efforts. In this respect, the Web appeared to be a crucial factor in creating an atmosphere conducive to learning. I also explored the ways in which the Web interfered with the historical thinking process of the pupils.
It seems that Web image display tools made it easier for pupils to compare and then judge visual representations of the concepts about which they were being taught, or on which they were writing assignments. Moreover, the easy access to various websites enabled pupils to make summaries. Through content analysis, content harmonising, and content structuring – all of which involve comparisons, judgments, and selections – they were able to produce short illustrated texts and maps. Finally, I considered the variety of Web sources used for WebQuest assignments. Ten sorts of websites were used, including Wikipedia, the Canon of the Netherlands, heritage sites, but also, among others, personal, educational, commercial, official, and news sites. It was by weighing information contained in each of them that the pupils managed to write their assignments.