3

The Domestic Environment and its Interaction with the External Environment

Elaborating the framework further, this chapter will consider the formation of public dispositions (Phase III) and the interplay between the domestic and external environments (the ‘Wider Context’). These are indicated by the shadowed circles and the highlighted outer frame in Figure 3.1. The third phase, the most speculative part of the whole framework, follows up the presumed consequences of Shaping public opinion (Phase I) and Writing history, Education and History education (Phase II). Moving on from the aspect of ‘process’ to that of ‘consequences’ of history education, attempts will be made to analyse what factors could come into play in the mental constructs of the future public through the teaching of history at school.

‘Forming views about home and foreign states’ and ‘Learning lessons from the past’ will be considered separately below, although

Figure 3.1 The Framework of Analysis (for Phase III and the ‘Wider Context’)
they are ultimately indistinguishable in the complex make-up and
development of the human mind.

With all the three phases taken together, the focus of the chapter
will then shift to the ‘Wider Context’. Just like its domestic counter-
part, the external environment is composed of innumerable actors
and factors. Yet, for the sake of simplification, it is conceptualized as
one outside world, with one outward arrow in the framework (on
the right hand side) signifying the implications of history education
at the junction of a myriad of interactions across state boundaries.
The chapter draws some preliminary conclusions in the end before
moving onto the case study chapters which follow.

3.1 FORMING VIEWS ABOUT HOME AND FOREIGN STATES

While much attention has been paid to human consciousness and
perceptions in the social sciences, the basic fact remains that little is
known about the subliminal processes by which habits of mind,
observations, attitudes and opinions are formed or transformed
through human activities, to say nothing of this process at the
collective level. In a similar vein, Collingwood once asked whether
there can be ‘a history of memory or perception’ and answered nega-
tively; he concluded that only acts done on purpose can be
reconstructed and hence the targets of history.1 In this sense, it must
be allowed that the argument which follows is confined to what can
be inferred from the circumstantial settings faced by young people.
Indeed, we are now entering the world of ‘unobservables’. Yet the
particular usefulness of focusing on childhood in the analysis of a
past is that childhood itself overlaps with an explanation about ‘the
way we got to be the way we are’.2 In this attempt, ‘Forming views’
about states seems to fare better than ‘Learning lessons’. For the
object of observation (i.e. states) at least exists, and there are trace-
able information sources or ‘circumstantial evidence’ such as
curriculum and teaching materials, which may provide some clues
to the developing views of students.3 With a view to outlining what
factors could weigh in their minds, the formation of views about
home and foreign states will be approached from two perspectives —
psychological and cognitive.4

The psychological dimension

The psychological dimension of ‘Forming views’ concerns the
perceptions, images and beliefs about foreign lands and about them-
selves, held by students or the future public.5 What is at the bottom
of these complex configurations in the mental realm, which have
emotive significance and remain with them until later in their life?
This dimension will be now considered in terms of three factors.