

History

A conversation with Catherine Priggs and David Hibbert

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It is important that history departments in different settings across the country debate what goes into the curriculum. If we focus on what history pupils should know, understand and be able to do by the end of Year 9, then there should be a great deal of commonality, but in terms of the kind of historical subject matter, that should be defined by the department, operating within the school's individual context.

Good history departments will make routine use of historical scholarship, both to inform teachers' thinking, planning, and practice, and to enhance pupils' study of the past. The presence of historical scholarship from Year 7 allows pupils to interact with current debates in history and will mean they can approach their study of the past meaningfully and with nuance.

Another thing that enables pupils to develop as historians is a broad historical perspective. In practice, this allows pupils to view the world with an informed understanding of the past and to make sense of their place in the world. Strong history departments will have thought about how pupils will develop a historical perspective from Year 7. They will have also considered the historical narrative communicated by their department's curriculum, to achieve coherence through all key stages.

Key to all this is disciplinary knowledge: the knowledge of how historical knowledge works, how it is constructed. That is inextricably tied up with the pupils' ability to argue. What it means to argue historically is quite nuanced, complex and difficult because what you need to be able to do is argue in a way that respects the epistemic identity of history. You have to understand the complexities behind the use of evidence, you have to understand how to challenge the selection of evidence and interrogate the reliability and availability of evidence. You have to be able to argue with an awareness of the really complex and tricky nature of the way historical knowledge is constructed so that pupils can express their own arguments meaningfully and can think critically in response to historical questions. That is a key component of a history pupil at the end of key stage 3.

That said, it is not *just* about the pupils' ability to argue carefully, with a real respect for evidence and with a real understanding of the kinds of questions historians ask and the kinds of arguments historians make. Whilst that is key, it is also about how they will think differently once in possession of powerful knowledge, and how exactly the world looks has changed for them as a result of what they have learnt in key stage 3 history lessons.

The concept of view-changing powerful knowledge works across different scales. An insightful question to ask end-of-key stage 3 historians is, 'How does walking down the street of your hometown/city – the street you live on – look different to you in the light of what you have learnt after a three-year key stage 3 history curriculum?' And that can scale-up to asking about how their understanding of the world – the way they understand and appreciate the news – looks different to them, because of what the history curriculum has taught them. It is beyond merely gaining knowledge about the past. It is about enabling pupils to use their understanding of history to participate in society, and that is a hugely powerful aspect of the history curriculum.

In his lecture to the Aristotelian Society in November 1945, Gilbert Ryle made the distinction between *knowledge that* and *knowledge how* and how easy it is to be a possessor of *knowledge that* and be completely stupid. Knowing stuff is not enough; knowing *how to use* that stuff is what makes knowledge powerful.

Pupils can, in a quite performative way, want to argue and they want to win an argument and there's nothing wrong with that, there can be real joy in a debate. If we want pupils to discuss *historically*, then there needs to be a certain quality of humility in their argument. There has to be provisionality; they must recognise that their opinion is constantly evolving, in relation to the claims of other pupils in the room, but also on a broader level. That is the nature of historical knowledge; it is always provisional, there are always new questions to be asked, new evidence to be found and therefore revisions to be made. Approaching the past with that kind of respect is key. Language is key to that. It is clearly important for them to understand revisionism, and for them to understand how and why history is constructed as it is. But you do not want to lead pupils down the route of thinking that they can just revise history however they want. It is a tricky balancing act. Pupils need to understand the craft of an historian, and to do this properly they need to appreciate the framework historians are working within and the rules they have to follow.

The pursuit of truth in history

It is really important to address the process of establishing disciplinary truth in all subjects and for pupils to understand properties of knowledge, and for them to understand that truth and knowledge are not the same

things in all subjects. It is equally essential that senior leaders understand the properties of knowledge in their curriculum areas. Pupils of history need to be able to understand core facts, and then it is important for teachers to establish the difference between those uncontested facts and when historians use interpretation to build historical arguments. You need to involve pupils in the process of the construction of history and why interpretations are forged. If you are thinking about the identity of history and what makes history different from science, it is the temporal separation. History is different from science because you can't time travel. Take the idea of footprints in the snow. People in the past leave footprints in the snow, but what you have left are the footprints, mere traces, the things that have been left, and you can never have the full truth and our picture of the past is always partial. But there are, nonetheless, things that you can establish. That is a complex idea for a key stage 3 pupil to understand. It only really emerges through encounters with multiple examples, different periods, different examples of scholarship, different historians and seeing the differences and the tensions and the meanings that arise from those differences. Such understanding accumulates over time. Eventually, it becomes an appreciation of the epistemic uncertainty, but also the accuracy of some of the claims that can be made and some of the tensions and issues surrounding historical interpretations. While there might be historical events, actually historians disagree about the significance and consequences of those. It is this kind of richness that emerges from something that might be seemingly uncontested, that is very fertile ground for pupils.

The building blocks of a key stage 3 curriculum

Pupils will interact with different types of knowledge as they study history. Substantive knowledge, which is the stuff of the past; the people, the periods, the stories that you put into the curriculum. Pupils will look at how historians have used evidence from the past to inform the claims they make. Due to the limited amount of time for key stage 3, and the infinite amount of events that could go into key stage 3, it is important to have a rigorous and considered rationale for selecting substantive knowledge.

Intricately intertwined with the substantive is the disciplinary knowledge. Second order concepts (diversity, change and continuity, cause and consequence, and significance) direct the questions historians

ask about the past and can be used to inform planning. An awareness of chronological understanding also needs to be built to provide pupils with a framework for studying the past. Finally, pupils need to interact with different interpretations of history, which will allow them to learn how and why the past has been analysed in different ways.

Disciplinary concepts can evolve over time through the discourse within the subject community and are not static. One recent example emerged from discussion of the work of Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot, which has led to a more explicit recognition of the need to emphasise silence as the opposite of retrospectively ascribed historical significance. If you are thinking about the overall key stage planning process, what you have to see is the way that the substantive knowledge interacts with the disciplinary and the way that they mutually shape each other. To start thinking about how to begin Year 7, you need to answer two questions: what substantive history will you start with? And how are you going to begin in a disciplinary sense? Those two things will interact and shape each other in complex ways.

Alongside the substantive and the disciplinary is a third type of knowledge: substantive concepts, such as democracy or empire. Substantive concepts relate to history but change over time, and are more abstract than the first substantive level. It's important to acknowledge the period-specific nature of substantive concepts, for example, revolution means different things in different contexts, and this is something that needs to be addressed with pupils across a curriculum.

The key is to shape a curriculum that comes together to create a real sense of history as a subject. Rather than beginning with a 'What is history?' unit with no substantive focus, you could start with something which confronts pupils with what it means to study the past and which will provide them with a much richer understanding of the subject. For example, you could begin with Mary Beard and Pompeii, and ask a question framed deliberately around interpretations and evidence in a connected way. This enquiry question could be something like: 'How has Mary Beard used evidence to reach conclusions about the lives of people in Pompeii?' This could be a short unit, with the curricular function of introducing pupils to the way that historians construct interpretations of the past using sources as evidence. This would have the potential of being very concrete, very tactile and very interesting for pupils. You

could use documentary footage to allow pupils to literally see Beard sitting in a cellar in Pompeii surrounded by bones which would help to exemplify the nature of what historians do. It could be vivid, interesting and introduce pupils to a charismatic and brilliant scholar and through her build a fascination for the subject and the pursuit of historical truth. There could be a fertile and tactile quality to it that could enable pupils to understand what can be, initially and over time, some quite meaningless abstractions. You could then build on this over the course of a curriculum as pupils would encounter other scholars, evidence and interpretations of the past in a carefully designed sequence.

Choosing to begin Year 7 with Mary Beard and Pompeii allows pupils to see the way that evidence is being used to construct a picture of the past. Using both written scholarship and visual material from Mary Beard is very helpful in encouraging a sense of scholarship. If you begin Year 7 with a well-chosen object of study, carefully resourced, it matters much less what the pupils' prior experience in that subject at primary school might have been. They might have had varying amounts of history as well as bringing wildly different substantive knowledge bases. The richness of Mary Beard and Pompeii, therefore, allows everyone to enter into that scholarly place. The secret is to pitch it very high and make it irresistible. By focusing the lessons around a historian, you combine the disciplinary element with the substantive. The story of Pompeii is fascinating but they also experience it alongside one scholar's interpretation; they have the privilege of watching her formulate her ideas as the evidence reveals itself.

Some pupils can have unhelpful stereotypes about who historians are, so tend to see historians as a certain type of person, i.e., a white man. So, beginning with Mary Beard and showing a video of her talking about her use of evidence begins the process of shaping pupils' views of what constitutes an historian; the pupils' picture of what a scholar is in the subject accumulates and builds over time, through the people and through the examples you include in your curriculum. It is a really powerful and kind of fertile way of thinking. You could structure your whole key stage 3 history curriculum around eighteen historians – one per half-term – as they interpret different substantive foci and concepts.

Whilst the first topic in Year 7 is important, it is also essential to have a view of the entire key stage 3 curriculum from day one and not just jump

to something just to engage pupils without considering coherence. So, from the outset, the department must consider sequencing and put curriculum design at the forefront of departmental conversations. You must define what the overarching key stage 3 curriculum narrative communicates to pupils. For example, it would be easy to fall into the trap of bolting on a study of diversity partway through Year 8 because you are concerned that it has not been given enough time in your curriculum. Thinking in this fragmented way could mean that your narrative became unclear and your curriculum would therefore build less powerfully over time. However, if it was planned in a way that connected to and enriched the curriculum around it then it could lead to a better understanding of that concept as well as the narrative as a whole.

A very important day-to-day reality question is how far there should be consistency across different classrooms in a history department. Because it is important that all pupils build a consistent curricular narrative, it is problematic for pupils to be getting a very different experience of history from different teachers. This could create real problems if and when pupils are then taught by other teachers in the future. However, it is also important to recognise that teachers create and enact the curriculum through constant micro-curricular decisions that will always be unique to some degree. One powerful way of addressing this tension is through prioritising collaborative planning and having regular conversations across the team about the curriculum as intended and enacted. Those conversations are important from day one as they will help to create shared understandings across a team.

When it comes to overarching narratives, one of the main outcomes of a history curriculum would be to engage pupils with otherness. This is, of course, a natural outcome of a history curriculum due to pupils' study of people from the past, but it is important to consciously plan for history curricula to develop pupils' historical perspectives by interacting with topics, case studies, examples of things that they possibly would not otherwise come into contact with. It is important that pupils have a wider appreciation of how our society is structured today, and then choose topics that are going to enhance their understanding of contemporary society. So, if, for example, you are in a school that is in a white community in a rural area and there is very little exposure to different ethnic minorities you would want your curriculum to do something about

that. You would want your curriculum to show pupils what the makeup of our country is, how our country has interacted with other countries around the world. And therefore that will look very different in different contexts and in different schools.

Pupils' developing historical perspectives will equip them to engage in more of an informed debate about the world, which takes you back to understanding where certain opinions are coming from and you know to make pupils sensitive to those opinions. History allows you to problematise the present; it is difficult for pupils to problematise the present and to see the contingency of the present and to think about the idea of just how different the past was, but also maybe how familiar the past was and how we have arrived at this point. Once their eyes are opened in that way, it allows them to see the world in a very powerful and very new way and it gives access to things like collective memory and shared cultural consciousness.

History can be a powerful disruptor for pupils and can support them in engaging with collective memory and myth. One interesting example is Winston Churchill's speeches during World War II. A recent book by historian Richard Toye looks at how people reacted to his speeches during the war and interrogates the popular story of the inspirational role they played. One of the things that Toye says is that the 'We will fight them on the beaches' recording that everyone has heard has been mythologised and was actually recorded in 1949, after the war. Churchill only gave the speech to parliament during the war. But yet Toye demonstrates that when people who lived through the war are interviewed they say they remember it. Interrogating that sense of collective memory and exploring the dissonance between the historical record and what is commonly believed is disruptive and powerful.

Case study

One way of creating coherence across a curriculum is to trace substantive threads throughout the narrative. For example, when we're looking at ancient empires, we look briefly at the Gupta empire and introduce India there. We then come back to do a comparison in terms of similarity and difference between Elizabeth I, familiar probably to almost every pupil, and the Mughal Emperor Akbar who ruled for almost exactly the same period of time in India and faced somewhat similar challenges in terms

of religious division. We come back to the Indian case study at the end of Year 7 by considering the impact of the British Empire in India. We look at a case study of an Indian soldier called Khudadad Khan during World War I before considering Yasmin Khan's work in relation to World War II in India through her book *The Raj at War*¹. Through her scholarship and a video about her process, they explore the experiences of Indians during the war, including the Indian Army, the largest volunteer army ever assembled. The thread culminates in looking at Yasmin Khan's work on the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan. India is, therefore, a thread that runs substantively all the way through our curriculum.

In addition, an important disciplinary part of what we are trying to do is illustrate what it is to be an historian struggling with primary evidence. What we are trying to do justice to conversations around diversity and decolonisation. Yasmin Khan is attempting to give a voice to silenced voices from India during World War II. She is using tricky archival recordings of interviews that had been done by other people and she talks in a video made for pupils about how that is really challenging as a historian because it's hard to find out exactly what you want from it. However, that challenge must be embraced if she is going to succeed in giving voice to the voiceless and try to fill those silences. The pupils are witnessing an historian wrestling with the problem of trying to expand our view of the past. Consequently, the substantive and the disciplinary choices mutually enhance each other and provide a richer picture for pupils.

One of the things you have to realise is that, whatever we choose to include in a key stage 3 curriculum, time is always going to be limited. You have to make decisions and, by virtue of putting something in, you are going to have to leave other things out. Each unit builds on the last. You have to justify your curricular choices in terms of their relation to the curriculum as a whole. Every unit of a curriculum sequence needs to help pupils understand the other units better. Each unit is chosen because it coheres well with the other units and then helps the narrative come together as an integrated schema for pupils.

All teacher-knowledge is partial. No one degree covers the full substantive range of the subject. It is important to talk to pupils quite openly about the fact you have to learn a lot about a new topic in order

1 https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/1847921205/ref=cm_sw_r_tw_dp_F3DKG2R3ATFKSM5A402M

to plan the lessons. The fact that our relationship with knowledge is ongoing is a powerful and happy fact of ongoing subject development. Being conspicuously fascinated and conspicuously joyful in what you are teaching is a key step towards engaging pupils in your subject. The same principle should be applied when working with your departmental colleagues - if there are vulnerabilities in a colleague's knowledge of a part of the past on the history curriculum this needs to be identified so that professional development can be arranged accordingly, but also to help to build and nurture a culture in which it's good to learn: this is something which can be supported by subject and senior leadership. Equally, as history continues to be re-written, it's important that colleagues do not rest on old or outdated knowledge of the past.

History: background

History's etymology derives from the Greek meaning 'request' or 'knowledge reached by survey'. The first European historians are the Greeks Herodotus and Thucydides, living more than 2400 years ago. They were the first ones to take history as the product of people's intentions and acts.

To help us get our bearings, it is worth quoting the purpose of history from the national curriculum programme of study:

a high-quality history education will help pupils gain a coherent knowledge and understanding of Britain's past and that of the wider world. It should inspire pupils' curiosities to know more about the past. Teaching should equip pupils to ask perceptive questions, think critically, weigh evidence, sift arguments, and develop perspective and judgement. History helps pupils to understand the complexity of people's lives, the process of change, the diversity of societies and relationships between different groups, as well as their own identity and the challenges of their time.²

The national curriculum for history aims to ensure that

2 www.bit.ly/3iTxTt

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all pupils know and understand the history of these islands as a coherent, chronological narrative, from the earliest times to the present day; how people's lives have shaped this nation and how Britain has influenced and been influenced by the wider world; know and understand significant aspects of the history of the wider world: the nature of ancient civilisations; the expansion and dissolution of empires; characteristic features of past non-European societies; achievements and follies of mankind; gain and deploy a historically grounded understanding of abstract terms such as "empire", "civilisation", "parliament" and "peasantry"; understand historical concepts such as continuity and change, cause and consequence, similarity, difference and significance, and use them to make connections, draw contrasts, analyse trends, frame historically valid questions and create their own structured accounts, including written narratives and analyses; understand the methods of historical enquiry, including how evidence is used rigorously to make historical claims, and discern how and why contrasting arguments and interpretations of the past have been constructed; gain historical perspective by placing their growing knowledge into different contexts: understanding the connections between local, regional, national and international history; between cultural, economic, military, political, religious and social history; and between short- and long-term timescales.

Once the importance statements have been revisited, it is helpful for subject leaders and coordinators to discuss and agree with colleagues the reason why their subject, in this case, history, is important for the pupils in their school. One way of doing this is to draw on a quote, in this case from Marcus Garvey: 'A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.' This kind of prompt allows us to formulate our way of stating the importance of the subject. We might agree or disagree with such a statement and in doing so come to a form of words which expresses our view of the importance of this subject, in this school. This moves us away from the territory of 'We teach this subject because of the SATs or GCSEs.' While the external

tests and exams are important, they are not the totality of the subject.

Professional communities

Subject associations are important because at the heart of their work is curriculum thinking, development and resources. The subject association for history is the Historical Association and it should be the case that any member of staff with responsibility for a subject should be a member of the relevant subject association, and this should be paid for by the school. The School's History Project is another invaluable source of information, support and development for history teachers.

Twitter subject communities are important for the development of subject knowledge because it is here that there are lively debates about what to teach, how to teach and the kinds of resources that are helpful. For history, it is worth following the Historical Association's Twitter and the hashtags #historyteacher and #curriculum.

Links

Historical Association – www.bit.ly/3gatIQZ

School's History Project – www.schoolshistoryproject.co.uk

Gombrich Little History of the World – www.bit.ly/3sxn7Fa

National archives – www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

BBC archives – www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p059sqrq

BBC Schools Primary History – www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/

British Library – www.bl.uk

My Learning – www.mylearning.org

Historic Learning – www.historicengland.org.uk

An overview of the key stage 3 history curriculum

	Year 7	Year 8
EQ1	How has Mary Beard used evidence to reach conclusions about the lives of people in Pompeii?	Why did the world go to war in 1914?
EQ2	What travelled along the Silk Roads?	How far does the First World War cast a shadow on the world I live in?
EQ3	How powerful were medieval monarchs?	Power and the people (thematic)
EQ4	Were people in the Middle Ages stupid, superstitious and scared?	Why did the Second World War happen so soon after the obscenity of the First World War?
EQ5	How did the 'remarkable convergence' between Luther's protests and Henry VIII's divorce change England?	How do we remember the Second World War?
EQ6	How were Elizabeth and Akbar similar and different?	How has the historian, Yasmin Khan, used evidence to reach conclusions about experiences of the Second World War?
EQ7	(Short) What can art tell us about encounters between peoples in the 15th and 16th centuries?	How should we remember the Holocaust?
EQ8	How do the ghosts of the British Empire continue to haunt Britain, India and the world?	

Three documents for your senior leader line manager to read about history

1. Ofsted's Research Review Series: History, www.bit.ly/3k13Ms7
2. What's the wisdom on... enquiry questions, *Teaching History* 178, www.bit.ly/2W3zb4x
3. No more 'doing' diversity: how one department used Year 8 input to reform curricular thinking about content choice – Catherine Priggs, *Teaching History* 179, www.bit.ly/3k0xNbh

Five questions for your senior leader line manager to ask you about history

1. How do you decide what to include in your curriculum?
2. How does your curriculum encourage students to use prior knowledge/disrupt prior assumptions?
3. How do you assess historical understanding in lessons?
4. What are the issues with literacy development in history and how are you trying to overcome them?
5. How do you think your curriculum will shape a student's historical understanding?