Disciplinary knowledge for all, the secondary history curriculum and history teachers' achievement

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The history education community's efforts to help pupils distinguish between the discipline of history and rawer forms of collective memory have been beset with problems from inside and outside the education community. From without, teachers face criticism for their supposed failure to foster narrowly celebratory versions of Britain's past; from within, pressure to reduce history to generic 'skills' of the 'new cross-curricularity', apparently in the interests of relevance, utility or engagement. This article will argue that such genericism is, first, redundant, in that it adds nothing to strong disciplinary practice in fostering thinking, reflection, criticality and motivation; and, second, inadequate: disciplinary knowledge and concepts are necessary in order to reach or challenge claims about the past. The argument is built from history teachers' discourse about their own efforts to find out how to make disciplinary history work at the pedagogic site. The article examines history teacher efforts to address complex problems of uniting content and concept and of motivating lower-attaining or marginalised students whom others (variously) claim can be helped only by narrow narratives or by giving up on disciplinary rigour altogether. The story of history teacher efforts contains valuable lessons for curriculum reviewers about the potential of strong classificatory framing for emancipatory and engaging learning. The article argues that any improvement of the existing Key Stage 3 curriculum is pointless, however, unless wider cultural and structural problems impeding lower-attaining students' entitlement to the subject are resolved.

Keywords: concept; content; curriculum; discipline; engagement; genericism; history; knowledge; teaching; thinking

Introduction

Warning of the dangers of a population unschooled by history as discipline, Shemilt writes:

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to subscribe to populist and mythic constructions of the past is to remain trapped in the codes and culture of the street gang, to invoke persuasive and partial histories that reinforce simple truths and even simpler hatreds. (2000, 100)

The discipline of history, by contrast, is 'the most sophisticated and rational way so far available of handling life in the fourth dimension' (Lee 2011, 64). Teaching all young people its concepts and conventions is extremely difficult. Although all human beings make meaning through temporal reference, through memory and through the continuous assimilation and construction of narrative, *disciplined* historical thinking is an 'unnatural act' (Wineburg 2001). While no less concerned with narrative:

> it is distinguished from other forms of interpretation of the past by the fact that historians are expected to make their assumptions, concepts and methods explicit, so that they can be critically assessed by an academic community of practice and to present arguments for interpretive decisions that they make. (Chapman 2011, 101)

It is also emancipatory. As with other disciplines, only when young people can generalise appropriately (Shemilt 2009), find explanatory power and challenge the grounds of others' generalisations (Counsell 2009) can they hope to engage with serious political discourse.

In history, the most systematic and far-reaching effort to implement a pedagogy based on 'the structure of the discipline' (Schwab 1978) was the 1972 Schools Council History Project (SCHP) (Shemilt 1980). If problems arose in its implementation, this is hardly surprising. Bringing an epistemic tradition to a pedagogic site, so that pupils understand the grounds on which valid claims about the past can be made, will never be easy. One cannot simply replicate historians' processes in a classroom, nor can product be swapped neatly for process. A key risk in any such effort, argues Scott, is that the student may misunderstand the syntax of the discipline:

> This may happen because it has been badly taught, or because ... a distorted version has to be taught to meet examination requirements ... or for a host of other reasons. (2008, 33)

Such problems surfaced starkly in the wake of the first National Curriculum (NC) (DES 1990). Difficulties arising from the attempt to harness historical thinking to the NC model were legion (Haydn 1994). Nevertheless, by enshrining both product and process, NC 1991 provided a framework within which teachers could experiment. It was down to the teachers to find out what was possible. This renders history teachers' subsequent achievement remarkable. There may have been more error than success, but history teachers have been tackling

precisely the problems that Scott identifies, often while working with disaffected or intellectually challenged students (e.g. Smith 2001; Philpott 2008).

Recently, such efforts have been frustrated by challenges from *within* educational circles. The rise of 'genericism' (Young 2008) has limited pupils' entitlement to discrete, specialist-taught history at Key Stage 3. Pupils other than the academically successful are increasingly prevented by a range of complex institutional factors from taking the subject thereafter (Burn and Harris 2010). Given that a counterposing of 'subject' and 'learning' has sometimes informed the rhetoric of the 'new cross-curricularity', it is not surprising that Young's recent argument for the emancipatory power of disciplinary knowledge has been greeted with interest, and not a little jubilation, in the history education community (Wrenn 2010). Young draws inspiration from the 'opening up' that knowledge classifications can yield, and invokes Bernstein's (2000) arguments against the short-termism and emptiness of generic 'trainability' as an educational goal. Instead, his theory of knowledge:

> sees the differentiation both between fields and between theoretical and everyday knowledge as fundamental to what education is all about. (Young 2008, 89)

It is worth considering history teacher activity in the light of this statement. Developing pupils' understanding of the distinctive properties of disciplinary knowledge and its difference from the 'everyday' is what history teachers have been attempting to do for about 25 years. Moreover, history teachers' published theorising has rendered the principles of that practice increasingly explicit. Where practice published as articles or shared through websites and workshops is openly cognisant of others' efforts, it adds up to a coherent discourse of some power. Such discourse shows teachers renewing their pedagogy through disciplinary reference. There is therefore a case for using that discourse to examine the scope of teacher-led problem solving, its curricular referents and curricular potential.

This is not to say that all history teachers are engaged in such efforts or have a research orientation. It is fair to say, however, that most are trying to solve problems or to find creative resolutions to sets of tensions (Husbands, Kitson, and Pendry 2003). Undoubtedly an 'accessibility agenda' dilutes some teachers' disciplinary goals (Hawkey 2006). Nonetheless, even though some practice is more limited, much addresses directly the complex difficulties of integrating disciplinary product and process, content and concept.

This article explores the nature and significance of such teacher efforts and reflects on their implications for curricular review. Its three sections aim to:

- illustrate teacher-led development through four areas: (a) evidence; (b) other second-order concepts; (c) overview-depth; and (d) 'Interpretations of history';
- argue for the pointlessness of reviewing the history curriculum unless broader structural change is secured; and
- argue for epistemic clarity in the curriculum, both in the interests of mounting a clearer challenge to the genericism that is sapping subject time and in order to replace such genericism with more worthwhile interdisciplinary conversation.

Teacher-led renewal of classroom history
Teachers' reaction to emergent problems concerning evidence

The challenge of relating disciplinary practices to meaningful activity for children has been revealed most starkly by the issue of evidence. Direct work with primary sources was essential to the realisation of SCHP goals, but alongside impressive early successes in engaging pupils with the grounds for valid historical claims (Shemilt 1980), significant problems emerged, especially after 'evaluating sources' was universalised by the GCSE criteria in 1985. Factors leading to reductive practices included: (i) the unintended consequences of certain efforts to make sources accessible to children (SCAA 1994; McAleavy 1998); (ii) early attempts at assessment; (iii) terminology appropriated from outside the subject, such as damaging confusions created by the word 'skills' (Lee 2011); and (iv) the fact that the majority of teachers outside of early SCHP developmental circles received the new ideas third hand. In 1990, a senior HMI admitted that some teachers were setting 'mechanical tasks rehearsing formulaic responses to snippets from sources' (Hamer 1990, 24).

There was a deeper problem than 'source work' becoming dry and routine, however. This was the conceptual confusion that much 'source work' often encouraged, especially the 'serious category mistake' of conflating 'source' and 'evidence' (Ashby 2011, 139). Many activities encouraged pupils in the mistaken view that a source can be 'reliable' in itself, rather than reliable *for* something. An understanding of inference was also compromised where pupils were not helped to think about the distinction between 'records' that bear conscious testimony and 'relics' that do not (Shemilt 1987).

Inspector criticism or researchers' restating of the ideal were unlikely, however, to secure the necessary reconstruction of 'source work'. This fell to teachers. What occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s was a gradual, collective reconstruction of classroom source use. Although by no means universal, what is noteworthy is the capacity of teachers to discern problems, to generate solutions for nurturing evidential thinking

and to give these currency through public discussion. Some teachers explored elements underplayed in the original conception.[1] This process was complex, multi-faceted and often evidenced ephemerally (workshops and unpublished action research). Nevertheless, the published work of teachers illustrates its cumulative character.

Much problem solving arose from a concern that work with sources was doing the opposite of what was intended, namely confusing or alienating the weaker pupil. The issue of pupil engagement was often primary in this reconstructive period; yet through this, more fundamental conceptual problems began to be addressed. This is particularly notable in the discourse surrounding efforts to help pupils to be 'constructive'. Crudely, this can be divided into two types.

First, a determination to allow pupils to synthesise or 'build' drove, variously, the work of Byrom (1998), Riley (2000), Banham (1998, 2000) and Smith (2001), and addressed many of the criticisms made by McAleavy (1998). A device emerging from this trend was the 'enquiry question'. First explicitly stated by Gorman (1998), it was developed into a set of working principles by Riley (2000) and later Byrom and Riley (2003). The 'enquiry question' was a culminating question that the pupils would answer at the end of a sequence of lessons. This was not necessarily – or even usually – *independent* enquiry; it would involve pupil activity but the journey would be crafted by the teacher. One 'enquiry question' would drive all lessons and be invoked regularly by the teacher in order to deepen the mystery, helping pupils to see new meaning in the question rather than seek easy, early resolution. The final 'answer', attempted in the concluding lesson, would be 'substantial', 'motivating', 'structured' and varied in form (Byrom and Riley 2003). Whether essay, diagram, role play, radio play or another creative outcome, it would embody some analytic or explanatory force. Quite different from the question that acts merely as a chapter heading, the conceptual shape of the 'enquiry question' became a tool for explicitly linking substantive knowledge and critical thinking.

Not all manifestations were as effective as the archetype, but the principle caught on. In their study of history departments in the early 2000s, Husbands et al. (2003) concluded that the 'enquiry' approach was 'becoming the new orthodoxy'. It marked a break with the 1980s and 1990s use of isolated exercises on tiny source extracts:

> it certainly poses a challenge to the potentially fragmented approach encouraged by the 'double-page spread' mentality of early national curriculum textbooks and what has been termed 'death by sources A to F'. (Husbands et al. 2003, 110)

It also became a contrast to GCSE practice. In the perceptions of teachers there was a difference between 'the ''buzz'' generated by enquiry at

Key Stage 3' and the trudge through algorithmic, atomised work at GCSE (Husbands et al. 2003, 132).

A second, related way in which history teachers sought a more 'constructive' approach was in resolving conceptual confusion by showing pupils that they could only establish and weigh evidence *for a particular question*. Much of this work arose as a response to the problem of pupils writing off sources for their 'bias'. The issue was addressed directly by Lang (1993) who teased out the historical value of 'bias'. LeCocq built on Lang's critique, describing 'bias' as 'a hackneyed catch-all, blunting and limiting pupils' evaluative work' (LeCocq 2000, 51). She related a systematic attempt to remove the 'bias' misconception by getting pupils fascinated by the utility of a source collection replete with 'bias'. If this led to the hyperbole that bias makes a source *useful* not *useless*, it was one commensurate with the enormity of the challenge of unpicking the legacy of early, reductive, 'source work'. This is not to say that early guidance on using sources had not been sensible or careful. It was doubtful anyone could have predicted just how reductive pupils – and many teachers – would become.

Claire Riley's (1999) use of 'layers of inference' together with Wiltshire's (2000) exploration of 'the language of certainty' initiated a particularly fruitful conversation in which Carlisle (2000) noticed new problems arising in his pupils' tendency to attribute agency to the source itself. He suggested refinements to Wiltshire's work in order to address potential misconceptions. Smith (2001), a Head of History in Bury, drew on Claire Riley, Wiltshire, Carlisle and LeCocq in his analysis of what was going wrong with low-attaining pupils' motivation and understanding:

> My view, like LeCocq, is that we should leave out such mental crutch words ... as biased/secondary/primary and focus on the real issue ... the degree of certainty that one can attach to historical claims arising from the source. (Smith 2001, 12)

Phillips (2002) brings out the significance of Smith's work, especially the link between remedying misconceptions about evidence and building literacy. Meanwhile, more teachers began using sources longer than the 'gobbet' (Counsell 2004). Woolley (2003), for example, used a short story by Thomas Hardy to develop low-ability Year 8 pupils' inferential thinking.

Teacher-led practical exploration of second-order concepts other than evidence

Second-order concepts are those intellectual categories essential to the practice of history, such as cause, change and evidence. They shape the

questions historians ask of the past. Although history's second-order concepts exist in no tablets of stone, a working, professional consensus around most of them has its origins in the SCHP and successive incarnations of the NC. The original Attainment Target 1, for example, was built around similarity and difference, change and continuity, cause and consequence (DES 1990). The process by which these concepts have entered teachers' everyday practice has been more complex and uneven, however. Ideas such as 'cause' have suffered from the same sorts of problems that dogged 'evidence', in that early efforts to make them workable, especially in the wake of the rigid and atomised 'statements of attainment' of NC 1991, fostered tedious, hoop-jumping tasks geared to narrow objectives (Haydn 1994). For teachers to engage actively with these concepts and to debate their use was therefore vital. The achievements of history teachers in relation to second-order concepts can be illustrated through two areas: enquiry questions and activities.

An 'enquiry question' enshrining a causation problem is relatively easy to frame. To structure a question that will require analysis of 'change' is much harder. Unless pupils have something to *do* in relation to 'change', some puzzle to wrestle with or problem to solve, they end up regurgitating mindlessly rather than generalising thoughtfully (Stanford 2008; Counsell 2011). This is why Foster's problematising of 'change' for her 'enquiry question', 'How far and how fast was segregation challenged?' (2008, 5) is of interest. Such thinking necessitates a teacher treating change as 'process' rather than as event (Lee 2005). Foster's work also showed how her own clarity concerning the second-order focus of her enquiry enabled pupils to assimilate and process knowledge. Foster's 'road map' activity saw pupils building a narrative of Civil Rights developments as part of their effort to judge speed and degree of change (Foster 2008).

A pupil who has been helped to notice that all 'cause' questions tend to have properties in common can, eventually, frame her own 'enquiry questions' that are about cause (or change, and so on). That this is a means, as well as a possible measure, of progression is brought out by Dawson. In explaining why pupils think history is prohibitively difficult, Dawson writes:

> They see the surface details and think each new topic is different because it features new or mostly new names, dates, places, etc. This camouflage prevents students realising that they can use what they've learned before to help them with a new topic. (Dawson 2009, 1)

Dawson proceeds from this to argue that we need to draw pupils' attention to those features that recur – the properties of a question that embody a concept. Burnham (2007) went further. She helped her pupils to think about whether or not their own, proposed enquiry questions are

'big' enough to embrace a meaningful historical problem, worthy of study:

> pupils began to think about whether there was a bigger question we wanted to ask about attitudes of Muslims and Christians toward each other and how these had changed over time. (2007, 13)

Teachers have also built activities designed to shift pupils' ideas within particular conceptual domains. The most powerful of these eschew reductive 'quick fix' tasks and show pupils the nature of the generalisations that they are forming or testing. Examples of history teachers doing this are extensive, often spinning from a single, starting example that teachers pick up, reshape and then throw back into the community for continued debate. Chapman's (2003) approach to teaching counterfactual reasoning was one such catalyst. His 'Alphonse the Camel' has influenced many other activities, such as those designed and researched by Buxton (2010), whose pupils compared eighteenth-century France and Britain as a way of furnishing counterfactual possibility. Woodcock (2005) was inspired by the camel metaphor to seek greater precision in pupils' classification and linking of causes. Choosing from words such as 'underlying', 'latent', 'emergent', 'inexorable', 'inevitable', 'exacerbate', 'shape', 'determine', 'mitigate' and 'temper', his pupils' writing gained new explanatory power.

Perhaps the most illuminating concept when exploring disciplinary structure and boundaries is 'historical significance'. 'Significance' is revelatory because of its special ontology: it cannot be a property of the phenomenon under study. Always ascribed by others, it shifts according to questions asked, as well as cultural or political context. Present in every NC since 1995, it only found its way into the Attainment Target of NC 2008, largely in response to burgeoning teacher discussion, by then spanning over 20 articles, many web discussions and new textbook activities. Discussion was enriched by international work (e.g. Seixas 1997; Cercadillo 2001). The taxonomies of Lomas (1993) and the practical ideas of Phillips (2002) became referents for work on nurturing progression (Bradshaw 2005), on pupils' preconceptions (Conway 2005), on stretching post-14 pupils (Hall 2008) and on using significance to engage pupils with local history (Brown and Woodcock 2009).

Teacher quests for coherence and scale: the overview-depth question, building substantive knowledge and the problem of the canon

The first revision of the NC saw increasingly sophisticated theorising of the 'overview'. NC 1995 explicitly required 'overviews' and made these easier to manage by removing a requirement to teach the 'study units' chronologically (DFE 1994). Teachers were now free to place (say) the

Reformation within a broad temporal or spatial context by mixing parts of study units in order to show patterns, synoptic stories or trends.

To understand teacher discourse at this time it is necessary to understand the negativity that some teachers felt towards 'overview'. Its neighbouring term, 'outline', had connotations of dry, rushed, fact-saturated overviews which many teachers viewed as the cause of alienation from history that precipitated its decline prior to the SCHP revival (Sylvester 1994). For teachers to argue *for* overviews at this time, therefore, was difficult. This need to reconstruct the overview as something positive – provisional and constructed, useful and interesting – gave a critical, driving force to debate at this time. These debates yielded new overview-depth planning models such as those advocated by Riley (1996, 1997). He argued that an approach:

> which simply moves pupils on from one depth study to the next limits their historical understanding. We need … pupils to move out from the particular, to see patterns and connections across time and place, to get to grips with big historical issues. (Riley 1996, 12)

Building on Riley's models, the Historical Association put out a national call for examples and gathered them into a pamphlet (Counsell and HA Secondary Committee 1997). Rayner (1999) subsequently drew on the pamphlet's terms ('big/little stories', 'big/little questions', 'over-arching themes') but went further. She wanted her pupils to 'internalise the relationships between these different levels of generality'. Her pupils used hyperlinks to 'swap between telescope and microscope'. For Rayner, pupils' ability to conceptualise such layers was intrinsically linked to their realising 'the problems involved in worthwhile, critical judgements' (1999, 14). Barnes (2002) also linked overview to judgement, but in a more teacher-led model. His pupils framed initial hypotheses, and then, three enquiries later, returned to consider 'How far was 1750 to 1900 an age of progress?' Practical solutions also grew as a response to the two-year Key Stage 3 (Cole and Thompson 2005) and to NC 2008 which, by breaking out of the 'study unit' model altogether, became the first curricular revision to use overarching narratives in the structuring of prescribed content.

One reason why debate continues is the enormity of what is at stake in giving pupils any longitudinal account or canon that someone else has rendered coherent through narrative. Howson and Shemilt (2011) observe that purposive messages, however implicit, are present in any large-scale 'story':

> The pointlessness of disconnected tales ripped from the past entails a collateral harmlessness; in contrast, joined-up accounts of the human past have greater potential for both good and evil. (2011, 79)

Critics of school history therefore see 'big' stories as the answer to every problem, from:

> gaps and distortions in students' knowledge of our island story; to the seeming inability of most students to turn disconnected facts and stories into joined-up narratives of national glory, human rights or anything else; to the questionable relevance of parochial history education agendas. (2011, 79)

The fact that there is ideological intent latent in any curricular collection of factual material arranged as implicit narrative has prompted critical, practical solutions from many history teachers. For example, Brooker (2009) argued that pupils should identify overarching themes for themselves, within and towards the end of a scheme of work, rather than having these specified at the outset by predetermined 'thematic stories' (Dawson 2008). The latter:

> serve to conceal the ruptures and discontinuities that form the counter-narrative . . . if crudely presented, they risk introducing a teleological understanding of history as a process of inevitable development from 'beginning' to 'end'. (Brooker 2009, 47)

Invoking the 'dialogic quality of learning processes', Brooker encouraged his pupils to create counter-readings to the narratives implicit in his choice of material.

Much commentary within teachers' published discourse hinges not, however, on validity or tacit moral purpose of the implicit narrative, nor even on whether the narrative line should be imposed or constructed (most accept that it is inevitably imposed), but rather on the practical consideration of how pupils might gain enough knowledge, efficiently and enjoyably, to be able to do history at all (e.g. Hammond 2002; Gadd 2009). In other words, the overview question is related to content assimilation and the confidence that comes from holding a story in one's head. It is unlikely that this represents naivety about a deterministic narrative or the imposition of a canon. It is more likely that other elements of disciplinary practice, enshrined by the NC, are deemed to foster the necessary criticality – judging the strength of claims about change or continuity, substantiating arguments with evidence, and so on. To judge one aspect of a curriculum for its critical potential or deficit – even the hidden canon latent in most selections of content – is to misread the way in which history teachers use the NC as a whole.

When it comes to retention and deployment of factual knowledge, it is all too easy to assume that some optimum balance of overview and depth will magically secure this. Perhaps the most important insight from teachers in recent years is that it is not *incidence* of overview and depth but their *interplay* that counts. Banham's (1998, 2000) dictum that there is 'overview lurking in the depth' has been enduringly influential. At first,

Banham shocked history teachers. How could he defend teaching Year 7 about King John *for eight weeks*? Banham's view, however, was that the wider medieval period would be more readily grasped if tackled *after* a substantial depth study that went beyond the usual superficialities of Year 7 history. He argued that after an extended study of John's reign, his pupils possessed a 'sense of period' and a special kind of readiness to assimilate other medieval content, in overview form. Suddenly, it was possible for pupils to understand, at speed, what other monarchs were up to, to grasp the significance of later changes and to find the curiosity to *want* to establish the chronology. Banham's notion that overview properties are surfaced by depth, making rapid overviews more mean-ingful thereafter, has never been formally analysed (except in unpublished MEd and PGCE dissertations), but it ought to be. Crucially, Banham's argument challenges the idea of presenting synoptic structures *before* depth. Many history teachers now cite Banham's practice in their more radical experiments (e.g. Jones 2009).

One such is Gadd (2009). Used to a two-year Key Stage 3 of vast 'thematic stories' – social in Year 7 and political in Year 8 – Gadd became dissatisfied. She judged that earlier events were not retained because they had not been properly grasped in the first place and that aspirations to make links with them were therefore vain. Gadd then took inspiration from diverse sources. Building on Lang's (2003) work on narrative and drawing on insights of Shemilt (2000) concerning 'colligatory general-isations', Gadd used Banham's principles concerning overview-depth interplay to develop three 'change and continuity' enquiries on nine-teenth-century British and Indian history, after which pupils blended the two through their own, culminating narrative. Furnishing pupils with many 'small' memorable stories, she gave them confidence to play with new narrative connections.

A quite different tradition, with considerable theoretical power although, as yet, only limited trialling in the classroom, is built around 'frameworks'. In this tradition, 'framework' is not to be confused with 'overview', 'outline', 'theme', 'story' or 'picture'. The latter are construed as *objects* of learning, whereas 'frameworks' are *instruments*. Such frameworks are 'provisional factual scaffolds'. They 'enable students to organise material as instantiations of, or exceptions to, high-level generalisations' (Howson and Shemilt 2011, 74). In its embracing of temporal, spatial and human scales, this is the most radically synoptic and critical of all approaches to overarching coherence. It includes the idea of the ultimate synoptic 'big picture' (Lee 1991) which is 'open, flexible and self-updating without losing coherence or exhibiting multiple personality disorder' (Howson and Shemilt 2011, 81). Rogers (2008), a Head of History in Leeds, has put elements of the framework approach to the test.

Teachers' enlivening of the curricular construct 'Interpretations of history'

The most explicit exploration by history teachers of the boundary between disciplinary and 'everyday' knowledge (Young 2008) lies in 'Interpretations of history' – a category of learning defined by NC 1991 and first incarnated as 'Attainment Target 2' (DES 1990). This focused on accounts subsequent to the period under study, such as museums, theme parks, historical novels, films or commemorative acts. In moving beyond the scholarly and into the popular, 'everyday' cultural phenomena were brought alongside disciplinary products, not as a relativist bid for their equivalence, but rather to illuminate the contrasting nature, construction and purpose of diverse expressions of historical consciousness.

Commissioned by the National Curriculum Council (NCC) to produce non-statutory guidance, McAleavy led teachers in two exploratory projects (NCC 1993). His team developed taxonomies of interpretation type (academic, entertainment, educational, popular, fictional, personal) and devised foci for pupils' thinking. Pupils might suggest, for example, the purpose of the interpretation or possible influences on it. They might discern the relationship between interpretation and available evidence. They might discuss the practical context in which the interpretation emerged or consider opportunities and limits of a particular rhetorical framework for conveying (say) 'sense of period' or complexity of causal agency (McAleavy 1993). The principles and examples that ensued clarified the demands of AT2. Pupils would only move into the curricular demand if they also stood outside a specific interpretation and considered how and why it came to be formed. Well-trodden enquiries such as 'Was Haig the "Butcher" of the Somme?' or 'Cromwell: hero or villain?', although amply justified by other parts of the history NC, were not adequate to develop and demonstrate the AT2 goal. It is therefore important to grasp the additionality of this curricular component: all parts of the NC – causal reasoning, evidential thinking, analysis of change – *already required* pupils to interpret. Peculiar to this component was direct analysis of how *others* do so.

Teacher-led practical theorising soon followed. Taking McAleavy's (1993) categories of 'popular' and 'personal', Wrenn (1998) led his pupils in reflection on how curators gradually altered First World War battlefield sites in response to changing national or popular values. Wrenn's pupils judged the relative weighting of 'preservation', 'commemoration', 'attraction' and 'education' in decisions about management of memorial sites. In her work on a nineteenth-century painting of Lady Jane Grey, Card (2004, 2008) described the combined substantive and conceptual demand of 'Interpretations' as 'seeing double' (seeing two periods at once). Card's practice is typical of an increasingly explicit relationship between 'Interpretations' and long time spans. This

relationship is evident in the influential textbook activity of Banham and Dawson (2000) in which Year 7 pupils examine why interpretations of one historical figure changed over several centuries in response to the interpreters' orientations or professional context, the sources they examined or the questions they asked. Norcliffe (2004) used Northern Ireland murals to help pupils analyse the process whereby 'King Billy' was gradually reinvented as a Protestant hero. Mastin and Wallace (2006) linked 'Interpretations' to narrative construction with their enquiry 'What has the British Empire stood for since 1900?', using a combination of traditional 'empire plates' and Niall Ferguson's revisionist work.

Such teachers not only differentiate between everyday and theoretical knowledge, they place both types of knowledge before pupils, inviting them to scrutinise each as distinctive products of temporality. In this, their work reflects a tenet of McAleavy's (1993) vision that is easily misunderstood. In presenting his 'types' McAleavy warned against the danger of activities becoming predictable hierarchies of value. This was not because he did not judge validity of claims important, still less because he saw the popular or fictional merely as 'texts' in a postmodernist sense. Rather, it is best understood as a practical pedagogic point, rooted in the project team's experience of what pupils habitually do. Pupils are apt to become reductive. The force of a question needs to be in exactly the right place if pupils are not to collapse into truisms. In this, McAleavy's team was prescient. His concern to avoid tedious rehearsals of 'Is *Dad's Army* a reliable account?' is vindicated by the results of setting exactly such questions. In the late 1990s, I found myself supporting teachers confused by their pupils' poor performance. Having been asked to judge the 'accuracy' of *Dad's Army*, pupils set out merely to prove that it was 'wrong', thus steering wide of reflection on the construction of the interpretation in its context. Much more fruitful questions were: 'What does *Dad's Army* tell us about the period in which it was created?' or 'What does *Dad's Army's* popularity tell us about our grandparents, parents and ourselves?'

A Year 9 'exemplification' essay shows ingredients of 'Interpretations' working together (QCDA 2010). In 'Why have impressions of the Battle of Rorke's Drift changed over time?' a pupil examines socio-political influences on a painting of the battle. He then reflects on ways in which the film *Zulu* captures tensions arising from Civil Rights developments in America, the end of Empire and continuing patriotism in Britain. The pupil historicises the film by commenting on how its creators and audience might have made meaning of Rorke's Drift. Finally, using a recent political cartoon, he illustrates the resonance of both battle and film in the twenty-first century. The pupils' avoidance of direct censure is nothing to do with relativism – it is clear the pupil does not see these cultural products as equivalent to scholarly history; it is, rather, a

reflection on diverse manifestations of the past in the present. By showing how people at various times have asserted or challenged 'continuity of identity' with the past (Chapman 2011, 100), the pupil is attempting to *explain* features of 'everyday' constructions.

This points to the peculiar achievement of 'Interpretations' as a curriculum device and the achievement of history teachers who continue to bound it carefully. If pupils should discern where historical standards of 'argument' have been applied and where, by contrast, the past is 'plundered' to produce 'convenient stories for present ends' (Lee 2011, 65), then 'Interpretations' is the disciplined study of such plundering. At the same time, 'Interpretations' goes beyond a normative division of 'uses and abuses'. We are all 'plunderers' through our engagement with the cultural products of many temporally conditioned ways of being. In its deconstruction of the popular or personal, 'Interpretations' is designed to develop heightened awareness of those manifestations of which we all partake (enjoying a film, commemorating an event) and so to guard against the dangerous assumption that we are immune to the most pernicious or deliberately misleading. If the discipline of history gives pupils intellectual tools with which to test claims about the past, the curricular construct of 'Interpretations' is designed to remind pupils that they cannot insulate themselves from the *wider* operations of historical consciousness. They can, however, gain some power over such operations, by learning to construct warranted generalisations about them, too (McAleavy 2000, 2003).

History teachers working in this tradition attest to the value of 'Interpretations' in securing pupil engagement. Anthony (2009) over-turned her Year 9 pupils' negative assumptions about the 'boring' history of their South Wales urban environment. Her pupils discerned the implicit generalisations within the *Horrible Histories* 'Industrial Towns Game' and then wrote about 'why the game's interpretation might be as it is' (Anthony 2009, 25). Riley used pupils' 'outrage' at a Tate and Lyle 'History of sugar' leaflet (it did not mention slavery!) in order to cultivate inquisitiveness, illustrating how low-attaining students' curiosity can be 'emotionally engaged but intellectually sustained' (Counsell 2003, 28).

Despite the power of plates, films, games and walls as ways into difficult deconstruction by stealth, teacher experimentation has been just as fertile with demanding scholarly products (Counsell 2004). Efforts enabling even the youngest teenagers to enjoy lengthy extracts by academic historians are furnishing a nascent debate about the purpose of so doing. Foster runs packed workshops for history teachers eager to hear how she managed to get Year 9 students to read scholarly works. For Foster, direct encounter with the text itself is essential: 'over-simplifying the material would gut it of its power' (2011, 203). Hammond (2007)

teaches her Year 9 pupils to explore how 'theories and methods' (cliometrics and micro-history) shape historians' use of evidence, while Howells (2005) secures direct relationship between Year 8s' understanding of scholarly interpretations and their own causal argument.

The pointlessness of changing Key Stage 3 history alone

What, then, are the direct implications for the review? On one reading, there is nothing to be done. All of the above – whether the quest for secure knowledge, the pursuit of disciplinary thinking or the achievement of their interplay – are encouraged by the present NC. Even from the perspective of lobbies for particular canons, the NC at Key Stage 3 is a magic mirror: external critics are often surprised to find that everything they want is abundantly present. Instead of isolated topics, they find the entire span of British history from 1066. Continuities in British political history were strengthened by NC 2008 (earlier versions had a social and economic focus between 1750 and 1900). The British Empire even has its own direct imperative. Schama (2010) is concerned at the absence of a grand 'arc', of coherence and chronology, yet this is driven harder by the current rubric than by any previous version. Likewise, a critic with a very different concern, that of excessive parochialism, will find substantial emphasis on European and world history and on the diversity of identities in Britain's own society. Whatever one's content proclivities, they are all there.

The reason many children can recall little of it is that much of it is never taught. It is impossible to do justice even to half of this curriculum in three years. It is this that explains the continuing dissatisfaction with the range of children's historical knowledge – a dissatisfaction expressed by teachers no less than outsiders (Burn and Harris 2010).

Teachers' concern is not some unrealistic aspiration for exhaustive knowledge. It is a concern for pupils to gain a minimum framework to be able to orient themselves historically. Pupils need frames of reference if they are to make meaning out of an abstract noun such as 'dictator', 'treaty' or even 'government' (Rogers 1987). Such confident facility comes only from adequate exposure to stories that pupils can incubate into mature usage (Counsell 2001). In the 1990s, I often related the story of the Year 9 pupil, 'Melanie', whose difficulty in assimilating Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin emerged in her hybrid dictator, 'Mutlin' (Counsell 1996). A pupil such as Melanie can only cope with one dictator at a time. Pupils must acquire enough 'fingertip' knowledge for the 'residue' of an accurate frame of reference and period sensitivity to endure (Counsell 2000). None of the authors discussed above, whether Gadd (2009), Foster (2008) or Rogers (2008) would claim that they are able to finish the job in three years. It is impossible. Their work can only point to what could be

achieved if only there were curriculum time to do so. Within secondary schools, it has to be a five-year project, not three.

That the present situation is more serious than the 1990s is confirmed by recent surveys. Melanie would now be fortunate to continue history beyond Year 8. From trends that Burn and Harris (2010) identify, disciplinary history is becoming safe property only of an academic elite.

First, Key Stage 3 is now two years or less in some schools. One or both of those years might be taught by non-specialists or even absorbed into 'genericist' curricula. Such arrangements are more common in schools catering for all abilities. It is pointless to reform a national curriculum when, on the ground, no such curriculum exists. Yet the case for a *national* curriculum must be that it will protect all children, including and especially Melanie. Second, many senior managers do not want pupils taking history at GCSE if they have little prospect of securing a C grade. From 411 comprehensive schools in the Historical Association's research:

> 46 (teachers) referred to 'ability' as the restricting factor, with 18 explicitly mentioning 'pathways' as the mechanism by which such a restriction was applied. . . . Many teachers expressed deep regret . . . that history was now out of bounds for lower-attaining pupils. (Burn and Harris 2010, 18–19)

Others deplored the fact that there were no historical options suitable for those children who wanted to take history but could not cope with GCSE.

I have argued the case for retaining history for the 'less able', post-14, elsewhere (Counsell 2003). First, it is essential: learning to develop and test rational claims about the past should not be optional for any citizen. Moreover, precisely because it *is* difficult, such pupils need more time. Second, we know that it is possible to engage such students and to secure their enthusiasm. Collectively, the community has developed the pedagogy to inspire. What now needs more explicit defence is that five years of specialist history are necessary in the *secondary* school. A critic might counter that five years could be achieved by dividing current Key Stage 3 content across primary and lower secondary. This is not practically feasible for two reasons. First, if the completeness of content learned were dependent on the primary phase (placing all medieval history in Years 5 and 6, for example), rigid divisions of content across phase would need to be either negotiated locally or dictated centrally. The former is unworkable; the latter would frustrate vital nascent research on the 'epic of long time' (Schama 2010) such as 'big picture' frameworks (Howson and Shemilt 2011). Second, resource implications of specialist training for *all* primary school teachers would be prohibitive.

The argument from precedent abroad is also compelling. In European countries where there is early demarcation into academic and vocational pathways, history remains compulsory to 16. Their students continue history, while also engaging in practical training. In England we seem locked, by contrast, into GCSE or nothing.

Finally, the problem of replicated content – for example, studying Nazi Germany twice – will never be solved until premature truncation ends. It is entirely a function of post-13/14 options. Because Key Stage 3 has to be fit *both* for pupils who give history up *and* for pupils who continue, curriculum architects at every review have had to squash into the Key Stage 3 period every conceivable aspect of history that diverse lobbies demand. Therefore, post-14 will always involve replication. If, by contrast, teachers were free to plan over five years, they could construct a sensible programme of progression and appropriate differentiation within it. The distracting, tedious, annual complaints that Nazi Germany dominates the curriculum will continue for ever until this one problem is finally tackled. The problem is not that students study Nazi Germany post-14; it is that their teachers have to include it at Key Stage 3 *as well*.

Epistemic clarity, distinct forms of knowledge and the curriculum as a whole

At the root of this erosion of history curriculum time, pre- and post-14, is 'genericism' (Young 2008). The view that disciplines can neither engage nor serve most pupils often betrays two misapprehensions: first, an assumption that a subject equates to information, as opposed to *knowledge*; second, a lack of awareness that a school subject such as history has long involved the active and engaging exploration of the *structure and form* of that knowledge, using concepts and attendant processes.[2]

This points to the importance of getting the rubric of a subject curriculum right. It must capture essential epistemic distinctiveness and reflect the way in which history teachers have reified it. The non-specialist senior manager or policy-maker cannot be expected to understand the purpose of school history if the curriculum is opaque in such matters. Fundamental to this effort are the second-order concepts – the most efficient device we have for defining the structure of the discipline in curricular terms. It is worth reflecting, therefore, on the role of such concepts in making everything else in the history curriculum work.

The term 'historical skills' can only lead to a separation of product and process, of knowledge and thinking (Counsell 2000; Lee 2011). Second-order concepts, by contrast, have an integrative curricular function. First, concepts turn content into problems. History teachers' success in establishing problems worth solving and in enthusing pupils in the effort – for example by enshrining a concept in an enquiry question – challenges

Barton's (2009) premise that disciplinary logic may be antithetical to pupil engagement. Second, concepts are our best hope for dealing with 'the problem of the canon' (Wilschut 2009). Canons will never go away. The effort to remove one will just create another. Concepts form a structural device for ensuring that pupils realise that all historical knowledge, especially that which ends up in curricula or textbooks, 'is always produced by someone and ... owned, controlled and subject to change' (Edwards 2008, 45). By discerning processes of knowledge construction, pupils can challenge the canon itself.

A key question for curriculum reviewers is, therefore, *how well* have successive incarnations of the history NC acted to uncover the nature of the discipline in this way?

An achievement of NC 2008 was its ending of invented categories with no life outside of a curriculum, such as the NC 1995 'key element' or the NC 2000 'KSU'.[3] Such catch-alls mask the conceptual structure of a discipline. In the period after 1995, one even found history teachers creating special tests for each 'key element' as though these were all of the same order. Moreover, because they are curriculum-dependent, such invented terms are ephemeral. This creates pointless upheaval at each review, especially for teachers who lean on the crutch of 'key elements' rather than on disciplinary categories to which a curriculum is only intended to refer. By introducing 'concepts' and 'processes', NC 2008 caught up with more powerful usages in history teacher discourse.

Moreover, category confusion between second-order concepts and substantive content has been gradually overcome. This might matter little to the intellectually confident history teacher who would look to the warrant of a professional or epistemic community rather than to that of statute, but for other teachers it might be critical. For example, some teachers were able confidently to transcend references to 'changes' (plural) in pre-2008 curricula (DFE 1994; QCA 1999); for many other teachers, however, the term 'changes' failed to signal a need to make the concept of 'change' powerful in pupils' thinking (Counsell 2011). NC 2008 resolved this by stating the term as 'change' and giving it explicit concept status (QCA 2008), thus indicating the type of discipline-specific generalisation pupils were to explore. Meanwhile, through various incarnations of 'Interpretations of history' and through the introduction of 'historical significance' (DFE 1994), the history NC has been consistently effective in capturing features of history education practice which require pupils to reflect not only on history as discipline (that is, her second-order properties) but also on the discipline's boundaries with 'everyday' knowledge.

Where the 2008 NC concepts remain opaque, however, they do not help the less intellectually confident history teacher, let alone the non-specialist. Teachers necessarily read the collection of concepts

hermeneutically, as interplay of parts and whole. Theoretical inconsistency across concepts therefore blunts the epistemic import, causing confusion in those history teachers who struggle to understand the role of concepts in planning. For example, 'similarity and difference', which found its way into the 1991 NC from SCHP lineage (DES 1990), had, by NC 1995, lost its conceptual force and become a purely substantive demand to study 'characteristic features' of societies (DFE 1994). In 2008, 'diversity' appears under 'concepts', and is recognised as a reprise of 'similarity and difference' (Anthony 2009; Bradshaw 2009). It still has its purpose blunted, however, by the prefix 'cultural, ethnic and religious'. Reasons why it is a good thing for pupils to understand cultural, ethnic and religious diversities are many, but these deserve curricular prominence in the content section where they belong. Bradshaw illustrates the damaging consequences of teachers mistaking concept for content: 'We did our diversity when we did slavery' or 'We do migrant workers from Scotland for our diversity unit' (2009, 5). A still leaner solution, teasing out its second-order status even more clearly, would be to state diversity as 'difference', thus inviting teachers to build taxonomies which might aid pupils' generalisations about 'difference' (e.g. Burbules 1997). This would secure theoretical consistency with the other concepts: as with 'change and continuity', its opposite, 'similarity', would be understood.

These are not minor, fine-tuning issues. They show how misplaced details can fail to foster epistemic force within practical planning. They also limit opportunity for those outside the discipline to understand it. The 'invented' categories of pre-2008 versions arose from an under-standable desire of curriculum reviewers to seek commonality across subject rubrics. It is worth reflecting on why a reviewer would want to do this. If it is for the administrative convenience of senior managers, for example in creating common monitoring systems, it is hard to see how this could help with anything other than a vacuous audit. If, however, the purpose is to help senior managers to build interdisciplinary conversation, and to help teachers think about boundaries between fields with a view to helping pupils do likewise, then greater *relatability* across subject rubrics, at least, would certainly help.

It is sobering, therefore, that the welcome introduction of 'concepts' in NC 2008 has not yet achieved this goal. Interpretation of 'concept' is so diverse across subjects as to render the term unhelpful. Geography includes 'sustainable development' – more akin to a substantive concept than the second-order, epistemic pointers that appear in history. The equivalent in history would be something such as 'democracy' or even 'peaceful dialogue'. Such differences arise partly from the different stages of each subject's internal debates, but an attempt, at least, should be made to capture the distinctiveness of each subject's epistemic goals. One acid test of a subject curriculum is: how does it help those *outside* the discipline

to make sense of it? If a senior manager does not know how another subject is designed to empower children's thinking, the idea of 'managing the curriculum' has limited professional meaning.

Woodcock's work (2010) illustrates ways in which strong classification (Bernstein 1971) can inform productive interdisciplinary learning. Examining the idea of 'evidence' in both science and history, pupils selected language in order to show the 'degrees of certainty' (Wiltshire 2000) that they attached to their claims. The same sensitivity towards epistemic commonality and divergence is evident in a rich Year 8 collaboration between history and science reported by Byrom (2010). Pupils examined the achievements of science in Baghdad between the eighth and thirteenth centuries. In an overt challenge to an integrated, competence-based curriculum, Monaghan (2010) worked with his school's English department on a term-long study of Dickens's *Great Expectations*. Proceeding from the ideas of evidence, similarity and difference, these history and English teachers sought an interdisciplinary alternative to:

> watered-down teaching, generic thinking skills and the loss of any kind of intellectual framework. We believed in cross-curricularity, just not this kind of cross-curricularity. What we needed was a way of showing people that smart interdisciplinary projects led by subject specialists were better. (Monaghan 2010, 13)

Each of these interdisciplinary projects points to the ways in which tight conceptual framing in a subject curriculum could assist rigour in interdisciplinary enquiry, making the differences themselves yield openings for appropriate interaction between disciplinary approaches.

Conclusion

Perhaps the most disturbing discovery occasioned by the 'new cross-curricularity' is that some senior managers see subjects as types of 'information' (Wrenn 2010) rather than as disciplinary 'ways of knowing' (Wineburg 1991). History teachers' frustration does not arise from the requirement to work with other subjects; examples of their doing so enthusiastically are legion. It arises, rather, from the logic that follows from a faulty premise. If history is merely 'information', then generic skills must be imported for learning to become 'active', 'engaging' or 'relevant'. History teachers' successful disciplinary practice shows that such imports are, at best, redundant. The joy of Parsons at seeing her 'Ds and Es' gradually gain the knowledge necessary for 'an active, informed interest in the affairs of our country' is matched only by the joy of her pupil: 'I get so excited about my next history lesson, I find myself dreaming about it before it happens' (Parsons 2002, 48). At worst, where genericism saps subject time or truncates it early, it detracts from hard-won and pioneering

achievements of a history teaching community: pupil engagement, content–concept interplay and the slow, difficult work of gradually giving disadvantaged pupils discursive and explanatory power within a particular form of knowledge. Evidential thinking and causal reasoning are not 'information management'. More than the academically successful, it is 'Melanie' who needs them. She must arrive at the point where she can free herself from the populist myths of the 'street gang' (Shemilt 2000, 100).

Such managerial confusions point us to the necessary and pre-eminent role of any subject curriculum: to *mediate the meaning of the discipline* so that all parties can understand its peculiar educational value. We are fortunate, in history, that teachers have brought us so far in showing us what is possible.

Notes

1. Speaking at the Schools History Project (SHP, formerly SCHP) conference in 1997, on the 25th anniversary of SCHP, David Sylvester, SCHP's first director, admitted that the earliest efforts had sometimes fostered 'endless atomising analysis at the expense of synthesis'. He praised more recent efforts of history teachers to build pupils' 'extended writing' as a means of developing argumentation within which evidential thinking might be developed and demonstrated.
2. This lack of cognisance of how history teachers build active, critical reflection on the 'how' of history, is typified by rhetoric that dichotomises 'subject' and 'learning', or 'subject' and 'doing'. For example, an advocate of the Royal Society of Arts' *Opening Minds* competence curriculum remarked: 'competences are treated not as subjects to be taught but as skills to be developed' (Katbamna 2007, 34).
3. In NC 2000, KSU stood for 'Knowledge, Skills and Understanding'. There were 13 of these in total, some of a different order and status to the others and many with subdivisions (QCA 1999).

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