



Children, their world, their history education: the implications of the Cambridge review for primary history

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EDITORIAL



Children, their world, their history education: the implications of the Cambridge review for primary history

I am delighted to edit this issue of *Education 3-13*, which focuses on the implementation of the English National Curriculum for history at Key Stages 1 and 2 (5-11 years old) (DfE 2013). It is discussed through the lens of recommendations, which apply specifically to history, in *Children, Their Lives, Their Education: Final Report and Recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review* (Alexander 2010). This is the most extensive report on primary education in England for 40 years, based on the findings of 28 research surveys, analysing and basing arguments on data collected from an extensive range of sources, including educational organisations, teachers, parents and children from all over England. It combines evidence on recent developments with a vision of how primary education should be. The Cambridge Primary Review Trust (CPRT) which supported schools and promoted a vision for primary education after the publication of the report has now sadly closed down. Nonetheless, the influence of the Cambridge Primary Review remains seminal in the field. Using it as a focus for examining the History curriculum continues its influence and status.

In structuring this issue of *Education 3-13*, contributors were invited to write with a focus on one of the key concepts in the review which are relevant to teaching history in ways which are transforming, and to the National Curriculum for history (DfE 2013). The concepts selected were: oracy, creativity, curiosity, excellence, locality, local, national and global links, chronology and cross-curricularity. The following articles discuss recent research in history education, linked to one of these concepts.

The *National Curriculum for History* (2013) is an endangered curriculum. It can be marginalised because of the accountability invested in English and mathematics and so interpreted merely as a transmission of facts. However, the *Cambridge Primary Review* (CPR) presented pressing arguments for a pedagogy in which history is amongst those subjects regarded as central to the curriculum. It is a powerful reminder that history remains in need of public, professional and political recognition.

National curriculum history and the Cambridge review

History, like all domains of knowledge, is not a collection of inert facts but depends on enquiry. The Purpose of Study in The National Curriculum states that pupils should 'understand the methods of historical enquiry'. These include a 'coherent *chronological* understanding' and understanding of the 'process and concepts of change', making 'connections between *local, national and international history*'. Pupils should be '*inspired by curiosity* to know about the past', ask 'questions, think critically', 'weigh evidence and develop perspective and judgment' in order to, 'discern how and why contrasting arguments and interpretations of the past have been constructed'.

History is central to the advancement of a number of aims proposed in the *Cambridge Primary Review*, which include valuing culture and community, local, national and global citizenship, the shaping of consciousness and identity and the lessons history offers to our understanding of present and future (272). However, in the Review, it is argued that the humanities are a casualty of the promise of a broad and rich curriculum, which has been sacrificed in pursuit of a narrowly focused 'standards agenda'. History requires time for thinking, talking, problem-solving and in-depth exploration, which engages children and which they find meaningful. A parallel sacrifice has been reflective and interactive pedagogy, which advances children's understanding in 'the basics', no less than in other subjects (237). In contrast, submissions to the review from children singled

out history as enjoyable, because it offers them opportunities to be actively involved in learning, to use imagination, and explore what seems curious (213).

Papers in this issue fall into two categories. The first four articles consider how we might retain a reflective and interactive pedagogy in teaching and learning history and the following four articles address the challenge to planning a coherent curriculum, which encompasses both time and place.

Reflective and interactive pedagogy

The Cambridge review, history and oracy

Each of the stages of historical enquiry (selecting and interpreting sources and combining them to construct accounts of the past and understanding why these interpretations may be equally valid but different) requires discussion between peers and with adults, in different social settings; it needs someone to express a view and support it with an argument, and others to provide alternative arguments, which may result in a new, shared view, or in agreement that sometimes there is no correct answer, because of incomplete evidence. Children learn to understand content through the process of enquiry.

One of the 12 aims of *Children, Their World, Their Education* is that children should explore and test language ideas in every activity and form of thought (199). The Report acknowledges the centrality of language, oracy and literacy, both to children's development and to a curriculum in which breadth and standards go hand in hand (275). It points out that a great deal of research converges on the quality and character of interaction that takes place in schools and classrooms, which demonstrates that this is a powerful tool for sustaining and engaging children's attention and for promoting cognitive development and higher order thinking, from the earliest stage and throughout the primary phase (305). Children's level of understanding is taken forward beyond the level each could achieve alone, by cognitive conflict, as they inter-think through sustained, shared thinking. Collaboration, it says, encourages children to pursue a joint goal, explain their understanding, express different points of view and attempt to reach a consensus (289). Because knowledge is negotiated and recreated, each of us, in our own way, makes our own sense, in the meeting of knowledge, both personal and collective (199). A theme of the review is that literacy is too narrowly conceived and that spoken language has yet to secure the place in primary education that its centrality to learning, culture and life require. The CPRT has produced a report on Classroom Talk, Social Disadvantage and Educational Attainment (Alexander, Hardman, and Hardman 2017).

In his paper, 'Oracy Dialogics Through the Lens of the Cambridge Primary Review', Jon Nichol discusses the concept of Oracy-Dialogics, then analyses a case study which focuses on teaching in which Oracy-Dialogics are a central teaching strategy. He concludes with a report on how children said this approach enhanced their learning in history.

The Cambridge review, history and creativity

Much has been written recently about the central value of creativity in education. Many submissions to the Review put creativity 'at the heart of the curriculum' (138), because it is linked with empowering children, through shared experiences, collaboration (64–67) and 'a vital aspect of cognitive and social functioning' (99). Creativity, it is argued, is a cognitively demanding process, which supports perseverance and problem-solving and enhances children's moral and social development (191). It is claimed to excite children's imagination in order that they can advance between present understanding, extend the boundaries of their lives, comprehend worlds possible as well as actual, understand cause and consequence (199) and to 'develop understanding through enquiry' (296).

Yet the Review states that 'creativity, the arts and humanities continue to cling by their finger tips in the primary phase, especially in Years 5 and 6' (44). The Review regrets that in these severely utilitarian times it has become necessary to argue the case for creativity and the imagination, on grounds of their contribution to the economy alone (199). Yet the Review emphasises the intrinsic

value of exciting children's imagination, saying that to experience the delights and pains of imagining and of entering into the imaginative worlds of others is to become a more rounded person.

In *What is Creativity in History?* the aspects of creativity identified in recent educational research are discussed and it is argued that the criteria for creativity are integral to and interdependent with the processes of historical enquiry. Each aspect of creativity discussed in the literature is exemplified, first by the work of academic historians and by children's historical thinking in history. It is argued that good history teaching by definition, must be creative.

The Cambridge review, history and curiosity

Submissions to the Review from some national organisations stressed that primary education should enhance children's enthusiasm, joy, *curiosity*, self-confidence, interpersonal skills and understanding of the world. And on page 198 it is stated that exploration is grounded in that distinctive mixture of amazement, perplexity and *curiosity* which constitutes childhood wonder. On page 213, curiosity is linked specifically to children's positive view of history which, they said, sparks their curiosity and encourages them to explore. In 'Curious Teachers, Create Curious Learners and Great Historians', Sarah Whitehouse, Karen Vickers-Hulse and Jane Carter, with Penelope Harnett, discuss factors that have led to a lack of curiosity in classrooms today. They justify the importance of curiosity both in teachers and learners and present case-studies illustrating how curiosity can be developed.

The Cambridge review, history and excellence

On page 4, the Review urges us to 'unite in the belief in fundamental principles ... such as engagement, empowerment, expertise and excellence'. The pursuit of excellence in teaching and learning inspires this report throughout. In their paper 'An Evaluation of the Quality Mark for History in Primary Schools in the UK', Bev Forest and Sue Temple examine the impact on practice of the Historical Association 'Quality Mark', awarded to schools demonstrating a culture of excellence in teaching and learning in history.

The Cambridge review and curriculum issues

The local in history: personal and community history and its impact on identity

It is argued in the Review, on the basis of research, that primary schools can and should respect and build on children's non-school learning, experience and capability, that the local component of the curriculum encourages this and that communities have a massive potential in this regard (262–263). The locality of the school is an important resource, which fosters relations between children who may come from different backgrounds (69). It takes account of their interests and is well-stocked with stimulating material. The aims of the Review emphasise interdependence, respect, reciprocity and citizenship. One particular aim is 'celebrating culture and community', which gives an explicit steer towards the regeneration of communal life and an education in which mutuality in learning, as well as relationships, is axiomatic. Submissions talk of loss of community and suggest that study of the locality is a way of responding to this need, for cultural and social as well as educational reasons. The Review argues that celebrating the culture of a community can help regenerate communal life and an education in which mutuality in learning as well as relationships is axiomatic (262).

In 'Local in History: Personal and Community History and Its Impact on Identity', Lynn Dixon and Alison Hales explore the relationship between people, their communities and their sense of identity. They argue that a move is needed from traditional local history in primary schools to one where personal and community history is at the heart of the curriculum, demonstrating how, through this approach, children begin to consider who they are, their backgrounds and how they are contributing to the wider environment. They draw both on theory and on conversations with children, which reveal the impact of this approach on a child's personal identity.

The Cambridge review, history and local, national and global links

The 12 aims of the Review propose a balance of national and local content and also a celebration of global culture and community, which, it says, should be local in orientation and rooted in knowledge and understanding (256). It is explained that this is because a sense of community does not begin with abstract ideas of Britishness but with how people relate to each other locally (259). On page 198, the Review quotes Bruner (1996, 13), saying that in promoting interdependence, advancing children's understanding of diversity and celebrating culture and community education is an embodiment of a culture's way of life, not just a preparation for it. Some contributors to the Review moved beyond community and nation to argue for a global perspective, in which the two fundamental aims of education should be integrating humanity and protecting the environment (188). And the Review agrees that from whichever point one starts and however one defines it, a global dimension in twenty-first-century education is essential (193). Indeed two Year 6 boys made a joint submission claiming that they especially wanted to learn global history (149).

Submissions specifically on the place and teaching of history criticised the growing marginalisation, at the primary stage, of a perspective on the world which contributors believed was of central importance in both education and life (229). Submissions from one community thought that teaching British history is essential to develop a concept of Britishness, while another community believed that

a condition of cultural plurality may demand, if not as many histories as there are cultures, then certainly an approach to history which highlights diversity and the very different tales that can be told about the past, depending on where, in the cultural mix, one happens to find ones self. (229)

Some members of the Association of Lecturers thought that the National Curriculum should promote 'Britishness' but accepted that this cannot be prescribed and that it is a problematic concept in an age of mass migration and global communication. The Association for the Study of Primary Education submission claimed that primary education aims for pupils to eventually become full members of society with an understanding of values which can only be taught by the non-core Foundation Subjects, because historical and social thinking are not the same as thinking in other subjects.

There is some reflection (15) on whether 'educating children's consciousness and understanding of global trends, fears and threats should be part of the work of schools, given that these are moral, political and economic issues and schools are wary of the charge of indoctrination' and it is recognised (194) that debate is needed on exactly what, in the context of primary education, the 'global dimension' should mean. Scottish curriculum for excellence sees global awareness, not as free-floating but as an essential feature of citizenship – a relatively new idea.

Karin Doull and Susan Townsend investigate 'The Issues and Implications of "Big Picture" History: Deconstructing the "Long Arc of development"'. They argue for the importance of developing wider historical perspectives for children to begin to make relevant connections, locally nationally and globally. They consider issues that will have to be taken into account in whole school planning and in transitions between Key Stages. Theory is related to narratives from student teachers, who discuss the constraints and opportunities they have encountered in considering this theme. Strategies are considered to increase understanding of the relationships between different groups and societies and how these have affected change.

The Cambridge review and chronology: is it time to refocus the debate?

Throughout the Review, there is emphasis on the importance of careful teacher planning, on children being enabled to achieve their potential and on promoting enjoyment and a love of learning. The Review (222) also endorses the methods of mental calculation and regular mental-oral practice to improve mathematical fluency. Hodkinson and Smith draw on sound empirical evidence from their research that teachers need to plan for regular, focused teaching of chronology skills through enjoyable activities which enable children to grasp complex temporal concepts through whole school approaches.

The Cambridge review, history and its links across the curriculum

'History is a synoptic subject; it has an integrative function, uniting meanings from other disciplines into a unified perspective, because the value of history is that it teaches us what man has done and what man is' (Phenix 1964, 235–245). Yet there are also good reasons for teaching history as a discrete subject. The Cambridge Review recognised this conundrum and argued that curriculum breadth and balance is not in opposition to attainment in the core subjects, and in fact it may positively benefit overall attainment in all subjects; disciplinary knowledge and thematic approaches are not mutually exclusive (245–247). The report argued strongly that to polarise disciplinary and thematic approaches is a 'false and pernicious dichotomy' (2010, 243). Contemporary research also indicates that cross-curricular and thematic forms of curriculum management need not traduce the key disciplinary concepts and skills linked to history (or other subjects) as long as practitioners have sufficient knowledge and awareness of history, and high levels of skill when conducting planning and assessment strategies. James Percival, in *History and its links across the curriculum* presents the findings of a substantial research project based on analysis of case studies. Three models on linkage between history and other subjects are presented and discussed. The research suggests that cross-curricular and thematic forms of curriculum management need not undermine the key disciplinary concepts and skills linked to history.

Conclusion

The papers in this edition consider how we can challenge a curriculum dominated by national tests in mathematics and English. How can we teach history from the children's points of view: what do they say, how do they interpret the past, what do they find interesting, how can we aim for excellence? Is it possible to make children and their communities central, but also give them an understanding of the wider world? How can children understand the chronology or make meaningful connections between history and the rest of the curriculum? This issue also demonstrates the ways in which all these dimensions of learning history are interdependent and coherent. It suggests at least some of the ways in which we can challenge a narrow and utilitarian curriculum.

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