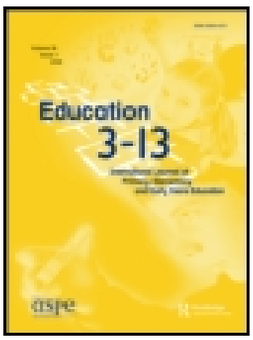

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Charlotte Mason, history and outdoor education and her relevance today

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to raise awareness of the relevance of the philosophy of Charlotte Mason to primary school education today. First a biography of Mason, tracing her development from an orphaned pupil apprentice to an internationally influential figure, puts her philosophy in context. This is followed by an overview of her philosophy, with a focus on outdoor learning and on learning in history. Then three case studies of outdoor history investigations are analysed to explore the ways in which they reflect both the English National Curriculum and Mason's philosophy. First, eight-nine-year-old children visit Stone Age sites, then five-to-seven-year-olds visit a medieval castle and finally a group of primary school teachers investigate a seventeenth-century farmhouse during a residential weekend. The paper explores how Mason's philosophy and practice can enrich the teaching of history within contexts of the English Curriculum.

KEYWORDS

Charlotte Mason; liberal education; mechanistic education; educational philosophy; outdoor education; National Curriculum for England

Introduction

As the year 2023 marks the anniversary of the death of Charlotte Mason (1842-1923), it is timely to consider how she worked to develop life-enhancing possibilities of education in contrast to the materialistic and mechanistic policies of the revised Code of Education introduced in 1862. Her philosophy evolved from her life-long practice, educating children and adults. It reflects ideas of philosophers since the time of Plato and of great minds of her time, such as Ruskin, Arnold and Wordsworth and anticipates ideas of the constructivists who followed her (Cooper forthcoming). She wrote extensively about her ideas in the six volumes of the *Home School Series*, republished in 2017 (Mason 2017), and in articles for the *Parents' Review*, a magazine which she founded and continued from 1890 to 1974 (www.amblesideonline.org).

Who was Charlotte Mason?

A recent, well-researched biography adds substantially to what was previously known about Mason (Combs 2015). She attended a church school at tuppence a week and qualified as a pupil-apprentice when she was twelve. Although orphaned at fourteen she progressed to become a pupil teacher and passed her pupil teacher finals at seventeen, while also teaching sixty-nine boys and forty-six infant girls, as the headteacher was ill. The following year, she passed the challenging Queen's scholarship exams for the Home and Colonial Training Institution. Here she encountered the enlightened ideas

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of Pestalozzi: learning from nature and through the senses; scientific enquiry; that children assimilate knowledge through their own efforts, not through instruction; the notion that children are qualitatively different from adults; and that children acquire good habits and dispositions through love, not fear. She passed her first-year exams and teaching practice but as throughout her life, she was 'delicate' and was advised, aged nineteen, to accept a position in an Infants' School in Worthing, where she gained her teaching qualification. The Revised Code of Education was introduced in 1862 and the school had to rely on rote learning, testing and inspections. She remained in this school until 1873, latterly as a respected headmistress.

In 1869, Mason was living with her friend Miss Brandreth and helping her to look after her brother's young children while he was in India. She was introduced to the culture and comforts of middle class living and the children's curiosity and creativity led her to a belief in home education. Ideas came to her of the possibility of a new type of school, remodelled on the National School but with transformational teaching. She read letters in which teachers expressed a dream for social standing and teaching experience. She visited London schools and art galleries and now had the qualifications to lecture to 'gentle woman students'.

From 1874 to 1878, Mason was a senior governess at Chichester College for gentlewomen, teaching the daughters of clergy and professional men. The college had a model practising school, like that in Worthing, catering for 130 children, which allowed students to extend their teaching experience. One student wrote that under dear Miss Mason's teaching, her views of life changed and that she now saw that teaching might be a very noble profession, not a mere trade and longed to put her theories into practice (Combs 2015, p. 126). From 1878 because of her heart and need for rest, Mason travelled in Europe, visiting Boulogne, Paris, Basel, Lucerne and the Alps. Then she travelled around England by train, taking walks and preparing her history of the counties of England.

From 1879 to 1888, Mason was in Bradford. She visited her Home and Colonial friend, Lizzie Groveham, who had married and moved to industrial Bradford and opened Mornington House Ladies School. Mason's new cause became parent education. She gave a series of lectures which were published. Reviewers commended the feature of physical and psychological teaching, of habit forming and character education, the importance of experiencing nature and empirical investigation, lively lessons in history, geography and the arts. Mason met the wives of wealthy merchants and of bishops. Mrs Emeline Steinthal, who had three children and was the wife of a Rochdale worsted merchant, opened her drawing room to discuss a scheme for a parents' educational union to vitalise educational principles for a wider audience. In 1887, two hundred invitations were sent to influential citizens in Bradford to launch the Parents' Education Union with a series of summer field excursions and lectures. The president was Mrs Boyd Carpenter, wife of the Bishop of Rippon and beloved by Queen Victoria. After Lady Aberdeen spoke at four of the lectures, the membership doubled. The Principal of Newham College Cambridge, Oscar Browning, Fellow of Kings, convened a Cambridge Committee. Frances Buss and Helen Gladstone, the wife of the Bishop of London, joined.

Mason needed an income, so she launched the *Parents' Review* magazine and the Parents' National Education Union (PNEU) in 1907, which posted her curriculum and supporting resources to home educators worldwide. By 1892, this gave her the finances necessary to buy a large eighteenth-century house in Ambleside, Cumbria, The House of Education, (later Charlotte Mason College), which she ran according to her philosophy until her death in 1923.

The philosophy of the 1862 Code of Education

The seeds of Mason's philosophy were sown in her days at the Home and Colonial College. Her ideas differed considerably from state's purpose prescribed in the revised Code of Education (1862). After the passing of the Code, annual grants were given to schools to support children of the labouring poor, depending on an inspector's report. The grant consisted of eight shillings for every scholar over eight who attended more than 200 days, subject to an examination, and six shillings and sixpence if they were under six years old, based on an inspector's report. However, this grant was

reduced to two shillings and eight pence for every scholar that did not satisfy the inspector in reading, the difficulty depending on the Standard (class) he was in and no one could take the test twice. The tests in reading, writing and arithmetic were precise. Reading in Standard I involved a narrative in monosyllables. In Standard II, it required reading one of the narratives in an elementary reading book. By Standard VI, a pupil was asked to read a short paragraph in a newspaper. The school was also fined, for example, if the girls were not taught plain needlework. There were fines if the inspectors found faults in instruction or discipline or if there was not one pupil teacher for every fifty pupils. It was also necessary for the principal teacher to keep a daily logbook, which was inspected.

Mason's philosophy

By contrast, Charlotte Mason wrote in the *Parents Review* (Mason 1896) how much she admired Matthew Arnold, who had been appointed Inspector of Schools in 1858, 'in which he did much good work but which was extremely irksome to him and as he afterwards confessed, almost insupportable … he grieved to see the dismal swamp in which middle class education was allowed to flounder and that of the working class insufficiently organised'. He continually argued that well-educated teachers 'are a thousand times better security than the mere examination test, on which, with such ignorant confidence, we are now dependent'. In Arnold's view, people should be brought in contact with ideas and if Britain could not facilitate for all members of her society full and free expansion it could not trust the sorting forces of the marketplace.

Key ideas

Mason developed her liberal philosophy as an alternative to the behaviourist and mechanistic school practices of her day. This is important because today we encounter problems similar to those Mason did in the nineteenth century. The approaches marked by rote learning, competition, rewards and punishments are often preferred by politicians, while many teachers would prefer transformative and holistic educational experiences. Political influence and central control over education are as real today as in the nineteenth century, albeit less extreme. Teachers have little encouragement to question how to teach.

Mason said, 'It seemed to me that we teachers had unconsciously elaborated a system of marks, prizes, and the like and yet eliminate that knowledge-hunger, itself a quite sufficient incentive to education' (Mason 2017. Vol. 6. p. 47).

Mason did not believe in knowledge transferred from teacher to learner. She said that the mind is not 'a sac to hold ideas' but has an appetite for all kinds of knowledge which it can digest and assimilate. (Vol. 6. p. 9). She placed much emphasis on active learning and what she called 'living ideas' (Vol. 1. pp. 135–68). Her First Principle was that children are 'persons, not a blank slate to be written on or "embryonic oysters" who have the potential of becoming persons. They are already persons'.

Mason felt that learning is centred on the conscious needs of the individual and she advocated 'active learning'. 'The mind concerns itself only with thoughts, imaginations, reasoned arguments; it declines to assimilate the facts unless in combination with its proper pabulum [intellectual sustenance] it, being active, is wearied in the passive attitude of a listener, a child is 'bored by the discursive twaddle of the talking teacher' (Vol. 6. pp. 123–15). Mason saw the role of the teacher as providing children with rich experiences, then facilitating and guiding their learning. She felt that children should enjoy using new concepts. She emphasised that education is not only to be got from books but thought that children should be introduced to the best books and the best art that has been provided (Vol. 6. p. 48). Children, senses, feelings and the natural environment are important.

Mason encouraged children to delight in words. She attached importance to using sophisticated concepts rather than 'baby language' (Vol. 2 p. 226). She gave an example of a young child who was familiar with sophisticated vocabulary. He told his grandmother about his visit to a railway station. She asked him if he had seen a 'puff-puff'. 'No grandmama', he replied. I saw a locomotive'.

'Mason preceded ideas of the early constructivists, Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner. Her approach to learning holds that people actively construct their own meaning, based on their experiences and reflection on these experiences and that meaning is influenced by both prior knowledge and new events, building new knowledge on the foundation of previous learning and modifying it when it is contested by new information. She did not believe in giving children ready-made opinions. She believed in 'playful learning'. Mason thought that children should learn the key concepts of a discipline, the questions to ask and how to answer them.

Learning in the outdoors

Mason believed that intimacy with nature makes for personal well-being (Vol. 1. pp. 54–72). Children should know the names of wild plants and where they grow. They should know the names of trees and the differences between them, their leaves, flowers and fruit (Vol.1. pp.51-2). They should learn from natural things in their own places, not from books and they should work outdoors, 'but pray, let it not be a grind'. A child can learn a great deal in this way without feeling under pressure. (Vol. 1. p. 55). Children should learn to classify plants, the similarities and differences between them (Vol. 1. p. 64) and in doing so their vocabulary increases. She regards classification as one of the highest qualities of the human intellect. Through such study, she said, a child learns concentration, discrimination and reverence for life. A child, she says, learns through senses: taste, smell, touch and hearing. A great sense of beauty comes from early experience of nature, an aesthetic sense of the sublime and the harmonious, without verbal instruction. The teacher gives a name, if asked for, but without formal instruction, to allow children to know and delight in natural objects and to build up information on which structured teaching could be based later (Vol. 3. p. 237). Outdoors a child learns about the weather, sun, rain, wind and direction. Winter walks are as necessary as summer walks and rain does no harm if children are suitably clothed (Vol 1. p. 87). She says, 'thinking comes with practice … a child must get in the way of thinking why he should think for himself … every walk should offer some knotty problems for the child to think about (Vol. 1. p. 153) and 'Any teaching which does not leave a mental image – an idea – has missed its mark. Ideas generate new ideas (Vol. 1. p. 173). Children should learn about commonly used tools. Geography outdoors nourishes the mind and furnishes the imagination, the mind with pictures and becomes a charming occupation of the child's day. Plans must be carefully used as children develop a sense of place (Vol 1. p. 276).

Learning history

Mason says that history should not be taught in outlines but should focus on a period and children should attempt to understand how people may have thought at that time (Vol. 2. pp. 279-295). She saw imagination as enabling you to get in touch with people of all periods and places. She thought that children should gather some knowledge which they should carry on to some extent themselves. What children need is graphic details on which their minds can reflect and that when talking about what they have learned they tell it in their own way, because they have internalised it. She considered that children should learn by direct experience but in the process learn the principles of a discipline (Vol 2. p. 127). She did not approve of history books because she felt children should not be given ready-made opinions because what they need is detail, on which their imaginations can work. She makes a distinction between information and knowledge. What a child digs for in books is his own interpretation, not simply a memorisation because what is poured into his ear without interpretation floats out as lightly as it came in. Children retell accounts, not as the

author did but through their own personalities and experiences because the account has originated in the child's own mind and so is original.

Three case studies

The first case study was undertaken in a school in Kendal where eight students were on teaching practice. The enthusiastic and experienced class teacher, the students and the students' university tutor worked together to plan the visit and follow-up work in school. The aim was to plan an interesting four-day unit of work on history for children across the five-to-seven-year age range. Some years later, the tutor was planning an international conference that involved detailed research, to mark the centenary of Mason's death, based on the six volumes of *The Home School Series*, reprinted in 2017 (Mason 2017). This deepened knowledge of her philosophy and made it clear that her ideas would resonate strongly with teachers today. Yet Mason's work is not widely known, except among home educators. This is possibly because her writing style is old-fashioned, her ideas are scattered, piecemeal through *The Home School Series* and her articles in the *Parents' Review* magazine, which can be found at the Armitt Library in Ambleside and are digitised (www.amblesideonline.org). For these reasons the following case studies, which had been planned within the statutory requirements of the English National Curriculum (DFE 2013), are analysed through the lens of Mason's philosophy and practice, demonstrating that it is possible to teach the National Curriculum in exciting and innovative ways, which reflect the enlightened educational ideas of Mason.

Case study 1: 5–7-year -olds visit Kendal Castle

The children visited the ruined castle in order to role-play a banquet that might have been held there in Medieval times. In school, in the morning, each child drew and labelled their concept of a castle to establish what they already knew. Although based on fairy tales some drawings had labelled draw bridges, moats, towers and ponds. Then the class discussed what they would like to find out about Kendal Castle, which is on a hill overlooking the town. The teacher sorted their ideas into four enquiries.

- What can you see from the castle mound now and what might you have seen a long time ago?
- Why was it built here and how and where could you attack the castle?
- How might they cook, wash, get water and have banquets.
- Survey of the site; what was the castle built of? Measure the curtain wall, windows and doorways.

In the afternoon, the children set off for the castle, equipped with clipboards and pencils, in four groups, each supported by two student teachers. Students scribed for younger children, some children labelled drawings, 'toilet' 'chimney' 'fireplace'. Some wrote notes under headings: 'dungeon – scary, very dark, smelly'. 'Great hall-eat food, parties, entertainment'. Cellar – stone shelves. They put food here to keep it fresh'. Stream – water for drinking'.

The following day in school everyone did research to find out more about life in medieval castles, in order to recreate a banquet. Some read children's books, some looked at pictures in books, to copy a small item of dress to wear at the ball, for example a belt or a sword. Some used images in a book on medieval receipt book to make models of food – a plate full of squirrels and eggs in jelly were memorable examples. Some made brass rubbings of a medieval lady and a knight, gradually changing their interpretation of what the image was, as historians do. 'I think it's a boat'. 'No, look. Here's a face … '

Some wrote stories modelled on fairy stories, to be read during the banquet. Some discovered the role of jesters and made up medieval jokes, based on jokes they knew. ('Why did the chicken cross the drawbridge?') The teacher taught everyone to dance to medieval music taken from You tube. A group of older children decided to write an information board about the castle because they found

the one on site too difficult. The headmaster attended the banquet on the final day, in role as the king.

Analyses

Reflections of the National Curriculum

The visit to Kendal Castle and the follow-up reflected the National Curriculum in that it raised children's awareness of the past, involved using common words and phrases about the passing of time and helped them understand some of the ways in which we find out about the past and ways in which it is represented. They used historical terms concerned with the passing of time and concepts no longer used such as 'curtain wall' and dungeon'.

Reflections of Mason's general philosophy

The project also reflected Mason's general philosophy of how children learn. She saw learning as an active process. She saw children 'as persons'. In this project, they initiated the enquiries before the visit and investigated and recorded them in their own ways. In reconstructing the ball, they decided which aspects they wanted to plan and how they would do it. Their imaginations were involved and they assimilated the information from the visit and books. It was not bolt-on, received information. They learned about a medieval castle in a context. Their active learning created 'living ideas' based on rich experiences. Mason said that children construct their learning based on prior knowledge and new events. The children demonstrated their initial knowledge of castles then built on it during the visit and extended this back in school. They were given no ready-made opinions but 'dug for information in books'.

Reflections of Charlotte Mason's philosophy in history education

'Imagination does not descend full grown – it grows by what it gets. Children should have the joy of living in other persons' lives in other times. Stories, history and geography cultivate their conceptual powers' (Vol. 1. p. 153). Children should get their first notions of a given period, not from historians but from themselves (Vol. 2. pp. 279–95). The children were given graphic details on which their minds could reflect, at the site and in preparing for the banquet. They had direct experience of a medieval source. They were also encouraged to talk about what they learned in their own way, because they had internalised it and were able to use historical terms they had been introduced to such as chapel, dungeon, attack and defence. The focus was on interpretation, not knowledge. Mason encouraged children to learn from sites. She describes how she took children to St. Paul's Cathedral and to Donne's Monument (Vol. 5. p. 133). Mason also encouraged using role-play and drawings to record historical experiences.

Case study 2: eight- to nine-year-olds find out about neolithic times

This case study was planned by the children's class teacher, in a school is South London and supported by the advisory teacher for geography and outdoor studies. This study was also within the context of the National Curriculum. It was intriguing later to explore ways in which it might reflect Mason's ideas, although the teacher, when planning it, had not heard of Charlotte Mason. The school was on a new estate of private houses and had an inspirational headmaster. Parents were supportive and enjoyed coming on both the site visits described. The first visit was quite close to the school but the second visit was 120 miles away, yet no-one complained about the journey.

First visit

One very windy October afternoon with pale sun and evidence of approaching showers the class visited Farthing Down, an important archaeological site in Surrey, consisting of steep earth and chalk banks, where Stone Age artefacts had been discovered. This was an introduction to The Stone Ages. They stopped to consider why the path up the Down was whitish with some sharp stones. It was easy to identify this as chalky soil with flints as the geologist visiting the school had previously explained how the chalk and flint had been formed and the children had been introduced to how long ago the Stone Ages were and had discussed some drawings of stone age tools and weapons, how they might have been made and for what purposes. The children were introduced to the idea that often little could be known about the distant past and it was important to make suggestions about how things might have been made and used and that people might have equally good but different ideas. When they reached the top of the Down there was time to explore, run around and get warm and have some thoughts and chats about how neolithic people could have lived in this place.

Then everyone gathered to share questions and suggest answers. This is a synopsis of the discussion.

'However did they keep warm?'

'They might have skinned animals and made them into clothes?' 'How would they cut them out, sew them together, what might they look like?'

'What kind of skins could they find?' 'Rabbit's?' 'Hare's?' 'There might be deer'. 'Or would there be wild boars?' 'Horses?' 'Might there be mammoths?' 'Or bison?'

'But how would they catch these animals?' 'Dig a pit?' 'Throw rocks at them?'

'We saw tools they made'. 'Yes, cut the skins with flint knives … we saw a stone needle … ' 'And they had weapons – arrows – axes and they could cut the animals up with tools -the scrapers … '

'What might they eat?' 'Obviously the animals – but would they eat them raw?' 'No, they could cook them on a fire'. 'But how would they make the fire?' 'They could chop down a tree with an axe'. 'Yes, but there aren't many trees up her?' 'Why not?' How could big trees grow up here there's hardly any soil?' 'But they could gather fallen branches from down the bottom'. 'OK but how could they make fire?' 'They could rub flint and wood together until it sparked then set light to a dry twig. You could rub pointed hard wood into a hole in soft wood and that would spark … '

'Would they just roast it in the fire? That visitor told us that the soil at the bottom is clay – they could make a clay pot and bake it in a fire then cook the meat in the pot … '

'If there's clay at the bottom that's wet-maybe there's a stream. If so, they could catch fish to eat as well'. 'What else might they eat?' 'Berries, fruit, nuts -What kind of berries? 'Rose hips, Rowan, blackberries?'

'It's beginning to rain and this wind is getting worse. We might find a tree to shelter under lower down'. 'No, it's soggy down there. Remember the mud'. 'They'd stay up here where its dryer'. 'What sort of a tree should we look for – the leaves are off most of them'. 'We need a fir tree' – Pine!' 'No. The branches on a Christmas tree point upwards'. 'Let's see what we can find … They find a spruce tree with its broad green leaves reaching nearly to the floor. Get around this side, the rains driving in from the opposite direction'. 'What direction's that?' 'Can't say. There's no sun to work it out' Under here it's warm – and dry … ' They all huddle under the spruce tree. 'How could we make it comfier?' Suggestions are made about collecting ivy or Old Man's Beard or ferns to make beds. But the rain eases off and they decide they would rather go home!

Second visit

The Stone Ages Unit included three more lessons in school, discussing sources from the Middle and the New Stone Age, a lesson on cave paintings, plans of stone circles and glyphs (signs) and a visit to Grimes Graves in Norfolk, a vast area of neolithic flint mines, with forty pits connected by tunnels.

First, they watched an archaeologist make a flint hand axe using a reindeer antler, then, wearing hard hats, climbed down a ladder into the mine. This stimulated all sorts of questions. 'How did they get the flint out of the chalk', 'How did they lift it up from the mine, did they make tools at the site, why did they need so many …

Follow-up in school

At the end of the Stone Ages unit, in groups of four, with no adult present, children recorded their discussion of a slide showing four flint hand axes. A brief extract from one group discussion (Table 1) shows how, with further reflection, children developed the discussion from Farthing Down.

Table 1 shows how children introduced reasonable hypotheses not previously discussed, how they took each other's thinking forward. They used newly learned vocabulary: tools, flint, hand-axes and trade. They corrected each other. 'They must have kept making them, to replace them. 'No, they could sharpen them like a pencil'. This extract demonstrates that the knowledge was not being transferred from teacher to learner. Because the children had assimilated their discussion and experiences on the visit, they were able to internalise the experience, draw on it and develop further ideas original to them. Through active learning they acquired 'living ideas'. They are individuals, 'persons'. They used thoughts, ideas and reasoned arguments.

Analyses

References to the English National Curriculum for history at Key Stage 2

At Key Stage 2 children should be taught about Britain from the Stone Age to the Iron Age and an in-depth study related to this period. They should construct informed responses that involve thoughtful selection of relevant historical information and understand how our knowledge of the past is constructed from a range of sources. Teachers should combine overview and in-depth studies to help pupils understand the complexity of sections of the content.

Reflections of Mason's philosophy

Again, knowledge is not transferred from teacher to learner, but the learner had to assimilate knowledge through direct experiences (Vol. 6. p. 9). A key principle is that children are persons, not a blank slate to be written on. The mind requires thoughts and arguments not facts and is bored by simply listening to the teacher. Teachers must give them rich experiences and facilitate their learning in the key enquiry processes and concepts of a discipline. In this case study they are again making inferences about sources.

Table 1. Extract from a recorded group discussion at the end of the Stone ages unit, with no adult present.

They're **flint hand axes**	Did they **trade** flint	They could have cut up trees	They use **tools**. They knew how to make them. And made other things. They must have explained to others how to make them. They were intelligent.
They had control over their hands	They must have kept making them – to replace them.	No. They could keep sharpening them – like a pencil.	They might have shared jobs. One might have made the blade and one made the handle.
Would they trade the flint for money? Or get something else?	Their skills developed gradually. They learned and explained things. They might have different tools for different animals	They had to concentrate. They're different sizes and shapes. That might tell us what different animals they killed.	They could kill people who threatened them too.

Reflections of Mason's philosophy of learning outdoors

Children are beginning to learn the names of trees in the places where they grow and some of their characteristics and the similarities and differences between them. They are experiencing weather, and certainly 'walking in all weathers' (Vol. 1. p. 87). And they are learning to think for themselves. Every walk should ask knotty problems for the child to think about. Since Mason makes the point that every child should learn about commonly used tools these visits are a good introduction to thinking about tools.

Reflection of Mason's philosophy of learning history

In the on-site discussion and the later recorded discussion with no adult present the children seem to be 'at home in that period and understanding how people at the time may have been thinking (Vol. 2. pp. 297-295). Children are getting their first notions of the period, not from historians but from original sources (Vol. 2. p. 285). They are not accepting conclusions without demur but getting graphic details on which their minds can work.

Case study 3: a residential weekend for primary school teachers

The third case study was planned and managed by two Local Education Authority advisory teachers. It also took place some time ago and was not previously thought of as a reflection of Mason's ideas. If teachers are to understand and be converted to including Mason's thinking in their pedagogy, they need to experience it themselves. To confirm that such a case study had this effect on the participating teachers and that it might form a model for further in-service training, it was analysed to trace ways in which it reflected Mason's ideas. The idea of Mason which most endorsed this is her idea that learning must be fun! And it was.

The intention of the weekend was for practising teachers to explore ways in which they could teach history through a site visit, making deductions and inferences from a variety of sources. The visit was to Bore Place, a Manor House in the High Weald of Kent, dating back to the 1500s and constantly updated. Sixteenth-century receipts were found in advance by one group on a visit to the British Museum, in order to prepare a sixteenth-century feast. Costumes for men and women were borrowed from a local drama group and worn with much hilarity throughout the weekend. Teachers worked on enquiries in groups. These included foraging and identifying edible plants, learning how to date and to layer an ancient hedge, and how and why trees were coppiced. There was a visit to a local brickworks and clay bricks were made from Wealden clay. There were attempts to identify the age of different parts of the house by recognising different types of brick bonds. A sixteenth-century map was used to find that the boundaries were similar then as in the sixteenth century, to identify the rabbit warren and the fishponds and recognise their importance in providing food in the winter. The teachers visited the ruined oast house and found out how hops are made into beer and read documents about the owners and events related to the house in the sixteenth century. One document, for example, suggested why the boundaries had not extended, as it described that it took numerous oxen to pull the family to church over the heavy clay soil; transport had been difficult. They saw cows being milked by hand as they always had been and practised threshing on the barn floor. They tried to discover how the house had been altered by looking at the rafter and perlin roof. Some people were frustrated when an authority on timber-frame buildings concluded that it was impossible to know … a salutary lesson that sources cannot always answer our questions. The final feast was most enjoyable. It included a rabbit from the grounds.

Analysis

A variety of historical sources was investigated through historical enquiry: maps, receipts and documents, the timber frame house and bricks in the house, the threshing shed and the oast house, tools for coppicing, hedge-layering and dating and the findings were actively learned and assimilated. The various trees and shrubs in the hedges were identified as part of the hedge-dating; the number of species in a thirty-metre stretch dates the age of the hedge in centuries. Learning, as Mason said, must be playful. Knowledge, which was actively learned through discussion, reasoning and imagination was assimilated in different ways by different people and the natural environment was part of this process. The experiences were rich and guided by experts. The ways in which the participants developed similar projects with their classes was demonstrated in a subsequent exhibition.

Conclusion

Mason was inspired by William Wordsworth and also shared the ideas of many philosophers before her and educationalists who came after her. This reinforces the significance of Mason's contribution to contemporary pedagogy. Wordsworth, like Mason, valued children as persons, the importance of nature and learning outdoors, love of great literature and of words and having time for reflection. Mason quotes Wordsworth frequently. Her quotations from Wordsworth's poems reveal his joy in childhood are linked to her writing on early childhood education over forty years. Mason quotes lines from "Ode to Immortality, Recollections of Early Childhood," that claim that children see what others do not see, because they do not comprehend mortality (Vol. 1. pp.11-12). She quotes a later passage, in which Wordsworth praises the attributes of children, whom he sees as living in an ideal and joyful world. The poem also focuses on how an adult develops from the child and how being inspired by nature inspires a deeper connection with humanity. She quotes (Vol. 3. pp. 191-3) Wordsworth's "Prelude", admiring his joy in exploring in the outdoors while at Hawkshead School. She writes that his observations on a wren show the importance they both attached to observing natural things with accuracy (Vol. 3. p.195).

Plato (427-347 BCE), like Mason, thought that learning is enhanced if the teacher has a love for the pupils. On Mason's death it was said, 'wherever she went the charm of her presence brought sunshine and happiness. She made all about her feel at ease, then acted as a magnet for drawing out all that was good in them' (Combs 2015, 6). Plato also said that knowledge acquired under compulsion has no hold on the mind and that education should not be spoon-fed, because it fosters growth through questioning and problem solving. Aristotle (384-322 BCE), said that we learn actively, by doing things (Aristotle 2009). Locke (1632-1704) believed that we learn through the joy of discovering the world, being curious and asking questions (Locke 2000). Rousseau (1712-1778) said that we learn through nature and 'things' (Rousseau 1762) as did Pestalozzi (1746–1827), who also attached importance to the interests and needs of the child and Froebel (1782-1852) who favoured outdoor learning and children representing their ideas in their own ways.

Dewey was the first to say that children actively construct their own meaning, based on their experiences (Dewey 1938). This notion was built on by Piaget, who said that children digest and assimilate information from their experience of the environment. Bruner thought that the environment should be explored through physical engagement and through images and symbols and saw learning as cumulative, building on what went before (Bruner 1966). Vygotsky saw the role of the teacher as inspiring and facilitating (Vygotsky 1962). Each of the early constructivists supported the idea of learning through play. Recently, Deheane working in neuroscience, endorsed the views of the constructivists (Dehaene 2020).

It is suggested in this paper that teachers today experience the same tensions as Mason did, between statutory requirements and their personal philosophies, or maybe they have not developed a personal philosophy. It is not claimed that current statutory constraints are as draconian as the 1862 Code, but payment by results, frequent testing and inspections do affect professional standing

and school status and do not encourage teachers to develop originality and enthusiasms. It has also been suggested that this can be done within compliance to statutory requirements and it is even likely that test and inspection results might endorse the advantages of this, as well as the richer experiences and mental health of pupils. Learning in the outdoors is at the heart of current thinking, seen, for example, in the work of The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom. In the centenary of her death, it seems timely to reacquaint ourselves with Mason's philosophy and practice.

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