Introduction

In the summer holidays of 2018 a furore arose in history education circles when the Department for Education excluded school subject departments from bidding for special curriculum funding if they used ‘enquiry-based approaches’ in their work.1 The Historical Association led a spirited response that argued for the unassailable value of a longstanding enquiry approach to history teaching and learning, constantly supported from the pages of this journal.2 The defence was accepted, but history teachers might still face scepticism from risk-averse school leaders who feel that enquiry is a controversial strategy for secondary history classrooms. We decided it would be useful to interrogate our own curriculum planning process and present the results in the form of an ‘anatomical guide’ to an historical enquiry approach that could support its defence in future. It is also always valuable to dissect your own work to understand better how it can flourish.

Our discussions ranged over the twenty or so enquiries that we have designed for schools over the past seven years and we settled on seven key features that shape our approach (see Figure 1). Five of these are universal to the historical enquiries that feature in this journal and in many departments and initial teacher education courses across the country: the enquiry question, scholarly knowledge, conceptual historical thinking, the connecting of the enquiry’s constituent lessons, and the final enquiry assessment outcome. The remaining two key elements appeared to be more particular to our own approach, although they are not without support from other quarters. We consider that an authentic historical enquiry entails certain pedagogical approaches; so for us there is a particular enquiry pedagogy. Lastly, our curriculum work as Justice to History has focused on histories that have been neglected or obscured within dominant narratives for many decades.3 Issues of social justice and fairness are paramount for us, so we include the ethic of an enquiry as an essential element of our plans.

Confirmation of our seven elements came from two fields: first, a selection of seven articles from the archives of Teaching History that demonstrated the importance of each of the chosen elements, and second, a selection of three of our enquiries that exemplify the elements in practice (see Figure 2). The former had played a part in the development of our own practice over the past decade and thus served to affirm the direction that we now commend to others. Just as Riley turned to the idea of garden design, so Mohamud and Whitburn provide readers with a powerful metaphor to enrich the explanation of each of their essential elements.

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The enquiry ethic

When Nicholas Kinloch decided to plan a short enquiry on the Aztecs back in 2003, he made a deliberate choice that would steer his students away from the familiar Key Stage 3 narratives of British history and into the underexplored realm of what he termed ‘indigenous empires’. In Kinloch’s own words, ‘the ultimate aim (was) subverting student “knowledge”’; he was seeking to achieve what we have termed ‘interrupting the psyche’. It is universally accepted that secondary school history education is not about the inculcation of one master narrative of the past, but is rather an exploration of constructed pasts, introducing students to the use of both historical sources and interpretations. Nonetheless, teachers have to select a particular focus for each of their enquiries and lessons. Which perspectives will be examined? Which sources and interpretations will be considered? Those choices make statements to our students, implicitly or explicitly, about ethical dimensions of the past and the present. Kinloch was consciously challenging white, Eurocentric assumptions of cultural superiority over allegedly primitive societies, and interrupted his students’ thinking, through ‘careful questioning’ and a dialogic process of enquiry. Many of the enquiries that we have designed and planned have shared Kinloch’s ethic in studying neglected and hidden histories and ‘interrupting the psyche’.

With our Abolition enquiry there were a number of key ethical aspects that we wanted to affirm. In preparing to lead the recent Historical Association Teacher Fellowship on Britain and Transatlantic Slavery we had worked with Kate Donington and Nick Draper on a set of principles that we believed should underpin work in schools on that topic. Inspired by the work of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance in their principles for teaching about the Holocaust, we decided on fourteen key curricular and pedagogical statements to guide teachers in designing and planning their enquiries. Race, resistance, and gender were key to our preparation of the enquiry ‘Did the Abolition Movement transform enslaved Africans into “men and brothers”?’. In developing this question, we were echoing a previous enquiry that we had constructed, which asked ‘How far did New World Slavery change Africans into Negroes?” as well as connecting with the key abolitionist refrain: ‘Am I not a man and brother?’ that accompanied the image of an African in chains. Towards the end of the enquiry, the question was amended to embrace ‘women and sisters’ as well, mirroring the later inclusion of that phrase by the Abolition Movement itself in the 1820s. There was some discussion among colleagues in the Fellowship programme as to whether the question should include women from the outset, but there was no dominant opinion, and the...
Figure 2: The anatomy of our enquiries – the *Teaching History* articles and Justice to History enquiries featuring in this article

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enquiry element</th>
<th><em>Teaching History</em> article that introduces the element</th>
<th>The Justice to History enquiry that illustrates the element</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ethic</strong></td>
<td>Nicholas Kinloch’s ‘Confounding expectation at Key Stage 3: flower-songs from an indigenous empire’ in <em>Teaching History</em> 112 (2003)</td>
<td>Did the Abolition Movement transform enslaved Africans into ‘men and brothers’?</td>
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<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Rachel Foster and Kath Goudie’s ‘“Miss, did this really happen here?” Exploring big overviews through local depth’ in <em>Teaching History</em> 160 (2015)</td>
<td>Did the Abolition Movement transform enslaved Africans into ‘men and brothers’?</td>
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<td><strong>Question</strong></td>
<td>Paula Worth’s ‘Here ends the lesson: shaping lesson conclusions as an iterative process in improving historical enquiries’ in <em>Teaching History</em> 173 (2018)</td>
<td>How Islamic was the science of medieval Muslims?</td>
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<td><strong>Thinking</strong></td>
<td>Christine Counsell <em>et al.</em>’s ‘Bridging the divide with a question and a kaleidoscope: designing an enquiry in a challenging setting’ in <em>Teaching History</em> 149 (2012)</td>
<td>How can historians investigate connections between religion and Africa?</td>
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<td><strong>Pedagogy</strong></td>
<td>Ed Podesta’s ‘Helping Year 7 put some flesh on Roman bones’ in <em>Teaching History</em> 149 (2012)</td>
<td>How can historians investigate connections between religion and Africa?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lessons</strong></td>
<td>Sally Evans <em>et al.</em>’s ‘“Please send socks.” How much can Reg Wilkes tell us about the Great War?’ in <em>Teaching History</em> 114 (2004)</td>
<td>How Islamic was the science of medieval Muslims?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment</strong></td>
<td>Jamie Byrom and Michael Riley’s ‘Professional wrestling in the history department: a case study in planning the teaching of the British Empire at Key Stage 3’ in <em>Teaching History</em> 112 (2003)</td>
<td>How Islamic was the science of medieval Muslims?</td>
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</tbody>
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A new enquiry on Abolition and the Legacies of Britain's involvement in the Transatlantic Slave Trade

A decision about the wording has been left to individual schools to consider. The enquiry's ethic should belong to the educators who are undertaking the work, which means some diversity of practice. Professionally we are committed to upholding 'fundamental British values', but our ethics extend beyond those very broadly expressed notions into a firmer commitment to social justice and equalities.

The Canadian Historical Thinking Project included ethical dimensions of history as one of its 'Big Six' concepts for all work in school history, alongside familiar second-order concepts of causation, change and continuity, and significance. Although work in England has not generally followed that path, our own approach to historical enquiries behoves us to consider explicitly the ethic that we understand lies behind an enquiry. Kinloch's determination to challenge preconceptions about indigenous early modern empires and our imperative to focus on the impact of abolition on the experiences of formerly enslaved Africans would both fit the Canadian concept in their challenges to justice in the past. But does this apply to all enquiries? Some areas of the curriculum might be considered uncontroversial, but we would see issues of inclusion and social justice as lenses for consideration of all situations in the past.

Pondering the ethic of the decisions that we make in framing each of our historical enquiries can open up more authentic and rigorous approaches to diversifying privileged white male narratives of British history. Rather than designing a specific enquiry on Medieval Women, for instance, it could be more powerful to look for, and include, the women involved in traditional staples of the Key Stage 3 history curriculum: Queen Emma and the Empress Mathilda in the story of the Normans and England from 1000 to 1154, or Johanna Ferrour in an enquiry focused on the Peasants Revolt in 1381.

It is possible to consider the ethic behind an individual lesson, but there would never be enough time to do that for every single stand-alone lesson in a curriculum. Moreover, it is unlikely that one could do justice to a particular ethic in just one lesson. Our first metaphor helped us to understand the strength of enquiries as opposed to a series of even good-quality stand-alone lessons. We can see it as the difference between music albums: the enquiry is like a concept album where all the tracks have a clear connection to an overall purpose and ethic, whereas the alternative is a compilation of hits and session tracks that leave the listener with some memorable tunes but no clear unifying message for deeper thought. So, we begin our planning of any enquiry with a...
consideration of the ethic that we think should be followed throughout. Exploring the knowledge that historians have developed about the topic is the next key step in building our confidence to do that.

The enquiry knowledge

Rachel Foster and Kath Goudie brought a good deal of knowledge of the Normans in England to the task of crafting a new enquiry for their Year 7 students. But the ethic of their enquiry was focused on bringing an authentic local dimension to the history, and they found that their local knowledge was lacking. A sequence of events brought them in contact with Professor Stephen Baxter, a specialist in the history of the Domesday Book. His knowledge not only filled the gaps that they were concerned about, but also overturned the conceptual approach of their enquiry. They had planned an enquiry question to develop the students’ understanding of change and continuity: ‘What type of change did the Domesday Book bring?’ After meeting Stephen, Goudie soon identified a problem: ‘I began to see what now seems screamingly obvious. The Domesday Book did not “bring” any change at all; rather it was a mechanism through which change was confirmed, codified and recorded.’ The increase in their subject knowledge brought Foster and Goudie to a new, conceptually diverse, enquiry: ‘What was the Domesday Book really for?’

Reviewing and augmenting subject knowledge is where all planning for our enquiries moves after the ethic has been confirmed. In approaching our Abolition enquiry, we already had an appreciation of the way in which conventional school history narratives elevated the significance of William Wilberforce to unwarranted hagiographic levels, and had previously designed an enquiry with the question: ‘Why does William Wilberforce no longer receive all the credit for the abolition of the slave trade?’ But focusing on historical interpretations had left little time in that enquiry to consider the processes and impact of abolition itself. Moreover, we recognised that we had planned that work with too little knowledge ourselves of those critical features. So, we began by reading Adam Hochschild’s *Bury the Chains* and also searching in the JSTOR treasure trove of scholarly articles (see Figure 3).

Hochschild’s engaging narrative account was scholarly enough to be clear about its sources and reveal changes in historiographical accounts, but didn’t debate every aspect of the issues; it closed gaps in our knowledge as history teachers but included the personal stories from historical characters that could inspire our students. Reading a complete narrative also proves particularly helpful when contemplating an enquiry, as it makes clear the choices about knowledge that inevitably have to be made within the big picture. Whenever the history we focused on had been drawn from a range of atomised nuggets of interest and significance, we have become aware that our enquiries risked losing the coherence of the overall narrative. Sometimes the decisions mean that a nugget of subject knowledge carefully unearthed has to be ditched for the sake of the overall enquiry. That was the fate of the satirical petition that James Tytler published in 1792 called ‘The Petition of the Sharks of Africa’, revealed in a Marcus Rediker article. It was really intriguing and would have engaged students, but it couldn’t command time that was needed for the key figures of Thomas Clarkson, Elizabeth Heyrick and Samuel Sharpe, and therefore never made the final enquiry.

We have sometimes likened the process of historical enquiry in the classroom to mountain-climbing. Initially, our thoughts were focused on the idea that the enquiry question resembles the summit, as students can be ‘looking up’ at it each lesson, knowing that some progress is being made towards the final goal. The metaphor has value too in comparing enquiries with teaching stand-alone lessons, whereby, in the latter, the students are moving across the mountain sideways, being engaged with something valuable perhaps, but never actually ‘scaling’ any of the issues. But the metaphor also serves as a reflection on knowledge and the enquiry. Familiarising ourselves with knowledge of the mountain is critical for making the decision about the path of ascent. You don’t need to know every detail of the entire massif before selecting the most appropriate path for your class’s journey, but you have to be sure that the chosen route will reach a summit. Foster and Goudie had chosen the local mount on the Domesday range, and, in securing greater knowledge of the field, quickly saw that their original path was destined for a crevasse. In our first abolition enquiry we realised that we had followed a careful path, but it had reached a minor level in the range; only a more thorough grasp of the terrain could see us emerge with a more fulfilling enquiry question as our summit.

The enquiry question

An overarching question is the core idea of an historical enquiry, but its relationship with the sequence of lessons can vary enormously in practice. The most powerful enquiry questions impact on every aspect of the learning and are explicitly present throughout. When Paula Worth came to consider the position of plenaries in her history lessons, it was the pervasiveness of her enquiry question in students’ learning that became her measure of successful pedagogy. Since the conclusion of a lesson marks the gathering together of that episode in students’ thinking and links it to the other parts of the enquiry, both before and after, the enquiry question is the most effective tool for such interconnectedness. Analogously, the quality of the students’ final thoughts in a lesson is a strong indicator of the quality of the enquiry question. Worth shared an example of an A-level lesson on the late Medieval English church that floundered in its conclusion because the enquiry question had not secured the involvement of her students from the beginning; using John Dewey’s term, there was no ‘felt difficulty.’ Worth posed a key question in the article: ‘Is the enquiry question interesting enough so that the students want to keep discussing their latest take on it in their lesson conclusions or even as they leap down the stairs from the classroom?’ Having engaged more fully with the historical scholarship of Eamon Duffy, Worth eventually transformed the prosaic ‘What was the liturgical year?’ into ‘To what extent did the Church shape medieval ‘rhythms of life’? ’ One of her students, James, was heard after a lesson debating the impact of social media on our current ‘rhythms of life’ in comparison to the medieval world: felt difficulty had been secured.
Wrestling is a valuable term for the intellectual work that teachers undertake in planning their questions, particularly in conveying the pitiless approach we need towards artifice and cliché. But then, as the final words and phrasing of the enquiry question emerge from the relentless discussions we have in our planning sessions, our attention to precision reminds us of a builder with a spirit-level. It is not enough for the air bubble to be partially centred between the two lines: it has to be exactly in the middle (see Figure 1). The semantics of the question can convey the heart of the ethic and the knowledge of the history, so the time spent on the wording of the question is invaluable. This is much easier as a collaborative endeavour than as a lone struggle. Without the critical knowledge and perspectives that are shared in our teamwork, we might settle much sooner, but with a poorer result.

Our enquiry on the history of Islamic science in the Middle Ages was originally designed for a thematic Key Stage 3 history curriculum, where the final term of Year 8 was to feature three or four cases that showed how religion and science were connected in human history. Situations where tensions emerged between the two seemed easy to choose, with Galileo and Darwin instantly coming to mind, but we also wanted to consider their positive interplay. So the ethic of the enquiry was clear, and the scientific advances in the Islamic empires of the early medieval period presented a good inclusive topic for the overall scheme, chronologically and culturally. It was important for the enquiry question to combine religion and science, and convey the 'felt difficulty' we wanted the students to encounter. The initial provocative stimulus came from a sweeping judgement made by Richard Dawkins against the possibility of fruitful interchange between science and religion: 'It worries me about religion that it teaches people to be satisfied with not understanding.'

The enquiry question had to explore the possibilities of productive connections between religion and science within an historical context, so we chose: 'How Islamic was the science of medieval Muslims?' There would be a number of key personalities, both medieval scholars and contemporary commentators, featured in the lessons of the enquiry who could be connected with an answer to the question. The penultimate lesson, for instance, explored the opposition from Al-Ghazali, a conservative Muslim scholar in the eleventh century, to the stunning scientific investigations occurring in Baghdad and other cities, complicating the mainly positive religious-scientific links that the students had encountered in previous lessons. The lesson ended by
asking students ‘How would al-Ghazali have answered our enquiry question?’ We think this was the type of work that Worth was looking for: explicitly or implicitly the students were engaged in answering the enquiry question every lesson.

The enquiry’s historical thinking

When Christine Counsell, Rachel Foster and Mary Partridge worked with a group of history educators in Cyprus on an intercultural programme linking the two main divided communities on the island, they brought with them the English educational tradition of working with history as a subject built upon rigorous disciplinary historical thinking.²¹ Their short, fivelesson enquiry had to cover three hundred years of Ottoman rule of Cyprus, engaging young Cypriot learners, both of Greek and of Turkish heritages, in a very different approach to their usual processing of an official narrative. The teachers found that it wasn’t easy to identify one second-order historical concept that would do justice to the history and the pedagogy required. They went through several iterations of conventional questions, beginning with a similarity and difference question ‘What was the Ottoman period like in Cyprus?’, then on to a ‘change’ question: ‘When was Cyprus most under Ottoman control?’ Neither of these was considered comprehensive enough to do justice to the complex history. In the end, a more hybrid enquiry was chosen: ‘Why is it hard to tell the story of Ottoman Cyprus?’, embracing elements of similarity and difference, evidential understanding, and change and continuity. As we have so often found, doing justice to the complex history demanded consideration of several second-order concepts.

We recently undertook to design and plan an enquiry for Year 7 students beginning their secondary school history studies, focused on the history of Africa before European contact. As with the Cypriot students, this could often be the young people’s first encounter with the processes of disciplinary historical thinking, although the latter is not absent from the best primary school practice. We wanted to eschew the purely skills-focused work seen in many ‘What is History?’ units. The idea was to ensure that any introduction to the workings of the subject was rooted in a real historical problem and that this would be directly related to the challenges of developing more authentic and appropriate histories of Africa in the school curriculum. So the ethical stance of the enquiry was very explicit: African history should be introduced to students without a sense of victimhood or western dominance. These principles were likely to confront common assumptions about African history that have been produced through centuries of racist distortion around ideas of a ‘dark continent’; such ideas linger in contemporary psyches, which were to be seriously interrupted through the enquiry.

We chose religion in Africa as our theme for the enquiry because there are so many varied traces of religious practice left in a range of artefacts, sites and written records that could introduce the emerging history students to the potential of sources as evidence. The enquiry question was a straightforward one, intended to clarify the dual purpose of the work: ‘How can historians investigate connections between religion and Africa?’ The knowledge would be drawn from two locations on the continent and two of the major world religions that emerged there in their early centuries: the first location being Axum (in Ethiopia) and the religion of Christianity; the second being Mali and the religion of Islam. Sources included coins, funerary stelae, Greek texts, rock-hewn churches, medieval maps, and Arabic journals. The students were introduced to ideas about the strength of sources for evidence in relation to particular questions. They considered change in religion and the possible factors that caused the spread of the religions. Comparisons could be drawn between sources, and also between historical figures, particularly the Christian king Lalibela in Ethiopia and the Muslim, Mansa Musa, in Mali, ruling across the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries respectively. As a much broader kind of enquiry than usual, embracing a range of historical concepts, it gave students the opportunity to tackle an innovative and sophisticated historical investigation and see how historical thinking is ultimately holistic.

Of course, students could undertake conceptual historical thinking in stand-alone lessons, but we are convinced that the enquiry approach builds students’ confident grasp of the historical problems and the application of that thinking far better than single lessons can. We have often interviewed students after we have taught an enquiry in one of our partner schools. Reena was a Year 8 student in an east London school, and quite quiet in class, especially in the early lessons of the enquiry. When asked how she felt when she came to the first of her two history lessons for the week, on a Tuesday, she said: ‘On Tuesdays I kind of feel like when you have a really good book and you wanna know more, so I feel really enthusiastic because I wanna know more…’ Reena positioned the enquiry in a very personal way, as her book was not a set text that might be the focus of an English class; it was a ‘good book’ – a novel perhaps – that was absorbing her personal interest and commitment. It was a book that she engaged with on a personal level, and where the thinking was taking her forward each week in a way with which she felt comfortable. Historical thinking is undoubtedly challenging and often counter-intuitive, and the ‘felt difficulty’ should not present an insurmountable challenge that would deflate the students each lesson. In order for students to take up the challenges each week, pedagogy is as important as curriculum in securing their confidence and commitment.

The enquiry pedagogy

Ed Podesta also set out to design an introductory enquiry for Year 7 students that would initiate them into the disciplinary approach to history.²² His substantive focus was the Romans and he gave his enquiry a strong emphasis on sources used as evidence, providing a local dimension to archaeological processes by asking the question ‘How might a skeleton end up in a field near Reading?’ A major priority for Podesta’s department was to develop the language skills of their students as they began their secondary school history education, particularly equipping them with vocabulary that would enable them to express conceptual historical thinking. Podesta’s account of the lessons showed how vital oracy was to the pedagogy; from the very first lesson the students ‘built the idea that history is about speaking and listening to each other’s ideas as well as about reading
Throughout the enquiry the students were talking to each other in pairs and small groups, as well as responding to questions from their teacher in whole-class discussions. The department understood that they needed to work very deliberately to develop those oral skills and appropriate attitudes in their students if they were to secure effective discussions, just as a deliberate approach would be needed in preparing them for written tasks. Pedagogy in the enquiry was active and dialogic, indeed sometimes ‘theatrical’ as Podesta describes it, but it was always geared towards historical processes and did not appear gimmicky.

As with historical thinking, it would be possible to see this dialogic pedagogy in stand-alone lessons, but again it would not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enquiry Lessons</th>
<th>How Islamic was the science of medieval Muslims?</th>
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| **Lesson One**  | What are the differences between religion and science?  
Why was Ibn al-Haytham significant? |
| **Lesson Two**  | Why was science so important to the spiritual lives of faithful Muslims?  
What do the Hadiths tell us about how Islam valued science? |
| **Lesson Three** | Why was an Astrolabe important to Medieval Muslims? |
| **Lesson Four** | What was happening in the ‘House of Wisdom’ in medieval Baghdad? |
| **Lesson Five** | How far was al-Khwarizmi a star of the House of Wisdom? |
| **Lesson Six**  | What did al-Ghazali think about the impact of science on Islam? |
| **Lesson Seven** | What happened to the science of medieval Muslims? |
be harder to see it flourish in that context than across a sequence of lessons allocated to a single, consistent enquiry. The metaphor that came to mind for us in this regard was of a cat moving into a new residence, or even just a new room. It takes hours, maybe even days, for a cat to rest from cautiously exploring every inch of the place and to settle into a purring nap. Many of our students are like that. They take time to develop the confidence to take on the challenges of a new topic, or indeed a new subject area at secondary school, and a sustained enquiry gives them the opportunity to do that; they can become involved in the dynamics of an active pedagogy if they are given the necessary time. It can be easy to give up on dialogue when students are either too boisterous or too reticent in their participation; but we should persevere with patience to develop oracy in the same way that we work on students’ reading and writing. Our own whole-class interactions are usually in the form of a Socratic dialogue that presses the students to articulate and justify their thinking about sources and problems. They need to prepare themselves for that, if everyone is to have a chance of joining in, and this is usually done in small group discussions, providing an environment for lower-risk exploration of the new territory.

Speculation is important in developing students’ historical thinking in our enquiries, both in response to sources and to the enquiry question. This was very evident in Podesta’s work as well. Although we decry the notion that ‘any idea in history is valid as long as you can back it up with evidence’, we firmly believe in encouraging our students to think for themselves. Our enquiries call on students to step out of the confines of stock narratives and common perspectives. Moreover, if the students are to develop their own ideas about complex second-order concepts, they need to be given the opportunity to speculate about possible mechanisms at work, rather than being given lists of causes or changes to be learned. Slower, careful thinking is essential if students are to have agency in developing their ideas about an historical image or consider the options available to an historical actor; such thinking and subsequent discussion takes longer to build than a few minutes, or just one lesson.

The questions are the critical element of our pedagogy that help the students to develop their thinking, and several examples of how that worked in our introductory Africa enquiry are shown in Figure 4. In the first lesson of the enquiry (top left panel in the figure) the class worked with very straightforward questions about two coins, although the answers led to a very significant idea of religious change. By the last lesson (bottom right) there were more questions and the students were grappling with more sophisticated evidential understanding. The other two panels indicate how the questioning developed in the lessons in-between. The essential oral work in every lesson built the students’ confidence in tackling these questions, and their written answers formed the body of work that the students would draw on to answer the enquiry question.

The enquiry lessons
Once an enquiry has a powerful overarching question, based on a clear ethic and profound subject knowledge, and the teachers have a clear understanding of the historical thinking and pedagogy that will be appropriate, it might seem that the really hard work is over in terms of curriculum planning. But that is far from the truth. One of the greatest challenges in developing enquiries is to ensure that the sequence of lessons is knit together by a focus on that unitary enquiry question and that pertinent knowledge is selected carefully to support the emerging enquiry. Sally Evans, Chris Grier, Jemma Phillips and Sarah Colton were all trainee teachers at the University of Warwick in 2003 when they embarked on a highly innovative and demanding enquiry based on the personal records of one First World War soldier, Private Reg Wilkes. As they said: ‘In each of our lessons, we used Reg’s viewpoint to explore different aspects of the war as a whole. This led us, in the final lesson, to the overall enquiry question: “How much can Reg tell us about the Great War?”’ It would have been very easy to think that the enquiry should include key elements of the war’s narrative that might not have been directly connected to Reg’s archive, but they maintained a tight disciplined approach, keeping every single lesson geared to the overall enquiry. Each of the lessons had its own question that contributed to this ambitious approach. All the enquiries we have considered in this piece have shown how strong an enquiry can be when the lessons build in this way, and we encourage further reading of them to build an appreciation of how critical the sequence is to the overall enquiry. What so impressed us about the Warwick team was that they had already understood this principle so early in their development as history teachers.

We had taught several enquiries in a boys’ comprehensive school in central London in 2012–13, and towards the end of the summer term we interviewed two groups of the Year 7 students involved. One of them was a young man named Julius who had shown interest in the lessons, but had never been one of the more vocal active participants. When asked about the idea of working through enquiries he gave us one of our most profound metaphors:

*The enquiry question is like a puzzle, you get one big question, then the… questions are split up, and then you gather all the information from those smaller questions to answer the big question…*

*Also the enquiry question, it’s like a lock. You know on a suitcase when you turn the numbers on it, it’s like that, because you turn one number to get a part of the sequence, then you turn another, so the enquiry’s questions are like each number.*

The metaphor of the padlock made clear that each lesson had played an integral part in the learning process and Julius understood clearly that they each contributed to his grasp of the overall enquiry. It appeared important that the lessons also used questions in their approach, and this is a model that we seek to follow throughout our work. The medieval Muslim science enquiry was one that Julius studied, and each lesson steadily built up the complex knowledge about religion and science and their interplay (as shown in Figure 5).

The enquiry assessment
Michael Riley’s ground-breaking article in 2000 introduced history teachers in England to the curriculum framework
The Astrolabe of Knowledge

How Islamic was the Science of Medieval Muslims?

You are going to present Richard Dawkins with an astrolabe that contains knowledge about the science of medieval Muslims on the discs inside.

Did the British Abolition Movement change enslaved Africans into ‘men and brothers’?

How would you answer the enquiry question?

You are going to present your response to the enquiry question in the form of a five-panel frieze. Each panel should represent one of the important events/people of the Abolition story. You can design your panels in any way you want, but they must contain some writing about why the event/person shows change or continuity in the overall narrative.

The frieze must communicate your understanding of the degree of change and continuity in the Abolition story.
of an historical enquiry and has inspired us throughout the following decades, with his memorable metaphor of the garden.27 He clearly stressed the importance of the students being able to produce a meaningful answer to the enquiry question by the end of the sequence of lessons. When he and Jamie Byrom wrote their further article about curriculum planning through enquiry in 2004, they explained the final outcome of their Roanoke enquiry, and emphasised the importance of relevant and meaningful tasks for young people.28 A strong enquiry question could always be answered by a written analytical answer, but Byrom and Riley wanted to see the students’ engagement with the demands of historical thinking and contextual understanding sustained in final assessment tasks that were more creative and personal. A strong sense of personal commitment was achieved when their students were asked to write as journalists of history for the BBC History Magazine about the failure of the Roanoke colony. Their written pieces were strongly akin to analytical answers to the enquiry question but had a creative and novel context. Moreover, the students were being asked to engage for a while with the domain of a significant media outlet in the field of public history, which could enrich their wider involvement in the subject.

Sometimes we also invite students to be more creative with the final assessment activity of the enquiry. In the Medieval Muslim Science enquiry, we drew on several of the particularly memorable moments of the enquiry to shape the creative task. The idea of responding to Richard Dawkins’s denial that there could be fruitful interchange between science and religion was not executed by students in a conventional article or letter, but by designing a paper astrolabe to send to him (see Figure 6). It was made up of different circular discs, like the metal one we had shown the students in one of the lessons, wherein each disc contained knowledge that the students selected to show the different influences on the medieval Muslim scientific advances. Similarly, our Abolition enquiry ended with the task of producing a five-panel frieze wherein each panel showed a chosen figure or event in the timespan of the abolition narrative. The frieze had to convey an appropriate sense of change and continuity across the time period of 1770–1870 in the experiences of the enslaved Africans. Both these assessed outcomes had a personal element of choice for the students, and this was again nicely conveyed by Reena, using her book metaphor. At the end of the interview, she asked to add to her own unsolicited contribution about her metaphor of the book: ‘I think it might be one of those books where you can choose your own ending.’ Reena’s insightful comment reveals the importance of the agency of the students in their final assessment. The book metaphor suggested a narrative flowing through the enquiry that her teachers had shaped to secure her involvement, but the ending was something that she had to personally shape as a result of her thinking.

These outcomes show aspects of how the students have engaged with each enquiry and its overarching question, but cannot tell us holistically about each student’s progress with historical enquiry in all its elements. We echo Ian Luff’s conclusion that: ‘Our explicit assessment should concentrate only on the quality of a pupil’s response to meaningful historical enquiry.’29 It is important for students to understand how well they are progressing in their questioning, in their work with sources, in their conceptual thinking, and in their grasp of substantive knowledge; Luff himself uses a spotlight diagram to convey in striking form the array of appropriate features.30 We think a profile format might provide one way of pursuing this kind of holistic assessment, and we have begun work on such an overarching framework, but space precludes discussion of it here.

Conclusion

The dissection is now finished, and we can evaluate our practice as history teachers through these seven lenses and fashion our curriculum planning by taking them all into account. As we had hoped, the identification of the seven features helped us to understand our approach to enquiries much better than before. Much of the work consolidated our existing thinking, but there were two aspects that brought new insights that we hope can enrich our future activity. The first is the value of the metaphorical thinking that we gathered together to support our sevenfold structure. The metaphors began as a colourful means of confirming our thoughts, but as we began to apply them critically to particular areas, we found that some of the metaphors generated new elements of thinking; from being somewhat ephemeral, they had started to provide foundations of a better understanding. We have probably underestimated the potential of such metaphorical expressions in the past, and we will certainly work harder at recording and revisiting them in future. The mountain in particular proved remarkably fruitful as we revisited it after some four years. The metaphor’s representations of the relationship between knowledge and enquiry, adding to our original use of it for the value of the enquiry question, helped us clarify our position in the current knowledge debates. Our recollection of John Lewis Gaddis’s use of Frederich’s painting of the ‘Wanderer Above the Mists’ for the cover of his book The Landscape of History sealed the value of the mountain metaphor for us.31

Finally, it was the explicit idea of the ethic of an enquiry that was something of a revelation to us in shaping this article. There had certainly been ethical dimensions to most of the enquiries that we have devised, planned and taught as Justice to History, but they were usually implicit, and it wasn’t something that we would have advised colleagues to examine for every enquiry they undertook. Having reflected on our planning of enquiries, and the work of our colleagues in our partner schools, we want to advocate a focus on the ethic of an enquiry in all historical fields. This is particularly important as we continue to grapple with the selection of knowledge and its relationship with historical thinking. Our values and purpose should be an explicit consideration in our curriculum planning, or we risk leaving trails of implicit notions and unchallenged assumptions as students depart our history classrooms. We have recently started working with our UCL colleague, Alison Kitson, on identifying a range of areas of human experience that are likely to impact most emphatically on societies and individuals through the twenty-first century, and then exploring how history educators could develop enquiries that would show the importance of studying the past to make sense of those fields in the present. We have tentatively called it ‘Teaching History as if the Past Matters’.
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