

TIME FOR CHRONOLOGY?

Ideas for Developing Chronological Understanding at Secondary Level

In 2002, when the Historical Association held its *Past Forward* conference on ways forward in history teaching, there was no seminar on chronological understanding, nor was there a paper on the topic in the conference report.¹ Key Stage 3 textbooks, for all their strengths, provide few, if any, activities that explicitly develop chronological knowledge and understanding.² There has been important work at Key Stages 1 and 2 but, at secondary level, the assumption that pupils develop chronological knowledge and understanding by studying topics in chronological order still seems to hold sway.

Yet we don't expect pupils to understand how to evaluate and use sources just by reading them. We break down the process into its constituent objectives, analyse pupils' problems and misconceptions in relation to these objectives and create activities designed to overcome them. We plan for development across Key Stage 3. This doesn't seem to be happening in relation to chronology – but it has to if pupils are to develop their chronological knowledge and understanding effectively. This article therefore aims to identify the key issues that need resolving in order to develop chronological understanding at secondary level.

In doing so I am building particularly on the work of Terry Haydn, who has written several valuable pieces defining chronological understanding and suggesting possible teaching activities and on the work of Denis Shemilt, whose challenging article 'The Caliph's Coin'³ should be read by anyone involved in curriculum reform in history. Despite their work, however, holes remain, most notably the vital practical area of moving from definitions to planning across Key Stage 3 for the reinforcement of chronological knowledge and understanding that is, perhaps, the key ingredient for success. Planning issues are therefore at the heart of this article before it moves onto constructing activities and finally to suggesting some of the implications of these ideas for GCSE and for 14-19 developments. The article cannot offer certainties or promise complete success; rather it's a form of thinking aloud with the intent of encouraging debate about this extremely difficult area of history teaching.

Why Can we be Optimistic about Teaching for Chronological Understanding?

'A common misconception ... is that primary-aged children cannot understand dates and so they should not be taught'.

'... the present research does not support the contention that 'less able' children cannot utilize dating conventions.'

'... primary-aged children are seemingly capable of assimilating the conventions of dating systems. This assimilation does, through, appear to be based upon specifically-designed activities and teaching methods ...'

'... teaching activates cognition, not maturation or the relative abstraction of the concept itself.'

These quotations come from Alan Hodkinson's research into primary pupils' chronological understanding.⁴ His work is supported by that of other primary educators. For example, William Stow suggests that, after appropriate teaching:

- some 6 and 7 year-olds can identify and categorise pictures e.g. as Roman, Victorian.
- many 8 and 9 year-olds can confidently group and sequence pictures from five different periods (Romans, Tudors, Victorians, 1940s and 1990s)
- many 9 year-olds are able to place periods in the correct century and most 11 year-olds can recall and accurately use dates associated with a period.⁵

The development of chronological understanding happens neither quickly nor easily and is closely linked to both language and mathematical development but the important, broad conclusion from work at KS2 is that pupils' chronological understanding can be accelerated through clearly-targeted teaching and learning strategies. Teaching is a more significant influence on the development of chronological understanding than simple maturation or the level of abstraction of an idea. Teaching matters! But that, of course, sets us a challenge what should we be teaching about chronological understanding and how should it be taught?

WHAT IS CHRONOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING?

The table below suggests objectives for teaching and learning chronological knowledge and understanding. This overlaps with material that Terry Haydn has already put into print. However I have diverged from his structure in one significant and, I think, important way and it also seems a necessary prelude to the discussion that follows.

Suggested objectives for the teaching and learning of chronological knowledge and understanding	
<p>1) Understanding of the vocabulary of chronological understanding</p>	<p>This incorporates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) descriptive vocabulary – e.g. before, after, decade, century, millennium ii) technical vocabulary – e.g. AD, BC, the use of fifteenth century for 1485 etc iii) conceptual vocabulary – e.g. change, continuity, sequence, duration, anachronism, period, chronology <p>By the age of 14 should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - understand and use accurately terms such as BC and AD and be aware that other chronological conventions exist and the reasons for them - relate centuries to dates i.e. 1349 was in the fourteenth century - use accurately and with understanding vocabulary related to the concept of chronology, such as change and continuity, progress, sequence and duration, anachronism.
<p>2) The development of a sense of period</p>	<p>This enables students to relate, for example, the term ‘Tudor’ to people, events and developments and to undertake the reverse activity, recalling key events, people and developments when working on a named period.</p> <p>These periods include:</p> <p>Prehistory, Ancient, Middle Ages, Modern</p> <p>Roman, Saxons, Vikings, Normans, Medieval, Tudors, Stuarts, Victorians, Twentieth century</p> <p>The diagram overleaf suggests the different elements of knowledge that make up a ‘sense of period’. The level of knowledge and understanding shown by pupils will clearly vary at KS3 and as they continue to study history beyond 14.</p>

	<div data-bbox="513 264 1308 788" data-label="Diagram"> <p>WHAT IDEAS DID PEOPLE HAVE THEN? e.g. How much say did people have in government? What religions did they follow and how tolerant were they? Were all people equal? What did they know about science, geography etc.</p> <p>WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE SEEN? e.g. What did they wear? What kinds of houses/buildings? How did they travel/communicate? What kinds of work did they do? How did they use their leisure time? How did they punish crimes? How did they treat illnesses?</p> <p>SENSE OF PERIOD</p> <p>WHAT WERE THE DATES OF THIS PERIOD?</p> <p>WHO LIVED THEN?</p> <p>WHICH EVENTS TOOK PLACE THEN?</p> </div> <p>By the age of 14 should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - use terms such as prehistory, medieval, modern accurately, being aware of approximate dates for these periods - explain some of the key features, individuals and events of the major periods of British history - sequence major periods of British history and be aware of approximate dates for these periods - explain some of the key features, individuals and events of the major periods of European and world history, such as the Renaissance
<p>3) Knowledge and understanding of a framework of past events related to the Key Stage 3 programme of study</p>	<p>This can be divided into:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a basic knowledge of sequences of events and their dates an understanding of how the relationships between these events contribute to an overview, sometimes called “the big picture”. knowledge and understanding of the detailed chronology of some major events within the Key Stage 3 Programme of Study. <p>By the age of 14 should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - recount in outline the major stages in key themes identified in KS3 PoS i.e. monarchy and parliament; social changes; empires - identify key people and events in each of these stories, place them accurately on a timeline and record their dates. - describe the characteristic features of past societies and periods and identify changes within and across different periods, (AT4), make links between them (AT5) - recount the detailed chronologies of a number of key events within the Key Stage 3 Programme of Study - explain why identifying the precise chronology of events is important in explaining the outcomes of events

<p>4) The ability to set (3) above within a knowledge and understanding of a wider overview of history, both chronologically and culturally.</p>	<p>This involves an awareness of historical events beyond the time-span laid down in the KS3 Programme of Study. This could include a sense of the approximate duration of prehistory, the development of farming and the first towns, links to KS2 topics such as the Ancient Greeks and to key developments in other cultures.</p> <p>By the age of 14 should be able to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - place topics studied at KS3 within a wider historical outline, including such major features of world history as prehistory; the development of farming and the first towns; the foundation of major religions - relate topics studied at KS3 to topics studied at KS2 such as the Ancient Greeks, the Romans, Saxons and Vikings and their world history option
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Table A: Suggested objectives for the teaching and learning of chronological knowledge and understanding

The analysis in Table A is developed from the work of Terry Haydn⁶ who has suggested a four-part classification for teaching and learning about time (labelled T1-T4), summarised as follows:

- T1 – Time-dating systems and conventions and vocabulary
- T2 – a framework or map of the past over the span of time laid down in the National Curriculum
- T3 – knowledge of a number of short-term frameworks e.g. key events and chronology of the Norman Conquest or World War Two
- T4 – Deep Time, understanding of the true scale of the past from the formation of the earth onwards.

In Table A I suggest an alternative definition, retaining T1 and T4 as Objectives 1 and 4 but bringing T2 and T3 under one heading (Objective 3) because they seem to be essentially the same concept but for a difference in scale. I have added a new Objective 2, the development of a sense of period, which, logic and experience suggest, plays a crucial part in the development of chronological understanding.

Identifying a working set of definitions and objectives may seem theoretical but is a crucial prelude to thinking about pupils' learning, planning schemes of work and creating activities. Departments wishing to develop chronological understanding in a more explicit way may wish to discuss whether they agree with the content of Table

A and whether any features should be added. The following points about the four objectives may inform that discussion.

Discussion Points

1) Understanding of the vocabulary of chronological understanding

a) Why is this objective important? Hodkinson suggests that a ‘comprehensive grasp of historical time is vital to the study of history. Without it, children will fail to understand how to sequence events, periods and people chronologically.’⁷ He goes on to show that children who were taught ‘time skills’ explicitly at KS2 were able to handle them and develop a more secure historical knowledge of the periods studied.

b) How precise should these definitions or lists be? A survey undertaken by Haydn in the mid-1990s showed wide variations in Year 7 pupils’ understanding of vocabulary.⁸ This appeared to have been at least as much to do with differences between schools about which aspects of time were taught as it was to do with differences in pupils’ ability. Clearly there is a need for agreement on the specifics to be covered both in primary schools and in the early years of secondary schools. The development of longer, apparently more prescriptive, lists for discussion between link schools may benefit pupils because it reduces the chances of inadvertent omissions.

2) The development of a sense of period

This objective appears to be a vital springboard for developing and understanding frameworks of the past (objective 3). Undoubtedly some pupils can learn to sequence the names of periods (Roman, Viking, Norman etc) and the dates of events by heart but far more pupils will develop an enduring map of the past if it is built on a deeper sense of period, a knowledge of the characteristics of each period. ‘If children cannot envisage an Iceni, a Roman, a Saxon, a Dane or a Norman in any way ‘from the inside’ there could be no purpose in their being able to place them in correct order in a time chart, let alone to space them accurately. That is what inert learning means *par excellence*.’⁹

The diagram within table A offers a framework for defining a sense of period. It seems likely that a pupil’s sense of period begins with visual images of individuals, clothing, homes or events – an introductory mental package to which a label such as

‘Tudor’ can be attached. Once that package is mentally established, other individuals and events, dates, attitudes and key developments can be added. We cannot assume that a sense of period develops automatically. It needs to be taught through specific activities and by using explicit language about ‘sense of period’ so that pupils know what it is that they’re achieving.¹⁰ Regular activities sorting pictures, people and events into periods help pupils to distinguish one period from another. It is important that early periods are not simply left behind as pupils move through Years 8 and 9 but are kept in the memory bank through activities that revisit and reinforce what has been learned.

3) Knowledge and understanding of a framework of past events related to the Key Stage 3 programme of study

There is more to this objective than simply knowing dates and putting items in sequence, vital though this knowledge can be. Pupils also need to develop the ability to identify where events fit within a broad framework of history and relate those events to each other, as required by the History Attainment Target, which asks pupils to ‘make links between features within and across different period’¹¹.

However there is also more to this objective than meeting the needs of an Attainment Target. An understanding of the frameworks of history provides the ability to trace patterns of change and continuity across long periods of time, to make comparisons and to challenge comparisons made between events in the past and in the present day. Shemilt argues powerfully that ‘unless and until people are able to locate present knowledge, questions and concerns within narrative frameworks that link past with past and past with present in ways that are vivid and meaningful, coherent and flexible, the uses that are made of history will range from the impoverished to the pernicious ... History cannot be disaggregated and plundered for bits and pieces that can validly inform the present. Its value is as a big picture ... that ... gives perspective to the present.’¹²

And yet history teachers as well as politicians have been disaggregating and plundering history for bits and pieces. In our case it has not been for malign political purposes but in search of ever more intriguing and challenging enquiries to enthuse our pupils. One of the great successes of the last couple of decades has been the

development of many excellent individual enquiries but at the cost of losing track of the big picture and with it the chance to develop and reinforce pupils' chronological knowledge and understanding. To reassert a more effective balance between studies of frameworks and enquiries in depth requires a review of approaches to planning, discussed in more detail below.

One further question in relation to frameworks is when (KS3, GCSE or beyond?) students can or should be introduced to the idea that a framework is an interpretation, a product of someone selecting the events to include and the words that describe it?¹³ Currently pupils at KS3 can learn a great deal about interpretations, usually within the confines of a tightly defined topic or period. Is it reasonable by 14 to also expect pupils to analyse frameworks in the same way? Instinct suggests the answer is 'no' but that's an instinct nurtured by ideas about the importance of maturation and abstraction. Perhaps we might take our cue from work on the understanding of time, where the key is how we go about constructing teaching and learning activities in order to bring this idea within the compass of some KS3 pupils?

4) The ability to set (3) above within a knowledge and understanding of a wider overview of history, both chronologically and culturally.

While not a statutory requirement, pupils benefit in a more broadly educational way if they can relate the periods and cultures studied at KS3 to a simple framework of the broader span of human history. This need not be time-consuming, involving one or two brief activities each year that build upon each other.¹⁴

PLANNING FOR ENDURING CHRONOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING - AN AGENDA FOR DISCUSSION.

Little has been written about detailed planning across Key Stage 3 for the enhancement of chronological knowledge and understanding. This omission creates the danger that work on chronology is, at best, episodic, yet the development of pupils' chronological understanding depends upon teaching explicitly to clear objectives and regular reinforcement of understandings so that, over time, they become more sophisticated and take root in pupils' minds. This section therefore suggests an agenda for planning for chronological understanding and, in Table B, summarises some of the key issues arising from research and practice that can inform this discussion.

Agenda for Discussion

1. Links with KS2

- a) Does the development of chronological understanding form part of discussions with feeder schools?

- b) How and when should we diagnose pupils' levels of chronological understanding developed during Key Stages 1 and 2?

2. Analysing existing schemes of work

- a) Are objectives 1-4 currently identified and taught explicitly?

- b) To what extent do existing schemes of work enable pupils to develop and continually reinforce objectives 1-4 (Table A) throughout KS3?

- c) Are units of work at the beginnings and ends of each year used to enhance chronological understanding, for example, by focussing at the end of each year on which events, people and issues pupils believe to have had the greatest significance?

3. Ideas for development

- a) Where and how can we build further understanding of objectives 1 ('vocabulary') and 2 ('sense of period') into our existing enquiries? Could, for example, enquiries

focus explicitly on ‘sense of period’, making links across centuries e.g. Would you rather change places with x in the 17th century than with y in the 13th century?

b) Would pupils’ understanding of objective 3 (‘framework of past events’) be enhanced by identifying clear thematic stories which run through KS3 and which are reviewed at appropriate stages?

c) Can effective, interesting enquiries be developed which range widely over time, linking topics covered in more depth in other years of KS3?

d) Should we address objective 4 (‘a wider overview of history’) and, if so, when and how?

Key Issues Arising from Research and Practice	
Diagnosis	<p>a) Make no assumptions about what or has not been taught, learned or remembered from earlier years. Failing to do justice to the quality of earlier teaching and learning causes as many problems as assuming that pupils have been introduced to all aspects of chronological understanding.</p> <p>b) Formative assessment of pupils’ chronological understanding can be undertaken at regular intervals, not just as the beginning of Year 7. The end of Y7 and the beginnings and ends of Y8 and Y9 are natural occasions for such diagnoses but formative assessments can continue to be made informally within the context of individual enquiries</p>
Planning	<p>a) Enduring chronological understanding will be more effectively achieved if built deep into the framework of planning, rather than being added in the form of discrete exercises alongside existing units of work. Regular and systematic reinforcement is essential, focussing on teaching to explicit objectives for chronological understanding</p> <p>b) Adopting a metacognitive approach is important i.e. make objectives and vocabulary relating to chronological understanding explicit to pupils. This will also help new teachers to understand, for example, that teaching topics in chronological order is not the same as teaching for chronological understanding</p>
Sequencing and Thematic Stories	<p>a) Activities which ask pupils to sequence a series of unrelated famous events or people (e.g. Domesday Book, Agincourt, the Reformation) are unlikely to be successful because the sequence has no internal logic to help pupils sort out a story. Sequencing events and individuals from themes (e.g. the developing story of monarchy and parliament, the stories of home and working conditions) is more likely to be successful because pupils can use their knowledge of the thematic story to sequence the items.</p> <p>b) Recall of individual key events, people and dates is likely to be</p>

	<p>enhanced by being understood as part of long-term thematic stories such as those listed below.</p> <p>c) Planning across KS3 should consider major thematic stories which create opportunities for reinforcing ‘the story so far’ and, finally, recapping the full stories that have unfolded across KS3. Suggestions for such stories are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Who decided how the country was run? Who held power – king or parliament? ii. How much say have individuals had in government? Changes in forms of protest and participation, including the struggle for the vote. iii. Freedom, toleration and equality – from villeinage to the vote to equal human rights. This could include education, religious beliefs and the growth of toleration. iv. How has daily life changed? – e.g. housing, diet, health, leisure, transport, communications. v. Working experiences – what did people do, how much time and how has it changed? How has technology changed human experiences? vi. Empires From Norman and Angevin to the British Empire, including also understanding of other empires, such as Rome, the Aztecs, Spain, USA and USSR, depending on the topics chosen in the optional units. vii. Diversity – the evolution of Britain’s multi-ethnic culture viii. England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales and the changing relationships between them. ix. Britain’s relationship with Europe. This could include changing patterns of warfare, trade, culture or religion
<p>Links across the Key Stage</p>	<p>a) Local studies can provide an overview by following the long-term development of a community or place. This enables links to be made across periods and with major national events, even if one question is ‘why was community x not affected by Event y?’ The History department at Holbrook High School, Suffolk have developed an enquiry for the end of Year 7 on ‘How and why has Dunwich changed since Roman times?’ This enables them to trace the development of Dunwich from Roman and early Saxon prosperity, through mid-Saxon decline to Viking growth (cementing links to KS2) and real prosperity in the 11th and 12th centuries to decline in the age of the Black Death, the impact of the Dissolution of the Monasteries, on into the settlement’s status as a rotten borough and then into the death-toll amongst local men in the World Wars. A living graph records the rise and fall of the settlement’s prosperity across time. Such enquiries can be placed in any year of KS3. Looking forward from Year 7 to events not yet covered in detail has not proved to be a problem and helpful reinforcement in Years 8 and 9 stems from questions such as ‘Do you remember what happened to Dunwich at the time of ...?’¹⁵</p>

	<p>b) Links across KS3 can be planned into some enquiry questions in Y8 and Y9 which refer back and make comparisons and contrasts with topics from previous years rather than being solely concerned with content covered in that year. This creates opportunities to relate new material to pupils' existing mental chronological framework, reinforcing and adding to their depth of knowledge and understanding.</p> <p>c) Particular opportunities for developing chronological knowledge and understanding across longer spans of time arise at the ends of years and the end of the Key Stage, particularly through enquiries concerned with developing understanding of interpretations and significance as well as the more obvious contexts of causation and change and continuity.</p>
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Table B: Key Issues Arising from Research and Practice

WHY PLAN KS3 HISTORY AROUND THEMATIC STORIES?

One of the key threads of this article is that pupils are most likely to develop enduring chronological knowledge and understanding if they regularly revisit material studied earlier, in the same way that they revisit evidence, interpretations and other concepts. At first glance, this idea seems to conflict with moving through time across Key Stage 3 but it fits perfectly well, provided we package the content into a series of coherent stories rather than treating it as a series of episodic highlights to be plundered solely for their ability to enthuse pupils and to develop other conceptual understandings. The challenge is to continue to enthuse while adding chronology to the list of conceptual understandings being developed consistently across KS3.

This approach to organization through thematic stories is illustrated in Table C, an outline scheme of work that assumes that KS3 History is seen as a single course, explicitly introduced at the beginning of Year 7 and concluded at the end of Year 9 with overview activities.¹⁶ Within each year, content is organized so that pupils can identify a number of thematic stories in Year 7 and recognize them again (perhaps with a little help!) when they return to them in Years 8 and 9. This approach ensures that stories do not lurk, unseen, beneath the surfaces of individual enquiries. For example, the story of the struggle for power between monarchs, nobles and parliaments puts in a brief appearance through Magna Carta and the first parliaments and then rises majestically into full view when pupils investigate the Civil War – but how many hear the end of the story when parliament and politicians finally took power from the crown in the late 18th and early 19th centuries?¹⁷

Using stories in this way solves the problem of revisiting and reinforcement. Teachers and pupils can move backwards and forwards through time, making links within themes and reinforcing chronological knowledge by summarising the stories to date at regular intervals. For example, when starting the social theme in Year 8, the social story so far can be recapped and then a longer story told at the end of that unit. In Year 9 that process can be repeated. Thus pupils revisit the key points from earlier years and, by the end of KS3, will have had the chance to develop an understanding of several such stories. This also requires pupils and teachers to differentiate between what must be remembered, what could be remembered and what needn't be

remembered at all. Recall of individual events, people and dates is likely to be enhanced by being understood as part of a story.

This approach to planning raises, in turn, one of the recurrent questions in history teaching – what do we want pupils to take away when they leave history classrooms at the end of KS3? One ‘history takeaway’ that we all crave is for pupils to find history enjoyable and intriguing, putting an end to those parents’ evening comments “I hated history at school but now I find it really interesting.” A second ‘history takeaway’, at a more intellectual level, is for pupils to understand the methodology of history and how the skills and concepts developed in history can enhance their understanding of the world around them. A third ‘takeaway’ is knowledge – but exactly what form should this knowledge take? Recall of individual facts and dates equips us to star in quizzes but has little other value in its own right. A more constructive approach to a ‘knowledge takeaway’ is to suggest that by the end of KS3 pupils should be able to tell, in outline, a number of key thematic stories from British and world history as well as demonstrating understanding of individual events. The depth at which these stories are told will clearly vary from pupil to pupil, incorporating more or less detail, but it is a task that is worthwhile at a variety of levels. This approach, based upon regular reinforcement of key stories, could be the best way to create enduring chronological knowledge and understanding and it links across effectively to other concepts, creating natural contexts for enquiries investigating significance and interpretations, long term patterns of causation as well as change and continuity.

Example Scheme of Work

An example of an outline scheme of work pursuing thematic stories across KS3 is shown on Table C. This table omits specific chronological activities in order to focus on the continuity of the stories more easily. However, it offers the opportunity to reinforce understanding and use of vocabulary re chronology throughout the enquiries and enables framework activities to arise naturally from the use of stories as planning tools.

Stories/Themes	Year 7 To c.1540	Year 8 c.1500-c.1900	Year 9 Since c.1900
Introduction	Intro to KS3 course. Vocabulary and sense of period activities	Intro to Y8 History. Vocabulary and sense of period activities	Intro to Y9 History. Vocabulary and sense of period activities
Empires	Did the Romans do more harm than good?	Why were so many American cultures destroyed?	Why do people still argue about the impact of the British empire?
Warfare and Unity	a) Why did the English rebel against the Normans? b) Why couldn't English kings conquer Britain?	a) How have wars changed since 1500? b) Why weren't the British Isles ever unified?	Why was the 20 th century so full of wars?
Power and citizenship	a) Was Magna Carta really so significant? b) Why was London in flames in 1381?	a) Why did Charles I quarrel with parliament? b) When did the monarchy lose its power?	Did violence do more to win the vote than peaceful campaigns?
Religion and human rights	a) Why did so many people visit Canterbury in the Middle Ages? b) Why did Henry VIII close the monasteries?	Why did religion cause so many wars?	Has the struggle for human rights been successful?
Social life	Would you like to have lived in the Middle Ages?	When was the best time to be alive 1500-1900?	a) Why have living standards risen so quickly since 1900? b) ... but have they risen for everyone?
Conclusions	What were the most significant people and events you studied this year? How do this year's topics fit into the wider patterns of history?	What were the most significant people and events you studied this year? How do this year's topics fit into the wider patterns of history?	What were the most significant people and events you studied this year and in KS3? How do this year's topics fit into the wider patterns of history?

Table C: Outline SoW Pursuing Thematic Stories across KS3

Activities for Developing Chronological Knowledge and Understanding

This section can only hint at the kinds of activities required.¹⁸ In general, activities must be as challenging and involving as those developed for depth studies. Most are likely to be short and active, making explicit use of technical vocabulary. It is of paramount importance to vary the style of activities to meet the differing needs of pupils. Some will respond positively to tasks involving creating, drawing and illustrating timelines, others will prefer to take part in physical timelines or family trees across the classroom while others will prefer pen and paper exercises. The keynote is variety to meet individuals' needs and this may include, for some, learning lists.

Negative images of classes bored to tears because history consisted of nothing more than dictated notes and learning dates by heart should not deter us from finding out which pupils enjoy compiling and learning lists and are good at it. Many 11 and 12 year olds have no problems remembering amazingly detailed lists of who plays for which team – a skill that can be taken advantage of, even if the motivation is not quite the same. This isn't a return to the mythical 'good old days' beloved by certain newspapers. As a product of the good old days (a 1960s grammar schools education), I didn't learn the names and dates of the monarchs of England until in my 20s and teaching. This is an improvement, providing a variety of activities for a variety of pupils and focusing activities so that each one targets one of the chronology objectives 1-4 explicitly.

As a brief example, picture sorting activities are a valuable way of developing pupils' sense of period. They need to be used at regular intervals throughout KS3. Use sets of pictures representing several periods that are chronological neighbours so that pupils have to identify which pictures are, for example, medieval and which are Tudor and to explain their choice. Examples of possible sets of pictures are:

- Set A – Roman, Saxon and Viking, Middle Ages
- Set B – Norman, early Middle Ages, later Middle Ages
- Set C – Medieval, Tudor or Stuart
- Set D – 18th, 19th or 20th centuries
- Set E – Victorian, inter-war, 1940s and 1950s, 1960s onwards

A possible series of tasks would be to:

- a) identify which pictures were from which periods
- b) give the groups of pictures the correct period labels and to locate those on a timeline
- c) identify the clues in the picture that tells us which period it is from. The sense of period diagram in table A can be used here as an aide-memoire to provide an agenda for thinking.
- d) suggest one anachronistic picture to add to each group
- e) research a set number of other pictures to add to each group, perhaps to illustrate a particular theme e.g. warfare.

It is important for developing an enduring sense of period that the earlier periods are not ignored once pupils move into Years 8 and 9. Cross-period sorting activities in Years 8 and 9 should include e.g. Roman and medieval pictures to maintain pupils' knowledge of those periods and to help distinguish and define later periods.

A Note on Timelines

Timelines play an important part in understanding chronology and helpful work has been undertaken by primary colleagues that can be transferred to KS3.¹⁹ Key points about timelines include:

- pupils need to construct timelines for themselves, not just look at completed ones.
- pupils' sense of duration will be helped if each century on a timeline is a different colour, thus emphasising the number of units. Pupils find it harder to get a sense of the passage of time from colourless timelines, even when they show dates and events.
- many pupils benefit from physical activities which require them to stand on a timeline and 'move about in history', gaining a sense of how far it was from one date to another by simply walking across the timeline.
- we often use timelines as introductions, to place in time an event about to be studied, but pupils may gain more from re-visiting the timeline after the topic

has been studied and they have some understanding of it. This is also the occasion to make effective connections across time to other events.

- timelines are more likely to be successful in reinforcing chronological knowledge and understanding if they contain visual images rather than simply words and dates.
- pupils can find timelines more interesting and memorable if they focus on real individuals they have studied rather than just 'big events' such as The Industrial Revolution.²⁰

Timeline Activity

An example of an activity which uses physical timelines, makes sense of BC and AD; this is included on the thinkinghistory website.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HISTORY AT 14-19

At GCSE

One obvious area where we might expect students' chronological understanding to be enhanced is in SHP Development Studies. Theoretically this is the ideal structure for developing chronological understanding because students tackle a broad sweep of time in little more than half a year and so there's less chance of forgetting what order periods and events came in. And yet examiners' reports regularly point out an inability to sequence periods correctly, a lack of sense of duration, people and events turning up in entirely unexpected periods as if propelled by an erratic Tardis and an inability to correctly identify, for example, the 19th century, all with dire effects on students' ability to analyse change, continuity, causation.

The villain here appears to be the not unreasonable assumption that teaching a topic in chronological order is sufficient in itself to develop students' chronological knowledge and understanding. However, as argued above, such knowledge and understanding is far more likely to develop when specific objectives have been identified and activities have been constructed to meet students' learning problems. One key point is the junction between years 9 and 10. Assessing students' sense of chronology as they begin a Development Study should reveal what students have retained from KS3 and what misconceptions they have. Can they, for example:

- identify 1850 as the 19th century
- tell a thematic story of major developments in social history
- place Egypt, Greece, Rome, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution on timeline and where?

Have they developed a sense of period sufficient to fill in most of the features of the sense of period diagram in table A? Can they use this to predict what each society might know and understand about each society about public health, anaesthetics, surgery, etc?

The results of such diagnosis may suggest that more time may need to be given during the course to building up a stronger sense of period for each of the major eras, to

sequencing periods and building up a sense of duration through constructive and active timeline activities, tracing stories such as that of ideas about the causes of disease across time.²¹ This all takes time but it is likely that more time spent on tackling chronology specifically and less time on the details of medicine or crime may help students avoid some of the major pitfalls in examinations.

14-19 Reform

Put simply, the big lesson about chronological knowledge and understanding is – use it or lose it! Even able pupils who develop a sound basis in chronological knowledge by the age of 14 risk losing much of that knowledge if it is not reinforced through further historical studies after 14. We cannot do anything about those misguided souls who choose to drop history but, if we only offer a single, narrow period of history for study after 14, how much of that sense of a framework or sense of periods can be maintained? If we are to take the development of an enduring sense of chronology seriously, then every student who opts for history at 14-16 and then 16-19 should have, as part of their historical studies, an overview course that, amongst other things, reinforces the hard-won understandings developed by the age of 14. Such courses can be interesting, challenging and need not fragment into a series of depth studies masquerading as an overview and they provide that long-term perspective on the present that is one of history's unique contributions to education.

CONCLUSION

Writing this article has been a form of thinking aloud, trying to find ways of turning analyses of objectives into practical planning and teaching activities. I have not had space to touch on many related aspects of chronological understanding but perhaps the most important issue is debating about how important chronological knowledge and understanding is within the history curriculum. For some time we have been addressing concepts such as evidence explicitly, identifying learning problems and constructing activities to overcome them. Is it now time for chronology?²²

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Endnotes:

- ¹ Riley, M. and Harris, R., (2003) *Past Forward: A Vision for School History 2002-2012*, Historical Association.
- ² Shuter, P. and Childs, J., (1987) *Skills in History Book 1: Changes*, pp.2-7 pre-dates the NC but addresses some issues of chronology very well. Store cupboards going back to the early 1990s may also contain useful chronology tasks in Dawson, I. et al, (1992) *Oxford history study units teacher's resource book* pp. 85-96.
- ³ Shemilt, D. (2000) 'The Caliph's Coin: The Currency of Narrative Frameworks in History Teaching' in *Knowing, teaching, and learning history: national and international perspectives*, edited by Peter N. Stearns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg, New York University Press. Compared with Shemilt's suggestions, what follows here is tame and unadventurous but I chose to work from what teachers are currently doing and enjoy doing.
- ⁴ Hodkinson, A. (2001), 'Enhancing temporal cognition, practical activities for the history classroom', *Primary History* 28, May 2001. For an extended discussion of his Hodkinson's research see *Educational Research*, vol.46(2), 2004 pp.99-119.
- ⁵ Stow, W. and Haydn, T. (2000), 'Issues in the teaching of chronology' in Arthur, J. and Phillips, R. (eds.), *Issues in Teaching History*, Routledge Falmer, pp.88-91.
- ⁶ Haydn, T., Arthur, J. and Hunt, M. (2001), *Learning to Teach History in the Secondary School*, pp.97-105
- ⁷ Hodkinson, A. 'Play the dating game' in *Times Educational Supplement*, 25 June 2004.
- ⁸ Stow and Haydn (2000) p. 90
- ⁹ Partington, G. (1980) *The Idea of an Historical Education*, p.227
- ¹⁰ For an excellent example of an explicit sense of period activity see Riley, M. 'Big Stories and Big Pictures: making outlines and overviews interesting', *Teaching History*, 88, July 1997 p.21.
- ¹¹ NC AT level 6
- ¹² Shemilt, op. cit., pp.99-100
- ¹³ Ibid, pp.97-98
- ¹⁴ For suggestions on activities for this objective see Terry Haydn's UEA website at <http://www.uea.ac.uk/%7Em242/historypgce/time/welcome> and Dawson, I. (2004) *What is History? Year 9, a conclusion for Key Stage 3*, John Murray, pp.40-43.
- ¹⁵ My thanks to Dale Banham for passing on yet another of his good ideas
- ¹⁶ For examples of concluding overview activities see Dawson, I., *What is History Year 9, a conclusion for Key Stage 3*, John Murray.
- ¹⁷ For a first attempt to tell this story in outline and to turn it into activities see Banham, D. and Dawson, I. (2000), *King John*, John Murray pp.46-53 and Harmsworth, A. and Dawson, I. (2002) 'King' Cromwell?, John Murray, pp.55-63. See also the Resources section of www.thinkinghistory.co.uk for an outline activity on monarchy that demonstrates parallels between challenges to royal power in the Middle Ages and the Civil War
- ¹⁸ For a range of other activities see the discussion on chronological understanding at www.qca.org.uk/history/innovating Terry Haydn's website (footnote 14), and www.thinkinghistory.co.uk
- ¹⁹ See, for example, Hodkinson, 2001, and his TES article cited above.
- ²⁰ An unanticipated spin-off discovered by teachers using Dawson I. (2001), *Lost in Time*, John Murray. This is one of the very few development studies published for KS3 and focuses on similarities and differences between the lives of Sir Geoffrey Luttrell, Samuel Pepys and Flora Thompson.
- ²¹ For examples of such activities see A. Moore (2003), *Essential Medicine and Health Teachers' Resource Book*, John Murray
- ²² I would like to thank Chris Culpin, Dale Banham and Angela Leonard for their discussion of the issues in this article. For an expanded discussion, together with a wider range of activities, see QCA's *Innovating with History* website at <http://www.qca.org.uk/history/innovating>