

Wales and Edward I - Finding a Purpose and an Approach

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'Edward I and Wales' is a phrase that you expect to find in a syllabus or National Curriculum document. It is one of those landmark events that flit from mind to paper, sometimes with scarcely a questioning thought to help it on its way. However once that phrase is embedded in a document the problems really start. Easy to say - and to agree - that 'Edward I and Wales' should be taught but why and how, and should it be 'Wales and Edward I'?

Finding a Purpose

One place that demonstrates the problems is the National Curriculum documentation. One of the major weaknesses of both the English and the Welsh history curricula is their lack of continuity and coherence in terms of content. One of the strangest and best examples is the power of monarchy and parliament, a story that looms large in both the first two compulsory study units which take the story up until about 1750. At that point the monarchy still possessed significant power, sufficient, for example, for George III to prevent Catholic emancipation and force Pitt's resignation over the issue. Yet the end of the story is missing. Pupils taught according to the document (and by the books which replicate it) will never discover when it was that royal power was truly superseded by that of Prime Minister and Cabinet and why that change took place. Of course it can be argued that teachers should be breathing this kind of continuity into the random pile of bones left lying around by official documents but to my mind, this situation reeks of carelessness and bad planning, not of the desire to give teachers freedom of manoeuvre.

Exactly the same problem relates to the history of Britain. In *Teaching History* (Number 80, June 1995) I have argued in the context of the English NC that there is a need to plan content themes across the whole of KS3 so that pupils have the chance to emerge with some conscious understanding of developments across the last thousand years of history rather than simply possessing a varied and random collection of pieces of information. For the history of Britain, therefore, Wales, Scotland and Ireland should not simply appear in the English curriculum at times of war and disturbance but there should be a theme in each year which looks at Anglo-Welsh, Anglo-Scottish and Anglo-Irish relations and at the sum of those parts. Thus, by the end of Year 9, pupils would have had the opportunity to understand:

- a) why the United Kingdom became a unified state

- b) why the Irish Republic is not part of this unified state
- c) that on a variety of occasions the history of Britain could have taken a different course
- d) why there is a variety of attitudes among the Welsh, Scots and Irish and English to each other.

This argument seems to apply to the Welsh curriculum as much as it does to the English. NC documents mention the impact of the Normans, the Edwardian Conquest and the union of the 1530s but there the theme (if that isn't too strong a word) vanishes. The result of this disappearance may be to create a sense of inevitability about Welsh integration after conquest by England. The absence of continuing discussion of Anglo Welsh relations and attitudes from the 1600s to today also prevents any link being established between the past and current concerns. If there is a debate today about Welsh independence and nationalism then history ought to be helping pupils to understand the roots of that debate and whether historical allusions have any validity. Has this debate been a continuing one across the centuries? If it hasn't been continuous what are/have been the circumstances that have caused the debate to emerge?

Therefore I would argue that a topic such as 'Edward I and Wales' should be planned not only in the context of 'Wales and Britain in the Medieval World' and of a Year 7 course but also in the wider context of the Year 7 - 9 syllabus. Of course, this topic can be taught simply in isolation, for its intrinsic interest as a 'good story'. It can be taught to develop pupils' conceptual understanding of, say, causation. However I don't think that either or both of these reasons are sufficient to prevent 'Edward I and Wales' (or most other topics) swiftly becoming just another of those disconnected chunks of history that float around loosely in most people's heads. It needs to become part of a pattern, a theme through Years 7, 8 and 9 of Anglo-Welsh relations, (encompassing conquest, integration and nationalism), that sets out explicitly to explain the diversity of current attitudes.

Such a theme raises the dangers of politicisation, of becoming a vehicle for trenchant views of one kind or another, unbalanced by alternatives, untested by evidence and therefore masquerading as history. However, omission of this theme seems to be not so much apolitical as a different kind of politicisation. The absence of study of Anglo-Welsh attitudes and integration through time suggests that there is no issue and has been no issue and that anyone who holds different views is in the grip of irrational ideas. This must be one of those areas where it is important to trust teachers'

judgements and professionalism rather than, as politicians are wont to do, assume that everyone will take the opportunity to peddle their own prejudices.

Teaching about the Edwardian Conquest of Wales therefore has a central part to play in this overall theme. Having studied the topic pupils should have developed their understanding of:

- a) why the conquest took place and whether events could have fallen out differently.
- b) the differing attitudes to the conquest in Wales
- c) whether this event ensured future integration

So much for the theory, what about the teaching? How should teaching be approached? The older I become the more I become convinced that pupils learn more effectively (and remember more historical information) if they study events 'from the inside', being asked to select from the choices facing someone in the past, being asked to record the attitudes individuals had to events or circumstances as if they, the pupils, were in that situation. This isn't the wilder flights of 'Write a letter as if you were a Viking ...' empathy but the evidence-based, necessary empathy that any historian uses to understand the past. The alternative is to stand outside the past, firmly in the present, answering impersonal questions about distant people's motives and attitudes. This has a superficial objectivity but it is a short step from distanced objectivity to disinterest to being thoroughly bored.

Can existing KS3 textbooks help with this approach? The answer is disappointing. My reading of over a dozen versions of 'Medieval realms' published for the English National Curriculum shows that:

- a) the Edwardian Conquest is dealt with firmly within its own temporal context, thus missing the chance to explain its wider significance and relationship to the present and
- b) many of the tasks provided seem randomly chosen, a couple of questions on castles here, a question on Edward's motives there and, in nearly every case, asking pupils to see these events as objective outsiders and therefore not engaging them sufficiently in the problems facing people in the past. The tasks provided are worthy but they are not involving or interesting. The only task that had me thinking 'I'd like to try that' was in Chris Culpin's Medieval Realms (Collins) where pupils are asked to advise Edward I on his strategy in attacking Llewelyn.

The following plan outlines activities for a sequence of lessons on Wales and Edward I. Space does not allow detailed lesson plans, the provision of sources, role-cards etc. The stages don't necessarily equate with lessons because lessons vary so much in length.

Stage 1 - Setting the Agenda: Wales and England 1000 AD to the Present.

History can often seem like one darn thing after another or, in the case of some textbooks, one darn double-page spread after another. There is no overview, no thread, explaining how the bits of history fit together. This hinders pupils' learning because the overall theme helps to provide a purpose and therefore motivation for investigating the parts. This first stage needs to set that agenda, establishing a purpose for the whole unit of work and to get pupils to suggest answers (to hypothesise if we want to be grand!) to the main questions of the unit. These are three:

- a) Why do you think Edward wanted to conquer Wales? No idea? Well, why do people conquer anywhere? Think of why William conquered England in 1066, Hitler, any current event. Pupils may suggest money, power, fame or hate - it's not important that they're right about Edward but that they're suggesting possible answers and hence a framework for their investigation.
- b) How do you think the Welsh reacted? Badly? Everyone the same? Why might someone welcome Edward? What might they get if they helped Edward? Why might a Welshman oppose Llewelyn? Again, correct answers aren't the purpose. If they were, you could skip the rest of the unit and sprint through the syllabus! What pupils need is an awareness of possible answers as a focus for the following activities.
- c) Were Edward's campaigns important and why? This is the big question linking this topic to the overall theme running through Years 7-9 and to the present. Big questions still need concrete answers and ones that suggest why a topic is worth spending time on.

Resources? A simple timeline (1000 AD to now) and a couple of maps of English-ruled territory before and after Edward's reign. What changed during this reign? Was this ever reversed? Why do these events seem so important?

Finally get pupils to write down their answers to these three questions. The answers are what they think now. They will answer them again at the end of the unit and compare their answers with these first ideas. This can be very motivating, enhancing self-esteem because the comparison shows

pupils explicitly what they can do better as a result of their work. This is positive feedback rather than the usual 'this is what you got wrong'.

Stage 2 - What Happened before Edward I and Llewelyn?

A constant problem is how to cover everything in the syllabus. Sometimes every topic gets roughly the same depth of treatment and therefore no real depth at all. It may be that in order to save time for this topic you need to make cuts elsewhere, dealing with other topics in overview. One way to do this is to begin at the end.

Tell pupils that the year is 1270. Half the class are English, the other half Welsh. They can be advisers to Edward and Llewelyn or they could be chroniclers, minstrels or bards. Their task is to entertain their prince with the history of their country's, contact with England/Wales. Give them guideline taken over? Why had the English advance stopped? Who are your heroes? Standard textbooks can be used as a quarry for information but the nature of the activity may well make finding out more purposeful and enjoyable. Pupils could work in pairs or threes and present their story orally, a useful way to demonstrate different perspectives on the same events. Then, if necessary, consolidate this with your own written summary to go in their exercise books. This maximises the time pupils have on the interesting task while ensuring they have an adequate account of events.

Stage 3 - Should Llewelyn Pay Homage to Edward?

Now, what were the motives of Edward and Llewelyn in 1274? Keep the class in their halves (or swap them round) or split the Welsh half in two, with one half representing Welsh lords opposed to Llewelyn. The task for each group, set up at the outset, is to decide whether Llewelyn should do/be required to do homage. Homage is a concept better demonstrated than explained. Pupils see and feel the significance of homage better if acting in pairs, one kneels before the other and swears obedience. Alternatively act it out (with heartfelt humility on one side and hauteur on the other!) with a colleague.

To make their decision about doing homage pupils need information. As an alternative to seeking this from books, pupils could be given packs of information along the lines of the Schools History Project's Mark Pullen exercise. Write up the information you need in manageable notes or paragraphs, cut these up so that pupils are handling and organising small pieces of paper, not whole sheets of A4, and put each set of material into an envelope. Thus pupils get an envelope of material to make sense of and you feel like the Blue Peter presenter you always wanted to be!

This information could be grouped as follows:

a) Llewelyn's advisers -

his career and achievements,

his character and motives,

his complaints against Edward,

the practicality of a separate Welsh nation

b) Edward's advisers

his character and motives,

his record as a soldier,

his claim to be overlord,

divisions among the Welsh.

c) other Welsh lords

the reasons for their resentment,

their own ambitions,

the effects of Llewelyn's actions, including high taxes.

Once pupils have sifted their information and decided their attitude to Llewelyn doing homage ask each group to state its decision. Start with Edward's group who should demand homage. Then ask Llewelyn's group who should want to avoid doing homage if you have given them the right information. Then ask the third group what they will do now, support Llewelyn, support Edward or wait to see what happens. Finally, having asked pupils to think what they would have done in that situation, its time to look at what did actually happen and to ask pupils to write up their own factual account or to give them your own version, whichever is more suitable. This has more chance of

being interesting and meaningful after they have taken part in the decision making exercise than if they were simply given an account of the events cold.

Stage 4 - What Happened between 1274 and 1283?

So far we've had some fancy 'seeing history from the inside' activities. Their aims have been to motivate, to get pupils to think and to make the historical information more memorable. If this has worked, now is the time to fall back on something very old fashioned but very effective story-telling. You have reached the stage where pupils know what Edward and Llewelyn each want and why this period was so important. Now tell them what happened Edward's first expedition, Llewelyn's submission, rebellion and the war of conquest, Llewelyn's death. The story will be much more compelling because the earlier activities have helped them to identify with the personalities and issues. As you go through the story you can pepper it with 'what would you do now/what are the options?' questions to keep pupils on their toes and thinking or just let them listen to a good story. At the end, when they've wiped away their tears, a written follow-up would be to ask pupils to chronicle the story from one viewpoint, English, Llewelyn's supporters or one of his Welsh rivals. As an alternative to develop more involvement you could set up an activity asking pupils to advise Edward or Llewelyn on strategy similar to the exercise by Chris Culpin mentioned above.

Stage 5 - Reactions

For the final activity I would go back to splitting the class into two - Edward's advisers and the Welsh. Each has a slightly different task, relating to how Wales is to be governed and controlled. For Edward and his advisers the task is to decide how they will control the country. This is best done by giving the pupils a list of options (mostly things that Edward did and some that he didn't, perhaps something anachronistic to keep them stretched even higher on their toes) and asking them to choose which they would do and which were the most important. The activity needs to be twisted around a little for the Welsh group. Give them the same list of options and ask them which they could put up with and which they would hate. What would drive them to revolt? Do all the Welsh have the same views? Neither group should be using textbooks to find the right answers. This is a 'what would you have done?' predictive exercise.

After sufficient thinking time, Edward needs to announce his measures. They could be listed on the board. Then ask the Welsh how they react to Edward's policies. Will there be a revolt? Will

everyone join in? This activity is therefore setting up a look at how Edward ruled Wales and the varieties of reactions. Having thought through the issues pupils will be more interested to find out what did actually happen, why Edward ruled as he did and why there was a revolt in 1294. How long you spend on looking at the aftermath of the Edwardian conquest will probably vary a great deal, depending on how much you are in love with castles!

Stage 6 - Back to the Beginning

In Stage 1 pupils were posed three questions, about Edward's motives, Welsh reactions and the significance of these events. As suggested earlier pupils can now tackle these same three questions again and compare their answers with those they suggested at the start. Hopefully they'll be better answers and pupils will be able to see very clearly what they have learned. That is good for pupils and teacher!

The answer to the third question about significance does, by its nature, need later reinforcement. At the beginning of consideration of the Anglo-Welsh theme in Year 8 pupils will be helped by looking back to the events of 1066-1500. The same reinforcement approach can be used in Year 9. In both cases looking back consolidates the patterns for pupils and raises questions for the new period being studied. Thus the Edwardian Conquest will be kept more in mind than if it was only touched on in Year 7.

This may also be the time to ask could it have happened differently? What if Llewelyn had done homage? One meeting at Shrewsbury failed because Edward was ill. What if that had gone ahead? What if Edward had attacked Scotland before he attacked Wales? Would he have returned from the north successful but exhausted, unable to conquer Wales because he lacked the energy and the money? If King John hadn't lost Normandy would medieval English kings have turned their attention to Wales and Scotland at all? There are big ifs and little ifs but at least one of them may be worth dwelling on.

Conclusion

This article has tried to suggest a broader context and purpose for the teaching of Wales and Edward I than exists simply within the topic itself. This argues for the planning of themes through KS3 as a whole so that pupils are aware of continuity and change from 1066 to today in their history courses rather than studying a set of unrelated topics. This approach needs to be applied to all content elements. In the teaching itself much can be gained by asking pupils to see events from

the inside by undertaking predictive exercises. Having established what they would have done, they will be more interested in discovering what really happened. This is not only increasing interest, it enhances motivation and makes it more likely that pupils will remember the detail and so knowledge will be enhanced.

Books

If space had permitted I would have loved to spell out the history in more detail. In reading up on these events I used:

J. Davies, *A History of Wales*, Penguin, 1993, particularly interesting on the development of society and economy.

R. R. Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence and Change: Wales 1063-1415*, Oxford, 1987

T. Herbert and G. Elwyn Jones, (eds.), *Edward I and Wales*, University of Wales Press, 1988.

M. Prestwich, *Edward I*, Methuen, 1988 - interesting for the argument that Llewelyn needed Edward into war in the hope that this would forestall Welsh attacks on his supremacy.