

Assessment and feedback in history

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Every year schools need to produce a statutory annual report for parents and carers, setting out 'brief particulars of achievements in all subjects and activities forming part of the school curriculum'. This should include the strengths and developmental needs of each child. In a subject such as history, how do we gather the information to fulfil this requirement? This article explores one way in which this can be done in busy classrooms while not losing sight of the fact that the main focus of our work is on helping children get better in history.

There are a small number of key considerations that should help us in this process.

Adopting an enquiry-based approach to planning and teaching opens learning, so that we can see what the child knows, understands and can do.

Establishing enquiry questions that are relevant, appropriate, and engaging to the children should now be a key part of teachers' planning. This allows children to develop their ability to ask and answer historical questions, develop their skills as researchers and at the same time develop their understanding of key concepts linked to questions of change, causation and significance.

Having a clear understanding of progression in history that allows us to see the development lines we need to be building into our planning.

There are a number of examples available which set out how children get better at history. In Shropshire we use a document that outlines progression in history. This can be accessed by going to www.shropshirelg.net (select Teaching and Learning Staff – History – History in Primary Schools – scroll down to the document 'Progression in History'). The aim of this document is to map out the journey from the beginning of Key Stage 1 through to the end of Key Stage 3, in order to give teachers a sense of progression and pitch for different key stages and prompt statements that, if planned for, could be incorporated into pupil feedback and annual reports.

Having the focus on the child as the learner, in order to ensure that information is shared with them to help them improve – we need to check that they have understood our feedback to them.

Marking is best done alongside the child so that learning is guided in the right direction. Assessment information needs to be understood by the child and one way to check this is to ask the child to respond to the improvement comment made by the teacher. A quick glance at these comments by any adult in the classroom will show that every child has read what has been fed back and has understood what action they could take to improve the work. The accumulation of these over the course of the year will give you the text for your annual report. Do not be afraid of using or repeating the same words you have said to the child. The link back from your report to the pieces of work the child has produced is a key piece of evidence.

Ensuring that opportunities for assessment are integral to the planning process.

This aspect will be picked up through the two examples below. The key point is that we set out knowing what we expect the children to learn, the learning then broadly follows that route (based on our expectations for progression), and we are then set up to assess what is produced against our plans. If this is communicated to the children in words that they understand, then we are likely to get better outcomes.

Recognising that as teachers we see and hear evidence of children's achievements that will not be recorded in books or in other physical forms. We should not be afraid of stating these things.

Alongside any planned assessments, we continually gather information about children's achievements throughout the day. Just because there is no permanent record of these they should not be discounted or be excluded in annual reports. It is remarkable sometimes how articulate some children are about their understanding of history. In many cases this is not reflected in their written work, but it is important to give children credit for what they know, understand and can do, even if this is not actually written down.

Key Stage 2 case study:

Were the Maya clever?

Expected outcome:

- Acquires knowledge of the past from stories and eyewitness accounts.

More able:

- Understand that people in past societies had a range of views.
- Describes the links between different features of past situations.
- Describe the actions of people in distant and unfamiliar historical settings.

What do we already know about the Maya?

It is highly unlikely that much will be known prior to teaching the topic. An introduction can be done using existing information to locate the people geographically and in time, in relation to other historical periods that have been studied.

Do we think the Maya were clever?

This question could begin by exploring what we think being clever actually means to the children today and what it might mean if we are talking about a people such as the Maya.

What do we need to find out about the Maya to decide if they were clever? (*Enquiry*)

This question could be used to encourage the children to come up with aspects of their life that they can research and collect information on. Likely areas of enquiry could/should include

- What buildings did they build?
- What were their homes like?
- Could they read and write?
- What clothes did they wear?
- Did they believe in God?
- Did they draw, paint and make things?
- Did they fight battles?
- What did they eat and where did they get it from?
- Did they have kings?
- What games/sport did they play?

Other areas of investigation could include Maya maths, astronomy, calendars etc.

What have we found out about the Maya? (*Organisation and Communication*)

This is an opportunity to share the findings from the examination of the questions above and could take the form of a class display, ICT presentations, talks etc., appropriate to the age and ability of the children.

Were the Maya clever? (*Knowledge and Understanding*)

This is the key question in that it asks children to reflect on what they have found out and relate it to the key enquiry question. The outcome could take whatever form the teacher feels is appropriate.

What happened to the Maya?

This final question is one that should be covered as the children may be surprised to find out that the Maya still exist and live in the same area they did in the period of study. This could bring the scheme full circle to explore the geographical area of the Maya.

Key Stage 1 case study:

How has children's TV changed since grandma's day?

Expected outcome:

- Shows knowledge of change in their own life

More able:

- Demonstrates knowledge of concrete examples of change over time
- Recognises differences between ways of life in the past.

The enquiry could follow the outline below through the structured questions and also provide opportunities to link history work with other curriculum areas.

What are our favourite children's TV programmes? *(Enquiry)*

Class discussion around the question with some data collection of the answers, which could be used for exploring what the boys, girls, older, younger children in the class like.

What programmes did our mums and dads watch when they were little? *(Enquiry)*

Asking parents the question and then bringing back the answers to repeat the activity above.

Did our mums and dads watch the same programmes as us or different? *(Change)*

Exploring the answers and expanding this into watching some of these programmes to provide concrete examples of change or similarity.

Did our grandparents watch the same programmes as us or different? *(Change)*

Exploring the answers and expanding this into watching some of these programmes to provide concrete examples of change or similarity.

How have children's TV programmes changed since grandma's time? *(Change)*

A general discussion and opportunity to show what the main changes or similarities have been.

Based on the above it should be clear that the assessment will be the outcome we get from the last question. This could be a drawing showing *then and now*. It is this piece of work that we would respond to and then make a judgement against the statements we used in our initial plan. We could mark all the work preceding this, as we are checking that the children are acquiring the necessary information, understanding the content and building up the knowledge in readiness for the assessment. If we wished to include an additional challenge, we might pose a further question, such as asking the children what they thought was the biggest or possibly the most important change in relation to the key enquiry question.

Establishing the learning focus at the start of the planning helps identify the assessment opportunity and also gives clarity to what you are going to feed back to the child. All the work leading up to the assessment could be marked to ensure that all are equipped with the knowledge and information to undertake the assessment. One minor point regarding this example is that the assessment does not come at the end of the enquiry. If your history is planned to last until the end of a half term, beware of having to take home all the work to assess over your holidays!

One final point. Depending on how you organise your curriculum and how many units of history appear in each year, it is possible to work out how many

assessments you may have. If, in Key Stage 1, you only spend a couple of hours studying a famous person or event, for example, it may not lend itself to a valid assessment. Also, in Key Stage 2 if you are planning on a substantial history unit of work you may find the possibility to have two assessments. Both will be supplemented by observations that you make of the children throughout the learning process and which may be significant enough to feature in the annual report to parents and carers.

Alun Morgan – Since finishing full-time work for Shropshire, Alun Morgan now works as an independent consultant, Initial Teacher Trainer, and assessor for the HA Quality Mark.