

Grappling with Enquiry

by Sarah Herrity & Neil Bates

The origin of the word history is from the Greek word *Historia*, which means **inquiry**: Knowledge acquired by **investigation**. Neil Bates and I ran a workshop on teaching enquiry at one of Hampshire's history conferences as we believe that enquiry is at the very heart of our philosophy on what constitutes effective history teaching. The purpose of education and history teaching has been much debated in the media over recent years.



'I believe very strongly that education is about the transfer of knowledge... Knowledge is the basic building block for a successful life.

The facts, dates and narrative of our history in fact join us all together

Nick Gibb, Minister of Schools 1 July 2010 speech to the DFE Reform Conference

The quote above reveals the history educational philosophy of School's Minister Nick Gibb. In his view the impartation of historical knowledge in terms of the sequence of facts and dates is of utmost importance in the teaching of history.

Many of us would agree that the teaching of historical knowledge is the foundation for an understanding of the past and essential for rigorous thinking in history. However, in itself a knowledge of events, facts and dates gives students a very superficial understanding of history. Purely learning what will inevitably be a teacher's selection of the facts will leave students vulnerable to persuasion by whatever interpretation of those facts is narrated by the teacher or textbook. This is a view that is supported by the research of Howard Gardener in his book, *The Disciplined Mind: Beyond facts and the standardised tests* (1999), quoted by Andrew Wren in TH 138. Many of you will know the influential work of Gardener on multiple intelligences. He believes that 21st century students need a, 'disciplined mind' to equip them for living and working in this century.

'Facts alone without a disciplined way of constructing this information' become simply 'inert knowledge'

Howard Gardner, *The Disciplined Mind: Beyond facts and the standardised tests* 1999 quoted by Andrew Wren in TH 138

A disciplined mind has mastered a way of thinking.' This goes beyond facts to embrace the discipline of the subject (the thinking behind it – its habits, skills, processes and attitudes). ***The Disciplined Mind: Beyond facts and the standardised tests* 1999**

He argues that, that facts alone are like decorations on a Christmas tree, the Christmas tree being the pedagogy of thought that holds the understanding and interpretation of those facts. The second quotation explains what Gardener defines as a discipline. The current History National Curriculum has outlined clearly what concepts and processes the history educational community believe make up discipline of history.

I share Nick Gibb's concerns about the previous trend towards an increasingly integrated curriculum that overemphasised skills or topics as a basis for learning. The introduction of Opening Minds and a Learning to Learn style curricula had the danger of leading to superficial learning because of a lack of breadth, coherence and relevance of the topics chosen. The real lack of rigor, however was often down to a lack of the depth of knowledge and analytical/evaluative study required to reach higher levels of thinking. It is the application of historical knowledge in the analysis of historical concepts like historical interpretation, change and continuity, causation, and the subjective nature of historical significance through the process of enquiry that really allows students to make meaning of their historical knowledge. This has been recognised by Ofsted, the Historical Association, the School's History Project and even the exam boards of the new GCSE, all of which argue that history is taught best through enquiry. The history National Curriculum also requires that students, 'pursue historically valid enquiries including some they have framed themselves'.

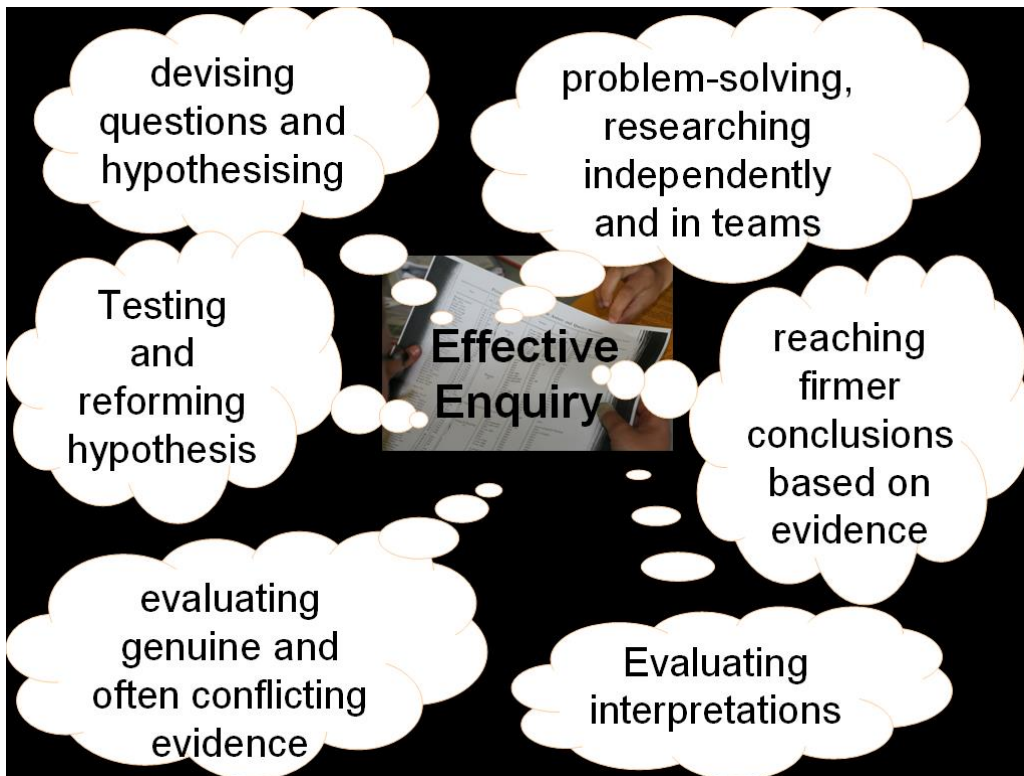
It is therefore in this context that Neil and I offer our insights into what makes an enquiry lesson effective. We believe enquiry:

- underpins our subject as a discipline
- allows students to genuinely investigate history for themselves
- teaches skills that are valued in the outside world like problem solves
- teaches all the skills involved in the national curriculum
- can be useful model for other subjects as an approach to classroom independent learning

Some common history lesson activities might include:

- Independent reading of a text book to find out why an event happened and sharing them with someone else who used a different text book to complete their chart;
- using picture sources to find out what life was like in a period
- Answering teachers questions based on their earlier explanation
- Explaining a historians view in their own words

Is this effective enquiry? In the words of Margaret Thatcher, **No No No!** Thankfully we don't often see any students in rows learning the dates of kings and queens! So what does real enquiry look like in the classroom? The following slide shows the activities that we would hope to see and indeed have seen in some outstanding historical enquiry lessons on Hampshire.



To help the steering group create their own effective enquiries we grappled with coming up with our core principles of enquiry that we shared at the networks two years ago that we feel are worth revisiting as they give useful guidance when planning your own enquiries. They are included at the end of this article.

Neil Bates provided an inspirational example at a recent HIAS history conference, of how to get students motivated in an enquiry. His mystery object was a Nineteenth Century cavalry sabre.



He asked the audience what questions you would ask the sword if it could speak e.g. did you kill anyone? Who did you belong to? Where and when were you used? Through answering the questions based on the real story of Thomas Trafford delegates slowly work out that the sword was used at the Peterloo Massacre. This intriguing technique could be used for any artefact or image of a person/object from history.

Neil and I provided delegates with 3 lesson examples that exemplified the principles of enquiry. First was a quality enquiry lesson from Richard McFahn on the protest methods of the suffragettes. The lesson begins with a slow reveal of a house burned down by Suffragettes while students came up with their own questions and ideas on what was shown. Students were then presented with a set of picture sources showing the different methods used by the suffragettes which they had to categorise. Others were given explanations that they had to match to the picture sources before putting them into a human timeline of suffragette's activities which our delegates demonstrated during our workshop.

Students were asked what has changed over time. Students can clearly see that the suffragettes' activities have become progressively more violent and they are asked to suggest reasons why. A timeline reveals that the main reason protest became more violent was because of increasing frustration over parliament's failure to introduce votes for women despite increased support.

Look at this timeline. Does anything happen that helps us understand why the Suffragettes decided to use more violent methods?

<p>1860s The campaign for women's' suffrage began.</p> <p>1867 The Reform Act gave working class <u>men</u> the vote.</p> <p>1878 1300 Women's suffrage meetings were held.</p> <p>1900 Politicians kept ignoring all demand for women's suffrage.</p> <p>1903 <u>The WSPU (Suffragettes) were formed in Manchester.</u></p> <p>1908 Campaigners have a meeting with the Prime Minister to discuss the idea of women's suffrage. <u>Little came of it.</u></p>	<p>1911 May A Bill that will give women votes is agreed by all Parties in Government. The majority of MPs support this</p> <p>November - the Government change their mind and instead introduce a Bill to widen to votes for men!</p> <p>1913 Attempts are made to add women to the new Male Suffrage Bill – but this idea is dropped</p> <p>May – A new private members bill to give women the vote is introduced but it is narrowly defeated by 48.</p>
--	---

The enquiry takes a turn at this point and asks students to make parallels with modern events. Most refer to violent activities used by terrorists like Al-Qaeda, the same controversial parallel that some historians have made.

Who else can you think of that uses extreme measures to try to achieve their aims?

What have these events got to do with **terrorism**?

11th September 2001

London Bomb attacks in July 2005.

al-Qa'eda.

a furious row broke out recently between historians when someone claimed that members of the Suffragettes behaved like al-Qua'eda

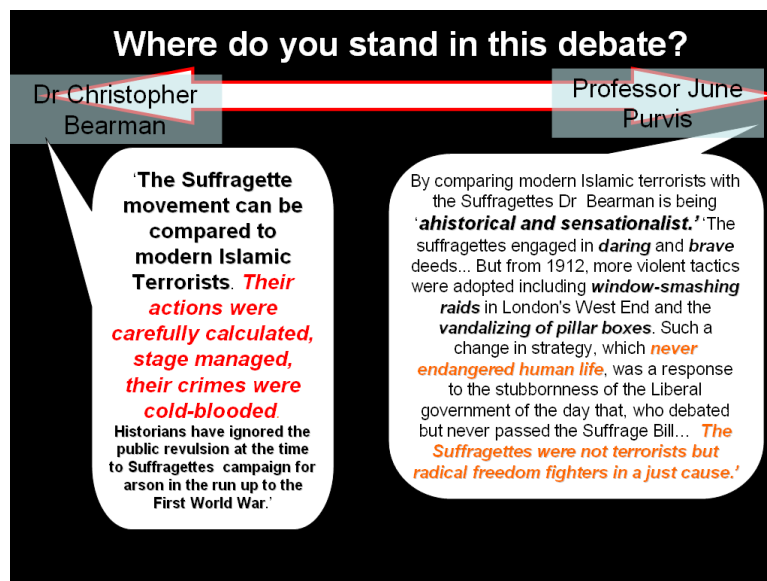


Students were shown the two opposing interpretations of Dr Christopher Bearman, And Professor June Purvis.

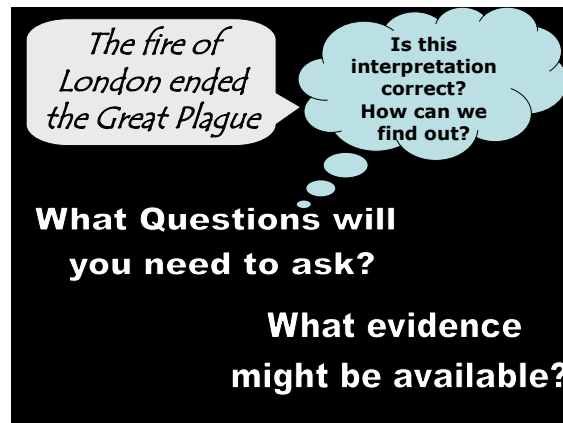
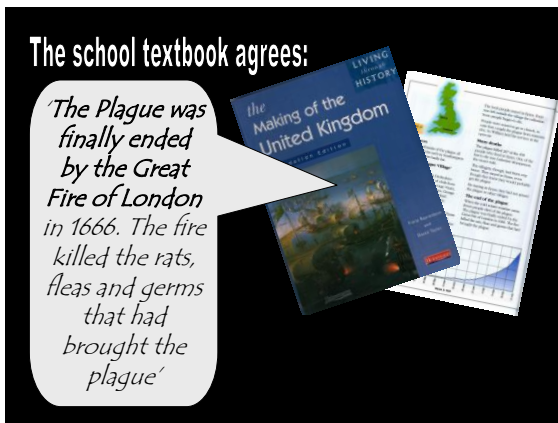
'The Suffragette movement can be compared to modern Islamic Terrorists. *Their actions were carefully calculated, stage managed, their crimes were cold-blooded.* Historians have ignored the public revulsion at the time to Suffragettes campaign for arson in the run up to the First World War.'

By comparing modern Islamic terrorists with the Suffragettes **Dr Bearman is being 'ahistorical and sensationalist.'** 'The suffragettes engaged in *daring and brave deeds...* But from 1912, more violent tactics were adopted including *window-smashing raids in London's West End and the vandalizing of pillar boxes.* **Such a change in strategy, which never endangered human life,** was a response to the stubbornness of the Liberal government of the day that, who debated but never passed the Suffrage Bill... **The Suffragettes were not terrorists but radical freedom fighters in a just cause.'**

After a discussion on what the key arguments of each historian students are asked to stand on a line of decision and justify their position.

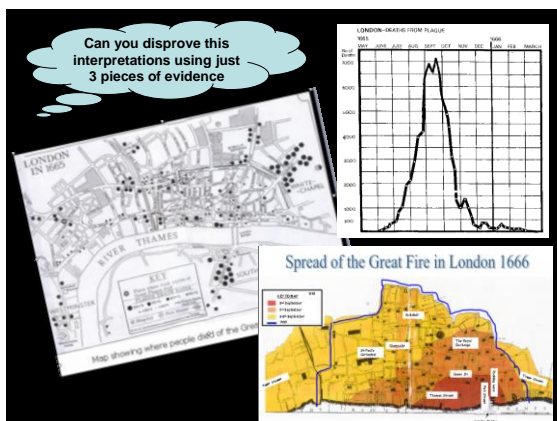


Secondly I reminded delegates of the need to plan longer enquiries that genuinely allow students to follow their own lines of enquiry as my 3 lesson *Delux* enquiry on the Great Plague and Great Fire of London does. Asking students what links the two events always results in the answer that the fire ended the plague.



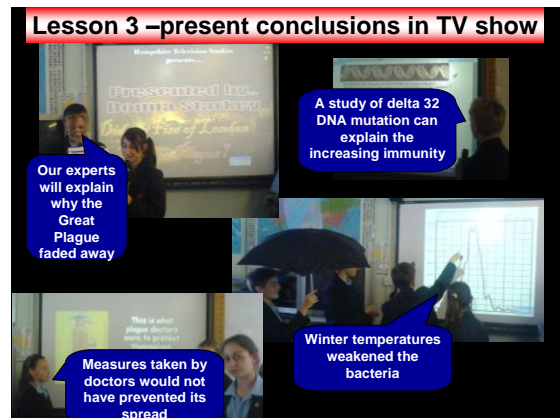
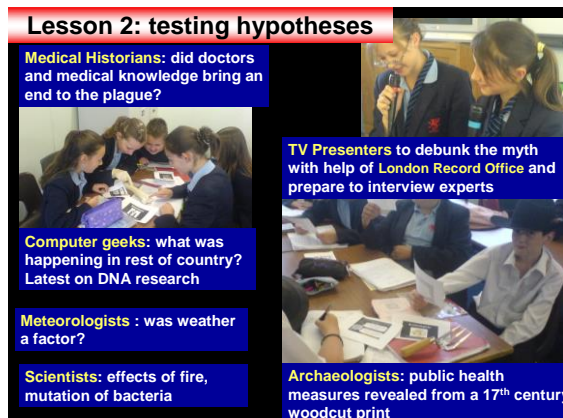
The text book agrees as you can see from the interpretation in the previous slide with an explanation that the fire, rats fleas and germs that caused the plague. Students are introduced to the concept that this is a historian's interpretation that students can evaluate. Asking a student to read the passage from the text book shows the students that they are challenging a real historian's interpretation and not a made up notion.

It is important in an enquiry that we allow students to ask their own questions and think through how they might find the answers in terms of the evidence available. In this lesson students ask whether the fire burned all the areas that were affected by the plague and ask for maps that might show this. Others ask for the numbers of those that died and whether the plague spread to other parts of the country. This information is then provided to the students in three genuine pieces evidence that the teacher 'just happens to have': a map showing the areas of London affected by the plague, a map showing the spread of the fire and the death rates for the previous year of 1665.



Students are charged with the challenge of disproving the interpretation using just those 3 pieces of evidence. During this part of the lesson Year 8 students are initially close to being out of their depth but are highly motivated to wrestle with this challenge and soon begin to see that the fire has not reached the areas of London worst affected by the plague, and the death rate appeared to go down from the September of the previous year suggesting that the plague ebbing away from the September of 1666 was partly coincidence or due to other factors such as the temperature changes in the winter season.

I am always impressed with how well students argue that the fire alone could not have ended that plague using these 3 pieces of evidence and their own arguments that the plague had spread beyond London. The lesson leaves students with the question that if the fire did not end the plague, what did?



It is the second lesson that allows students to follow their own lines of enquiry. The challenge in this lesson is for students to share and test the validity of their own hypotheses on what they believe may have ended the plague. Groups of students are given a set of evidence that matches their hypothesis so that in the third lesson each group can present their findings as part of a TV show that allows students to create their own history programme that attempts to answer what did and did not help to end the plague. Meteorologists, for example investigate their hypothesis that it was the weather that brought an end to the plague. Scientists research their hypothesis that the plague ended due to people developing an immunity to the disease, medical historians investigate the idea that it was the doctors that helped to stop the spread of the plague or found effective treatments for the disease, and so on.

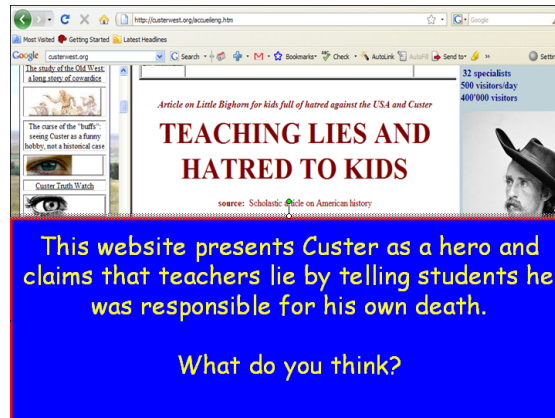
Finally Neil involved delegates in his engaging enquiry on Custer which I will ask him to explain to you in his own words.

The students are shown 3 interpretations of Custer. The first was a painting of the battle of the Little Big Horn. Students were asked to raise their own questions based upon this picture. This was then followed by a short video clip from www.custerwest.org. This clip presented a very heroic impression of Custer, complete with stirring music. I then posed the question “What impression do we have of Custer so far?” Once this was established a third film clip was used to introduce the contention that the defeat of the Seventh Cavalry might have been the fault of Custer’s second in command. Major Marcus Reno.

With students now set up for a genuine historical conundrum (namely was Custer betrayed or was he responsible for his own defeat?), I next demonstrated how we might use the technique of Teacher in Role as a method to encourage students to not only raise their own questions but to impart useable historical detail in a fun and engaging format. For the purpose of the Conference, I chose to wear a silly hat in order to make the point that students often need a visual clue to help them differentiate between teacher and “historical figure”.

I then explained how the remainder of the enquiry progressed. This was to use a traditional card sort to allow students an opportunity to categorise the causes of Custer's defeat and to reach their own conclusions as to who was to blame.

To finish, I made a link between the lesson material and modern day controversy that continues to surround the Battle of the Little Bighorn. This was done using a screen shot from the custerwest.org website which accuses teachers of peddling hatred of national heroes to impressionable children.



This website presents Custer as a hero and claims that teachers lie by telling students he was responsible for his own death.

What do you think?

By showing our students that the controversies of the past continue to resonate in the present we do much to make our enquiries into the past a memorable and meaningful experience.'