

**Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for History, Classics
and Archaeology Grant**

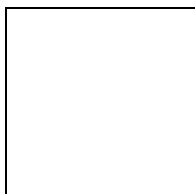
Teaching history to non specialist history students

Final Report

Derek Bunyard, Janice de Sousa, Camilla Leach, Stephanie Spencer

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Faculty of Education
University of Winchester
West Hill,
Winchester
Hampshire
SO22 4NR



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HE Academy Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology Grant
Teaching history for non specialist history students
Executive summary

The Education Studies degree at the University of Winchester is an interdisciplinary programme leading to a BA (hons). Students may take Education Studies or Education Studies (Early Childhood). The degree is focussed on text based study, there are no placements. Students are expected to base their study on extensive reading of primary texts. Modules are thematic rather than disciplines based so that whatever their area of interest they will need the skills identified in the history benchmarks in building confidence in analysing and reading a variety of source material. Our students come from a wide variety of backgrounds with differing degrees of historical skills. Some may be taking an Education Studies and History Combined Honours degree, others will have abandoned history almost as soon as they entered secondary school. All our students take the same four modules in the first year. One of these, '1944/88 The Acts' in semester two is designed to give them a contextual overview of the development of state education in England and Wales since 1830. In their first assignment they are asked to analyse an extract from the Norwood Report (1943) *Curriculum and Examinations in Secondary Schools*. For many this is a challenging task as they are unfamiliar with the techniques required and there is limited time in the lectures for detailed explanation.

The subject centre grant provided for the addition of a variety of supplementary resources in order to develop student skills and confidence as they completed this assignment. Students in the 2004-5 cohort had been asked to fill in a questionnaire asking what additional help they would have liked. The grant enabled us to follow up suggestions in the 2004/5 survey and students in the 2005-6 cohort were provided with an introductory lecture giving an overview of the period 1830-1988; an optional reading pack focussing on the cultural, social and political themes of this time period; five additional seminars and workshops focussing on analysing primary sources and a web based timeline offering links to more detailed websites.

At the end of the semester the 2006 cohort of students was given a further questionnaire asking about the efficacy of the different types of supplementary help. Opinions were divided, demonstrating the different learning styles of our students. All the resources provided had proved to be of some help to the students and were received positively. As the resources were all supplementary to the main lectures students with the requisite expertise did not feel that too much time was devoted to issues with which they were already familiar. Most students attended the seminars and the introductory lecture. The timeline is still in the process of development and will remain as a resource on the Education Studies website. Seminars will be retained next year but may be re-organised to provide fewer workshops for smaller groups of students rather than an expectation that all students will attend all workshops.

It was clear that our students were beginning undergraduate study with little confidence in their own, or their peers' skills of analysis. Following our presentation at the annual conference of the Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology it became apparent that these anxieties are not limited to non history specialist students and that our experience is not limited to those on interdisciplinary courses. The team would like to thank the Subject Centre for the grant which has enabled them to build the confidence and ability of our first year students and we trust that our experience will be of use to others.

1. Project

1.1. Project description

The aim of this project was to identify and create effective supplementary resources for introducing historical skills to non history specialist students. Dawson, Murray and Paterson (2005) noted that even specialist history students benefited from additional support in the development of their historical skills. Non traditional history students face a harder task as many of them do not take history up to GCSE level. This project was designed as a result of a student survey of the first year cohort on an Education Studies BA (hons) programme at the University of Winchester in 2004/5. The survey was conducted after the submission of the first essay for a level one module on the development of the state provision of education in Britain. The assignment for the module required an analysis of a short extract from a Board of Education Report (1943) with a personal reflection by the student on the experience of their own education. It was clear that students needed to develop their confidence and skills in reading and handling historical documents. In addition, with so little prior experience they were not aware of the amount of material available through the internet, or how to go about finding it. For many students there was also little understanding, or awareness of the relevance of historical frameworks to their own experience and identity.

In common with students on other interdisciplinary courses our students do not necessarily bring to their studies any prior experience in history, over 50% gave up history before GCSE (Student survey). The Education Studies programme has eschewed a disciplines based approach to the subject in favour of a three stage generic progression from a focus on 'experience' at level 1 moving to theory at level 2 and critique at level 3 (Tubbs & Grimes, (now de Sousa) 2001). It understands the concept of education in its widest sense which includes historical, sociological, representational and educational theories and texts. Our students do not take specifically 'history of education' modules but will encounter primary texts which require historical analytical skills throughout their studies.

Initial research confirmed Ramsden's observations when he noted Lybeck and Yencken's desire that students should overcome 'common misconceptions of and negative attitudes to the subject and their nervousness in looking at the subject independently' (2003: 139), because of 'what is perceived as its remoteness from our present culture' (Lybeck and Yencken in Ramsden 2003:139). In developing supplementary materials at level one we intended to offer

students access to resources which would increase their knowledge base, and develop their analytical skills. One aim was to raise students' awareness of the potential for historical analysis to use 'knowledge in order to develop certain skills and quality of mind' (QAA History benchmarks, 2000 Academic standards, 10, 12).

The institution has a stated commitment to Widening Participation (King Alfred's College, Strategic Plan 2002-05, 1.2) and our students come from a wide range of backgrounds including non traditional and mature entrants through Access and Btec courses. For many of them their experience of history hitherto has not been positive. The survey indicated that students are now interested in pursuing the history of education but are not confident in tackling independent reading of what they see as challenging texts.

This project sought to extend the help available for non-history specialists. There is not time, nor would it be appropriate to the Education Studies programme philosophy or content to spend main lecture time on the explanation of detailed historical narratives. The supplementary material aimed to give them both the confidence and the skills to approach historical texts.

Nearly 50% of our students surveyed had abandoned history at school before GCSE. The remainder were equally split between those who took GCSE and those who took A level. Therefore we cannot expect that all our students will bring basic skills for analysing, reading or even finding relevant historical texts.

1.2 Aims and objectives

The project addressed benchmarks of the historian's skills and qualities of mind for non specialist history students.

- 1) Increase the knowledge base of non history specialist students many of whom give up history at school prior to GCSE (bench marks statement 12.i & 12.ii)
- 2) Offer an introduction to, and the opportunity to practice, basic critical skills (benchmark 12.iv, 12.v)
- 3) Build confidence in approaching primary texts and develop intellectual independence (benchmark 12.vi, 12.vii)
- 4) Highlight the relevance of the past to the present (12.i)

- 5) Encourage students to reflect on their experience of education in the light of a variety of primary sources on the development of formal education (12.i 12.iii).
- 6) Build confidence in oral discussion and completing written assignments using primary texts. (12.vii)

1.3 Project content

The materials developed by the course team for this project were:

- An introductory lecture at the end of semester one giving a chronological overview of the main events and concepts from the mid nineteenth to the twentieth century .
- An extended reading pack building on themes introduced in the introductory lecture
- A web based timeline giving links to websites with either more detailed information or primary texts
- 5 focused workshops and seminars following lead lectures in semester 2

1.4 Evaluation

The new cohort of level one students in 2005-06 was asked to complete the same questionnaire as the previous year, following the first assignment. This together with tutor evaluation of the assignment indicated the effectiveness of the new material, whilst recognising that each cohort will vary in the historical skills they bring with them.

2. Context

2.1 The students

In 2005/6 and 2006/7 there were approximately 120 students enrolled on the Education Studies course. While some of these took history as their second subject in the combined honours degree a majority had little experience of historical work. 82 students completed the evaluation questionnaire following the essay hand in and the completion of this project. Figures given in this report relate to that evaluation and have been rounded for convenience.

The questionnaires were anonymous and students were free to decide whether or not to complete them.

Historical experience of students % (student number in brackets)

Before GCSE	After GCSE	A level	Not given
45% (37)	31% (25)	22% (18)	(2)

It was clear that many students had mixed feelings about their previous experience

Did you enjoy history at school?

Yes	No	Occasionally	Not given
43% (35)	22% (18)	34% (28)	(1)

Reasons given for those who did not enjoy history at school

Boring	Poor teaching	Topic uninteresting
15% (12)	10% (8)	12% (10)

The students were asked what they found particularly difficult on the module

Reading	Selecting appropriate quotes	Volume of material	Analysis	Distancing self from subject	Not given
10% (8)	26% (21)	15% (12)	25% (20)	13% (11)	12% (10)

How similar is history in this module to history taught in school?

Was similar	Not similar	Not given
20% (16)	70% (57)	10% (9)

2.3 Existing research

Teaching history within an interdisciplinary degree raises some difficult questions. The team was informed by J.Slater's comment on school history that 'History is an often unsettling and sometimes uncomfortable subject. It is controversial and often very sensitive. There is some consensus about its importance in the school curriculum but much less agreement about what it is for' (Slater 1995: xi)

The project team drew extensively on existing research in this area, for example:

Diane Railton and Paul Watson,(2005) 'Teaching autonomy 'Reading Groups and the development of autonomous learning practices', *Active Learning in Higher Education*, Vol 6 (3) pp182-193.

Noel Entwistle 'How do Students learn and study? HE Academy

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/embedded_object.asp?id=21699&filename=Entwistle) accessed April 2006.

Colin Brooks and Jonathan Gibson 'Teaching the Reading of Texts: Interdisciplinary Perspectives, Workshop Glasgow December 2005

http://www.hca.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/reports/classics/teaching_reading_texts.doc accessed April 2006)

Graham Rogers, 'History, learning technology and student achievement making the difference?' *Active Learning in Higher Education* Vol 5 (2) 232-247 (2004).

Enhanced Teaching-Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses Subject overview report Charles Anderson and Kate Day (Universities of Edinburgh, Coventry and Durham, November 2005)

Anderson, C. and Day, K. (2005) Purposive environments: engaging students in the values and practices of history, *Higher Education*, 49 (3) pp.319-343

Rogers, G. (2004) History, learning technology and student achievement, Making the difference? *Active Learning in Higher Education*, ILTHE & Sage publications

Alan Booth History Survey: Supporting More Diverse Students

Stierer, B. & Antoniou, M. (2004) Are there distinctive methodologies for pedagogic research in higher education?, *Teaching in higher education*, 9 (3)

3. Introductory Lecture

3.1 The Lecture

This was delivered in week 12 of semester 1 prior to the Christmas break. It concluded the module on 'Educators' in which students are introduced to the work of a number of individual thinkers. Students are encouraged to broaden their idea of what constitutes education. The lectures deliberately do not follow a chronological pattern, selecting the educators for their variety of thought rather than charting developments in the history of education theory and practice. These can include practitioners such as A.S. Neill and Maria Montessori and also individuals who students might not previously have recognised as 'educators' in the formal sense, for example Charles Dickens and Steven Spielberg.

Tutors have frequently noted that many students do not have a sense of how different time periods fit together and the introductory lecture to the semester 2 module 'The Acts 1944 and 1988' was designed to give students some idea of the overall context of these significant education acts. It was given by the tutor who delivers the 1944 section of the module. It was accompanied by a series of largely familiar images on a PowerPoint presentation. Students were expressly told that the lecture was to give them a very brief overview at speed and that they were not to take notes. In doing this it was hoped that they would take away with them an impression of the zeitgeist of each period and make some connections with their existing knowledge.

Title 'A gallop through history (1836-1987)'

The lecture began by emphasising the importance of understanding political and cultural contexts to developments in education and noting some issues that students might identify when studying a text: social class, economic change, political events, position of women, religious and cultural contexts. These were followed by slides using illustrations. Items selected for discussion were those which students might have come across without being clear where they fitted within a time line.

1. Victoria (Industrialisation, railways, Crimean war, Boer war)
2. William Morris (Arts and Crafts movement)
3. Ruskin by Rossetti (position of women, separate spheres, social class)
4. Caroline Norton (employment of women)
5. Edwardians (embryonic welfare provision, social class suffrage campaigns)
6. Changing culture modernism

- 7. World War 1 (all population affected - expectations of improved welfare)
- 8. 1920s (Hollywood, Jazz, Wall Street Crash)
- 9. 1930s Rise of fascism
- 10. Abdication
- 11 World War 2 (importance of Home Front)
- 12 Welfare State
- 13 New Elizabethan Age, Festival of Britain, Cold War
- 14 1960s Labour government, Women's Liberation, censorship lifted, Vietnam
- 15 1970s Punk, Winter of Discontent IRA troubles
- 16 1980s Mrs. Thatcher, Falklands War
- 17 Princess Diana

3.2 Student evaluation

Did you attend the introductory lecture (on last day of semester 1)

Yes	No	Not given
87% (71)	11% (9)	2% (2)

How useful was the introductory lecture?

Very useful	Quite useful	Not useful	Not given
25% (20)	57% (47)	5% (4)	13% (11)

Many of the students commented that they had known very little of the politics or history of the twentieth century other than World War 2. Feedback following the lecture was positive

4 Reading Pack

4.1 Content

There are substantial reading packs to accompany the module which address specific issues raised in the module. This supplementary pack was designed to extend some of the issues raised in the introductory lecture. All the books used are also available in the university library and students were encouraged to follow up any interest generated. As with the lecture the readings chosen were designed to give a flavour of the time rather than a detailed political, economic or social account.

Students were advised that they might find the readings useful reference points throughout the programme

The pack was headed by a table of political parties and Prime Ministers from 1834-1997 from <http://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/England-History?PrimeMinisters.htm>

Dennis, B. & Skilton, D. (eds) (1987) *Reform and Intellectual Debate in Victorian England*, London: Croom Helm 'The Gentleman'.

Hearn, P. (1876) *Labouring Life in the Victorian Countryside*, Gloucester: Alan Sutton 'The Influence of Religion'.

Hennock, E.P. 'Poverty and Social Reforms' in P. Johnson, (ed.) (1994) *Twentieth Century Britain Economic, Social and Cultural Change*, London: Longman.

Branson, N. (1975) *Britain in the Nineteen Twenties*, London: Weidenfield and Nicholson 'Slump: the Dole and the Poor Law'.

Symons, J. (1975) *The Thirties. A Dream Revisited*, London: Faber and Faber 'The Heart of a Dream'.

Calder, A. & Sheridan, D. (1984) *Speak for Yourself A Mass Observation Anthology*, London: Jonathan Cape 'The Forces, 1940-45'.

Vansittart, P. (1995) *In the Fifties*, London: John Murray, '1956 A Change of Mood'.

Clarke, P. (1996) *Hope and Glory, Britain 1900-1970*, London: Allen Lane, 'In Place of Strife, 1963-1970'.

Childs, D. (1997) *Britain since 1945*, London: Routledge 'Labour's Minority Governments, 1974-79'.

Seldon, A. (1991) 'The Conservative Party since 1945' in T. Gourvish, & A. O'Day, (1991) *Britain since 1945*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

4.2 Student Evaluation

The packs were available following the introductory lecture for reading over the winter break. The readings were referenced in some of the essays set for the module.

Did you use the reading pack?

Yes	No	Not given
54% (44)	44% (36)	2% (2)

How useful did you find the reading pack?

Very useful	Quite useful	Not useful	Not given
21% (17)	45% (37)	15% (12)	20% (16)

5 Seminar workshops

5.1 Content

Five seminar / workshops took place following the lead lectures in the 1944 section of the module. In view of the success of these seminars and student demand five further seminars/ workshops were given following the 1988 lectures. The workshops took the form of working through a selection of primary texts for specific points. There was a ten to fifteen minute introduction by the tutor and then students worked in groups with two tutors circulating to help discussion.

A summary of the seminar work was posted onto the Education Studies website for students to refer to as they wrote their essays

Seminar 1: When is the piece written - what context do we need to find out?

Seminar 2: Who wrote the piece? What do we need to know about the author / where do we find this information?

Seminar 3: What does it say? Writing a précis. Finding significant quotes.

Seminar 4: Who was the audience? How do you judge the significance of a text?

Seminar 5: Analysing an extract from the Spens report (1939) (The actual essay set was analysing an extract from the Norwood Report, *Curriculum and Examinations in Secondary Schools*, 1943)

5.2 Student evaluation

Did you attend the seminars?

Yes	No	Some	Not given
87% (71)	10% (8)	2% (2)	1 % (1)

How useful did you find the seminars?

Very useful	Quite useful	Not useful	Not given
43% (35)	44% (36)	7% (6)	6% (5)

Some students wanted the seminar material based only on the Norwood Report rather than looking at other texts which they felt were 'off the point'. They also commented that they would have liked more tutor input. It was clear that at this stage of the degree (first semester) there was little understanding of the value of group work. One student commented that there were too

many people for good discussion (ignoring the group work which followed the initial wide discussion). Another student commented 'You make us learn for ourselves which really helps'.

6. The Timeline

6.1. The content.

In the student survey which initiated the project many of the students had commented that they would like some help in accessing online information. They were bewildered by the array of material available. Equally from the tutors' point of view there is little point in re-inventing the wheel by repeating information already available. All Education Studies students use the Education Studies website regularly. Lecture notes are posted as are module outlines and reading lists.

We had extensive discussions over the format of the timeline. Did we want to address themes? Were we in danger of arbitrary periodisation if we tried to divide what could easily become unwieldy into more discrete sections? To what extent should we use graphics? How could we engage students' interest?

We considered a large number of existing timelines, some took linear forms, some were layered, some were flow charts. Some divided across the page.

Finally we offered the students two versions of the timeline, one a linear list and a second with access through visual images. These may be accessed at

<http://www2.winchester.ac.uk/edstudies/> (go to module outlines, archive 2005_6 1944/88 The Acts outline)

The timeline gives links to some primary texts, for example the Plowden Report (1967) and the text of Callaghan's Ruskin speech (1976) in addition to a variety of useful historical timelines.

6.2 Student evaluation

Did you access the timeline?

Yes	No	Not given
48% (39)	51% (42)	1% (1)

How useful did you find the timeline?

Very useful	Quite useful	Not useful	Not given
18% (15)	33% (27)	20% (16)	30% (24)

The timeline was not available at the beginning of the semester which might account for the number of students who did not access it. Students were made aware of it and asked for their

comments on their preference for the graphic or linear model. The comments were evenly divided. Some liked the simplicity of the linear model others found the graphic version more intriguing, which was our intention.

Some student comments:

The time line would be useful if all the modules were included.

I preferred the graphics - they give more information

I prefer the simple bullet points

Graphics are more interesting

I like the plain version. It's difficult to know which sites are reputable so this is good

Prefer the one with pictures - can we have dates on the books?

Other modules might be confusing

More instructions on using the time line

If extended it might get overloaded.

7. Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology Annual Conference 2006 feedback

The team was invited to attend the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology Annual Conference 2006 at Lady Margaret Hall, University of Oxford. Three members of the team presented a paper entitled 'History by the Back Door: introducing historical perspectives to non-specialist students'

In this paper we set out the parameters of the project and discussed the progress of the work. At this stage we had just finished teaching the first half of the module but had not had either the student feedback or finished marking the assignment set on analysing a piece from the Norwood Report.

The paper generated discussion over the content of our course and general issues with helping students to analyse primary texts. We were interested to find that problems of confidence in handling these sources were also articulated by specialist history students. Some members of the audience noted that we have high expectations of our students in the amount of primary material we expect them to read on all the modules, not just those that are primarily historical in content. As the reading of primary material is central to our programme we welcomed comments as to how we can further help our first year students. Similar problems in terms of student seminars were noted by members of the audience and there was general agreement in the disjuncture between the expectations for students in schools and those of first year undergraduates. It was interesting, as well as a matter of concern, to know that this is not only an interdisciplinary problem but is also pertinent to history specialist students.

8. Conclusion and future developments

8.1 General conclusion

The grant from the Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology has been very useful in enabling us to extend our resources for first year undergraduates on the interdisciplinary Education Studies programme at the University of Winchester. From discussion at the Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology conference it has become clear that students' lack of confidence in reading and analysing primary texts is not limited to our programme. The variety of material that we offered confirms existing research that the diverse nature of today's student body requires a variety of material to meet their needs. Whereas some students were technically adept and happy to use web based material others preferred directed reading. Only one student suggested student led seminars as a future development indicating the lack of confidence that students have in their own ability and the dependence that they have on the tutor as 'expert'. The marks for the semester have not yet been subject to detailed analysis but the impression gained by the two tutors who teach on this module is that there was much less anxiety about approaching the essay than previously. There was less take-up of the offer of individual tutorials and far fewer worried emails on approaching the topic. Very few students failed the assignment and our impression was that student grades did improve. There seemed to be fewer third class marks and subsequently an increase in second and first class marks. Our overall impression was that the standard had improved, but of course we are comparing different student cohorts.

8.2 Future developments

In planning for the module next year we have decided to retain the introductory lecture at the end of the first semester. The references for the reading pack will be available so that students can follow up their interests. We intend to continue the seminars, ideally in smaller groups but that is also dependent on staffing. It may prove more beneficial to divide the cohort into smaller groups for fewer seminars per student so, for example, we might give 5 seminars to 20 students covering all the material. The timeline will continue to be developed, for the moment we will continue to run the two models side by side until we have a clearer idea of which is preferable.