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Historical knowledge in a knowledge economy – what types of knowledge matter?

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Historical knowledge in a knowledge economy – what types of knowledge matter?

This article examines the potential of history as a subject to contribute to a 'knowledge economy'. Global trends in curricula reforms have often emphasised generic competences and development of students' critical thinking to benefit the future economic position of citizens and nations. However, viewing knowledge in these terms presents a reductive view, particularly given that there is no clear definition of the nature of the knowledge which could or should be universally deployed in the pursuit of a 'knowledge economy'. This paper presents an argument that a focus on 'powerful' disciplinary knowledge and 'valuable' frameworks of knowledge, in areas such as history education rather than generic competences and skills, would better serve a knowledge economy. Drawing on two empirical studies from England and New Zealand, which present different policy contexts, the paper explores the extent to which the potential of history education is being realised to develop such powerful and valuable knowledge. The data reveal similar patterns in both contexts; despite the history teachers in both countries sharing a disciplinary understanding of the subject this is not comprehensively reflected in the curricula they construct, and there are few attempts to create coherent frameworks of knowledge. This suggests that the opportunities for history education to support the development of a knowledge economy have not been fully realised and exploited.

Keywords: history curriculum; knowledge; knowledge economy; disciplinary knowledge: curriculum; curriculum design

Introduction

The idea of a 'knowledge economy' has emerged as the impact of globalisation has seen a shift towards innovation as a key driver of economic advantage (Allais, 2012; Ball, 2017; Porter, 1998), and is commonly used to suggest direct causal links between developing specific forms of 'useful' knowledge and improved economic outcomes to give nations and individuals a competitive advantage (OCED, 1996). In linking 'knowledge' to the 'economy' education is seen as critical to this development and means '[g]overnments will need more stress on upgrading human capital through promoting access to a range of skills, and

especially the capacity to learn'. (OECD, 1996, 7). The importance of developing the knowledge economy can be seen in policy documents and statements in a range of contexts. Duncan (2011), the then American Secretary of State for Education, states that 'in a knowledge economy, education is the new currency by which nations maintain economic competitiveness and global prosperity.' Within the European Union (EU), Veugelers and Mojmir (2009, 1) argue that the knowledge economy is 'a pivotal policy area', and that supporting new member states in this regard is vital to the future economic well-being of the EU. In New Zealand a *Knowledge Wave* conference co-chaired by the Prime Minister and the Vice-Chancellor of The University of Auckland in 2001 is illustrative of the credibility given to the concept as the conference aimed 'To spark a broad-based national discussion on how New Zealand can benefit from the pursuit and application of knowledge-based creativity'. In the UK the knowledge economy features in government White Papers, such as 'The Importance of Teaching: The Schools White Paper (DfE, 2010) and the more recent 'Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice' about the future of higher education (DBIS, 2016). In Scotland the *Curriculum for Excellence* has at its heart a focus on ensuring 'children and young people gain the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for life in the 21st century, including skills for learning, life and work' (Education Scotland, 2017).

What this means in reality is however open to debate. Lauder et al. (2012, 1) see the knowledge economy as a 'social imaginary that has education at its centre'. The OECD (2001) states that the knowledge economy requires an emphasis on competencies and skills per se, but also acknowledges there is little agreement on which competencies and skills are seen as necessary. However the OECD (2001, 100) argues that the ability to 'use information and communication technologies (ICT), to solve problems, to work in teams, to supervise and lead and to undertake continuous learning' are key areas for development. Despite these

vagaries over the precise understanding of the term the emphasis in reformed education systems is on the development of generic competences (OECD, 2001) and 'on knowledge, the conditions for the production of knowledge and innovation, and the role of technology in enabling that process' (Robertson, 2005, 157). This has seen developing STEM education, lifelong learning, 'learning how to learn', and the value of networking as crucial elements of an education system in supporting a knowledge economy (e.g. OECD, 2016; US Department of Education, 2010). However existing educational systems are often viewed as being ill-equipped to meet these economic requirements. The curriculum has been a particular focus of criticism for being a 'one size fits all' model, lacking flexibility and choice, and for encouraging the transmission of knowledge (Robertson, 2005; Winter, 2012). Yet deliberations about curriculum reform can be poorly informed by curriculum theory, for example debates about different forms of knowledge that could be developed and seen as desirable are often overlooked or simplified (Harris & Burn, 2011).

This paper seeks to contribute to the debate about knowledge and what type of knowledge should be promoted by governments keen to develop a knowledge economy in a global context. The result can be a reductive view of what constitutes knowledge so this article examines changes to curricula for history in two different contexts, New Zealand and England to consider how curriculum decisions support government objectives. Both countries have been heavily influenced by neo-liberal policies and successive governments have introduced a series of educational reforms to secure future economic competitiveness. Yet both countries have currently adopted different positions regarding 'knowledge' in the curriculum. The paper focuses on historical knowledge because it offers an interesting insight into the debates about knowledge and the knowledge economy, especially as a number of subjects such as history, which are not directly related to STEM subjects are overlooked in

this context. Typically history is seen as contributing more to issues over citizenship, social cohesion and identity (e.g. Barton & Levstik, 2004), but a focus on historical knowledge and what constitutes history knowledge demonstrates the potential of a subject like history to provide a powerful means of equipping people with the sort of cognitive capabilities expected in a knowledge economy.

The different policy contexts

The place of history within the secondary school curriculum

While not a core subject in secondary schools in either England or New Zealand, the place of history within the curriculum in each country differs. In New Zealand history is taught as a discrete, optional subject only in senior secondary school, for students aged 15 to 18 years. In earlier years of schooling history has a presence within the Social Sciences learning area. *The New Zealand Curriculum* 2007, which is applicable to all years of compulsory schooling, contains broad vision and values statements, key competencies, and principles for curriculum decision making. Relevant to this discussion, for example, is the vision statement that young people will be 'enterprising and entrepreneurial' and the values statement that students will be encouraged to foster 'innovation, inquiry and curiosity'. The outcomes-based form of curriculum also specifies requirements for history through six *achievement objectives*, two for each of the three senior levels of history (see Table 1). But more dominant than *The New Zealand Curriculum* in determining teachers' practices, is the *National Certificate of Educational Achievement* (NCEA) qualification for senior students. From 2011 prescribed history content was abandoned when new *achievement standards* for the NCEA were written. This delegated authority over what historical content was included in history programmes to individual schools. Teachers' decisions are however constrained by the practicalities of what works well for addressing the achievement standards for the NCEA. There are six assessable

achievement standards at each level of history and they address second-order concepts such as cause and consequence and procedural knowledge such as enquiry skills.

[Insert Table 1 here]

The situation in England is more complex. History is a foundation subject in the National Curriculum meaning it is a compulsory subject in the lower secondary school (for students aged 11-14 and known as Key Stage 3 or KS3). It is an optional one in the upper years of secondary schooling for students aged 14-16 working towards public examinations (typically the General Certificate of Secondary Education or GCSE), and remains a specialist option for those aged 16-18 studying for A level exams. From 2003 secondary schools in England were encouraged to experiment with the length of their curriculum for students in the lower secondary school, so schools could teach KS3 in two, rather than three years, thus enabling them to spend three years working towards the public examinations at 16 years of age. Schools were also encouraged to experiment with the structure of this KS3 curriculum, for example the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) published a radical new curriculum (known as 'Opening Minds') framed around five key competences rather than subject areas. These curricula models represented a move away from subject knowledge per se and towards more generic educational outcomes, centred on ideas such as learning to learn, managing information and relating to people. However, following the election of the Conservation-Liberal Democrat coalition in 2010, and the more recent Conservative government, there has been a shift back to a more 'traditional' subject based curriculum, with a greater emphasis on 'knowledge'.

Curriculum changes

History practitioners commonly regard knowledge as differentiated into two main forms - substantive and disciplinary knowledge. Substantive knowledge refers to knowledge of events, ideas and people and includes substantive first order concepts such as nationalism or

communism which enable connections to be made across different historical periods and places. Disciplinary knowledge includes procedural and conceptual dimensions. Procedural thinking involves the processes required to effectively work with evidence, develop interpretations and construct arguments. The conceptual dimension draws upon what are called second order concepts such as cause, consequence, change and continuity, which provide ways in which history can be thought about and ordered. The shift to procedural knowledge and disciplinary ways of thinking can be traced back to the Schools Council History Project established in 1972, which began in England but was also influential in New Zealand. Therefore, requiring students to engage with second order history concepts and understanding how history is constructed from sources, is currently at the heart of professional discourse over curricula, which is also reflected in the national assessment systems, in both countries.

However the wider policy contexts differ as does the degree of freedom teachers have when determining what to include in their history curriculum. In New Zealand teachers have to work within an assessment framework, in which students have to demonstrate an understanding of historical concepts and processes, but in which no substantive knowledge is specified. This has seen a move to greater genericism and less prescription as teachers have complete freedom to choose the substantive knowledge. In England there has been a shift in the opposite direction. Teachers assess students' understanding of historical concepts and processes, but debate has focused more on what students should study and the place of substantive knowledge in assessing students' understanding of the past. A review of the curriculum in 2010 saw an attempt by the government to introduce a highly detailed and prescriptive level of substantive knowledge all students would be expected to know, based around chronological periods of history; although this was heavily modified and the level of prescription reduced, the proposals have sparked a renewed debate about the value of

substantive knowledge per se. Therefore the two systems make for interesting comparison, looking at how teachers with potentially similar conceptions of history as a form of disciplinary knowledge (for example Harris & Reynolds, 2016; Ormond, 2016), approach the subject within contrasting policy contexts.

Literature review

Central to the curriculum reforms in both contexts are questions about knowledge, and the type of knowledge deemed valuable and useful. For example in a knowledge economy the ability to 'learn how to learn' is deemed crucial. This is because the availability of technology means information is more readily available and accessible so the where and when of learning can be more flexible. Potentially learning can happen outside of an educational institution and does not require a 'teacher' to mediate the knowledge, hence the need for learners to know what to do with the knowledge they encounter. This implies the need for generic competences in working with knowledge.

This model has been criticised on different grounds. For Hirsch (1993, 24) there needs to be an element of core knowledge that everyone is taught, rather than a curriculum that emphasises skills at the expense of knowledge, as 'a coherent approach to specific content enhances students' critical thinking and higher-order thinking skills'. In part this provides equal access to a common heritage, learning about the 'best' from the past, and therefore is a form of cultural capital. However the core knowledge model, has been criticised (Cain & Chapman, 2014; Young & Muller, 2010); this is because students are expected to comply and accept preordained bundles of knowledge as valuable and uncontested, and are not expected to examine or understand the process by which particular claims to knowledge are made. Wheelahan (2007, 645) attacks competency based models of vocational education as being 'unproblematic 'descriptions' of the skills needed by employers', and argues that people need

to see that content is a product of disciplinary thinking. Young and Muller (2010) also critique the emphasis on competencies and skills, which they refer to as a 'Future 2' model of education. For them this type of curriculum has the potential to provide isolated, random areas of content within a sea of competences, where young people are not taught to distinguish between different types of knowledge and forms of thinking, instead knowledge is regarded as information. This can limit young people's understanding of the world to their own experiences. Similarly McPhail and Rata (2016) critique genericism for focusing on perceived relevance to the 'real world' as an organising principle for a curriculum rather than disciplinary concerns.

Instead Young and Muller (2010) advocate a model whereby young people are introduced to the processes and standards by which knowledge is constructed, and which therefore makes it contestable and modifiable, which they refer to as a 'Future 3' model; this disciplinary approach is seen as powerful knowledge (Young, 2016). It requires understanding of discipline specific ways of thinking; as Cain and Chapman (2014, 117) argue:

> Interrogating sources' in history is certainly not a generic critical thinking skill: it has conceptual dimensions (a concept of evidence) and a procedural element (modes of reading and interrogation) and knowing any number of facts about the historical context of an historical document will not help students interrogate that document as evidence unless they have some knowledge and understanding of the concept of evidence and some understanding of how to ask questions and of what questions to ask.

This counters Hirsch's claim that contextual knowledge is the main feature in distinguishing whether a text is seen as accessible. As Wineburg (2001) has shown, historians read texts differently to students; the latter read for information and therefore extract information whereas the former draw upon their conceptual understanding of history and read for meaning, subtext and to develop explanations. It can be argued that this disciplinary approach to knowledge is far more sophisticated and valuable than a more generic approach; advocates of the knowledge economy are often those who claim education needs to develop generic

skills, valorising information retrieval and information processing, as essential elements needed for the knowledge economy, yet disciplinary knowledge appears to offer a stronger analytical ability (Cain & Chapman, 2014). It could be argued that a disciplinary approach to history exceeds what might be gained through a 'learning to learn' or 'critical thinking' approach seen as necessary elements of education for a knowledge economy.

There is a strong argument for seeing history as powerful knowledge (Young, 2016), but it does not necessarily make history 'useful' knowledge, nor does it mean that a disciplinary approach to history is enough to contribute to a knowledge economy. The Usable Historical Pasts (UHP) project (Foster, Ashby, Lee, & Howson, 2008), showed few students had a coherent view of the past and were unable to identify trends and patterns through time, despite being taught a history curriculum in England that emphasised the notion of history as a discipline. In other words students' historical knowledge was of little use to them in explaining their current reality. In order for historical knowledge to be useful it ought to allow young people to orientate themselves in time, and enable associations or connections to be made between events and themes, which help provide a sense of change and continuity, and similarity and difference within eras and across time and geographical space. Rüsen's (2004) notion of historical consciousness provides an interesting perspective into how history might be useful, by connecting our understanding of the past, to the present, and to possible future actions. Rüsen has devised a typology outlining four different ways in which people might make use of the past. The 'exemplary' and 'traditional' types essentially mine the past for information to provide a moral model of how we should behave and to justify current practices. The 'critical' and 'genetic' models both emphasise studying the past through a more critical lens, providing counter-narratives and appreciating that events in the past could have worked out differently and that there are a range of possible future actions. These last two types use history in a more critical and potentially useful way, and require a good

understanding of the nature of the historical discipline. However all four types require a sense of a 'big picture' of the past, suggesting that useful historical knowledge needs to be based around a coherent framework. Such a framework could be constructed on different scales. Shemilt (2009) advocates a framework based around four fundamental themes - modes of production, political and social organisation, growth and movement of peoples and culture and praxis, which span all of human history and geographical space, whilst the recent Dutch curriculum is based around ten periods of national history (Wilschut, 2009). However these different proponents agree that any framework should be seen as a provisional scaffold, subject to modification as students develop further insights into issues as they study them, which differentiates it from the core knowledge approach. By studying recurring themes throughout history young people should be able to make increasingly sophisticated associations and connections between people, events and themes, appreciating the 'big picture' of the past, rather than seeing it simply as 'a formless collection of events' (Lee, 2007, p. 60). This form of thinking provides both a sense of perspective, links past and present and could therefore inform potential future actions, and requires the ability to adapt thinking as new knowledge is encountered. This ability to make connections and to modify ideas in the light of new knowledge are important ways of thinking expected in a knowledge economy.

This literature review highlights the debates about the value of different forms of knowledge. The global emphasis on a knowledge economy is driving educational reforms in one direction, namely the importance of generic competences, and is a feature of both New Zealand and England's policy contexts, but within England there has also been a drive towards some form of core knowledge curriculum. Yet knowledge debates in history education present other forms of knowledge as being of greater value, namely the importance

of ‘powerful knowledge’ through a disciplinary approach, and the development of provisional frameworks of knowledge.

Exploring what teachers actually do and what choices they make about the form of knowledge to develop provides helpful insights into policy enactment and the extent to which teachers are (un)consciously supporting the development of a knowledge economy. Exploring this in two countries, which to an extent have a shared vision of history education, but with differing policy contexts, adds to the richness of our understanding about what teachers choose to do. This study therefore focuses on what type(s) of historical knowledge is being developed, and in particular looks at the extent to which teachers a) adopt a disciplinary approach to teaching history and b) give consideration to building a coherent, usable knowledge of the past when planning their programmes. And therefore whether the teaching of history is in a position to support ways of thinking that would be seen as valuable in the context of a knowledge economy.

Methodology

Evidence of history teachers’ practices and views derives from data collected in slightly different ways in the two countries. In England data were gathered from eleven teachers in ten history departments in two southern counties, which represents a non-probability, convenience sample, whilst the New Zealand teachers were drawn from New Zealand’s largest city, Auckland, as a purposeful sampling of teachers from diverse school types. All the teachers were either Heads of Department or had some responsibility for curriculum planning. Some of these teachers were new in post, whereas others had up to 20 years of experience. In both contexts the teachers represent a range of schools – single sex, co-educational, low to high socio-economic areas, urban and suburban, and religious and non-denominational schools. All schools were state-maintained. Ethical approval was granted by the universities in which both researchers were based and appropriate ethical procedures were

followed. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, and agreement received to electronically record interviews. Copies of the transcripts were made available to all participants for validation.

Semi structured interviews were conducted with each of the participants in each country and in New Zealand a further second interview was undertaken a year after the first to evaluate any changes in teachers' views and approaches. In New Zealand, in response to a new environment of having no prescribed topics, participants were asked what historical topics they selected for their programmes and asked how this interfaced with the teaching of disciplinary skills while in England participants were asked to explain their programme choices. In England, schemes of work were also collected from each of the participants' departments, covering the 11-13/14 KS3 curriculum. Schemes of work, which outline lesson sequences, are an expectation of History departments in England. These documents are artefacts, which present the thinking behind lessons to be taught. There is no particular format to which these documents are supposed to conform, but generally the schemes of work collected in this study specify what is to be taught and the aims of particular lessons, and many then provided suggested activities and resources.

In both countries the use of semi-structured interviews allowed a range of issues to be explored, including the thinking behind teachers' choice of content and how they understood what they were trying to achieve in developing students' understandings of history. Interviewees' explanations for their programme structures were coded in relation to the degree to which teachers adopted a disciplinary approach to teaching history and the extent to which teachers deliberately tried to construct young people's framework knowledge of the past. In both studies the data were hand-coded. Pursuing a disciplinary approach could be recognised in teachers' comments on the development of substantive, procedural or conceptual understanding (which were adopted as broad codes) and within each area more

specific ways of thinking could be identified; for example procedural thinking would be seen in an emphasis on students gaining an understanding of how to critique and interpret primary and secondary sources, whilst a conceptual focus would be reflected in reference to ideas such as understanding of causation or change. Ascertaining whether historical frameworks were being deliberately planned for would be discernible through the use of themes and the deployment of depth and overview topics to cover a broad range of historical themes and periods, which were adopted as broad codes. An emphasis on themes would suggest opportunities to revisit issues that resonate through the ages, building up an increasingly sophisticated understanding of an issue, with the ability to make connections between events and issues across time. The interplay of depth and overview could also indicate how students are enabled to develop a coherent 'big picture' of the past. For the schools in England the schemes of work were analysed to see whether they revealed signs of a strong disciplinary emphasis in the planning, and whether there were explicit attempts to create a usable historical framework. Given the nature of the documents and varying levels of detail, this does mean that there is an element of interpretation involved in the analysis. In the majority of cases the combination of enquiry questions or topic headings, along with intended learning objectives, and some detail about possible lesson activities give a good indication as to the nature of what was being taught. In the New Zealand context analysis of the record of topics addressed in school programmes and explained by teachers during the interviews, serves as a verifiable source of evidence for how programming supported or mitigated against coherent frameworks of substantive knowledge.

Findings

A disciplinary approach to teaching history

Analysis of the schemes of work in the English schools showed that five of the ten schools used enquiry questions extensively throughout their planning; for example, in Plum School

the enquiry question ‘How can Sutton Hoo help us learn about the Saxons?’ is firmly focused on the process of working with evidence, the question ‘Why was Henry II whipped?’ has at its heart the concept of causation, whereas ‘Who should be king in 1066?’ is much more about substantive knowledge. These first two questions, especially when combined with an analysis of the learning objectives for the lesson and lesson activities indicate a disciplinary approach. Two other schools had a more mixed approach using both enquiry questions and topic headings (and was probably indicative of changes being made as departments rewrite their schemes of work), and three schools had schemes of work that simply identified topics to be taught, suggesting a focus on substantive content was the priority. Interview data also reinforces the idea that some clearly saw history as a discipline when it came to planning:

> I do think some of the skills that history gives are unique to the subject, particularly the use of evidence, um, and the consideration of purpose of author, and where interpretations come from. I think those are absolutely vital. (Kerry, Cherry School)

However there appeared to be two important issues arising from an analysis of these departments’ approaches to teaching history as a discipline. One is the extent to which these teachers saw particular concepts and processes as being specific to history as a discipline or as generic and important life skills. This applies particularly to the idea of working with sources, and using them as evidence to make claims about what happened in the past, and exploring the process by which this is done. In total eight of the teachers mentioned the importance of understanding historical ‘skills’ such as working with evidence.

But in most cases teachers explained the value of working with sources generically, stressing the ability to think about societal issues generally:

> It really does encourage them to analyse and question what they read, to consider how accounts of the past are formed and we relate that to the present day quite a lot and particularly in their understanding of the media. (Judith, Ash School)

The problem with stressing the importance of generic ways of thinking devalues the uniqueness of the subject and the discipline, and although the teachers might align themselves with Young and Muller's (2010) Future 3 curriculum model, their justification appears to fit more comfortably with a Future 2 curriculum.

The second issue is revealed through an analysis of the actual enquiry questions, and the accompanying detail in the schemes of work, which makes it possible to identify the particular focus of lessons; this was possible with seven of the ten sets of schemes of work (the other three were less detailed so any comments would be merely speculative). Analysis of the Year 7 schemes of work on medieval England (for students aged 11-12) shows several teachers placed a far greater emphasis on issues related to second order concepts (such as cause and consequence, and change and continuity) rather than the procedural thinking about how the past is constructed, i.e. working with sources and the development of historical interpretations (see Table 2). The former essentially provide the means by which we explain and communicate our understanding of the past, i.e. why events happen, and the extent to which things have changed. The latter however is, arguably, at the heart of disciplinary thinking as it provides the means by which claims to knowledge are made.

[Insert Table 2 around here]

Overall causation questions tend to dominate the majority of the schemes of work which have a disciplinary focus. Enquiries about historical interpretation, which has been called the 'jewel in the crown' of the curriculum (Counsell, 2003, 6) because of its value in showing how history is fluid and is open to misuse, feature infrequently in the schemes of work.

In New Zealand, on the other hand, given the strong focus upon disciplinary procedures and concepts in the *Curriculum* and achievement standards, teachers could be said to be adopting a strong disciplinary approach. Selections of historical content are largely

made on the grounds that they are suitable for addressing the concepts or disciplinary procedures assessed in a particular achievement standard. For example, all interviewees, in relation to the standards assessing understanding of the concepts *cause* and *consequence* explained how the substantive content they chose was an attempt to ensure its suitability for addressing the requirements of these standards. Stephen found that the topic of the Bombing of Hiroshima worked:

> You can do long term, short term causes and consequences which you need to do. You can analyse them which means talk about the type of political causes, social and economic and you can do that with that topic really well (Interview 1).

As he explained 'It's really about understanding the achievement standards … and then picking topics that work.'

However, less certain is that teachers recognised, or viewed as important, the conceptual basis of their teaching. Instead the concepts of causes and consequences were commonly discussed in terms of ticking off that they had taught students an appropriate number of causes and consequences, in sufficient depth, for students to achieve at the highest levels; as Bianca (interview 2) commented 'I teach them three causes, I teach them three consequences, they don't get like a fourth. We had a fourth to begin with, but we dropped that because it was just too much.' This results in an historical convenience rather than validity emerging from evidence and interpretation.

The historical concept *significance* is also a consideration in programmes. Students are required to engage with evaluating an events' 'significance to New Zealanders'. Yet the importance of *significance* as an historical concept can be side-lined as teachers focus upon the suitable selection of an event as their priority. Matthew commented that for his Level 1 programme:

> it is just simply World War 2, what caused it, what were the consequences. And that decision was more just because we could deal better with the significance to New Zealanders… We wanted just to make sure, that should they be given a question in the exam which relates to New Zealand, they at least had something to talk about (Interview 2).

In these circumstances, where assessment is the driving factor, second order concepts such as cause, consequence, significance, can have reduced capacity to fulfil their critical role in disciplinary thinking. The concepts are not brought into play because of their appropriateness for explaining a particular body of knowledge, nor are the second-order concepts utilised in conjunction with each other. Instead a pre-determined concept is the starting point for organising a response to an assessment. Such an approach does not guarantee that disciplinary concepts are understood or used in ways which assist in the development of historically literate students.

One of the interviewees however, regarded the 'greater focus on historical concepts (as) a significant advantage' (Linda, Interview 2). She noted that 'driving … our programme is a desire to shift from content to bringing forward the historical concepts … so we cottoned on to *The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts* book' (Seixas & Morton, 2012). She highlighted, for example, the benefits of putting an explicit focus on *perspectives* and on *significance*. Countering this argument though were her concerns that there is an over emphasis on *causation*, and that concepts such as *change and continuity* are not given sufficient emphasis so that 'trends and patterns get lost' (Interview 1). She referred to the way causes and consequences are assessed at each year level which she viewed as being 'done to death' (Interview 2). Linda also felt that students were 'the poorer because they are being driven again towards this narrow definition of what history is. It's an event and it's about causes and consequences of an event'.

The focus on the second order concept *perspectives* was also regarded as valuable by all research participants. The perspectives standards are internally assessed where teachers set an assessment and students research the views of people in the past or present about an historical event. By their final year in school students are expected to see perspectives through the lens of an historian, making judgments on the validity of differing perspectives. Therefore, historical interpretation becomes a stronger feature at this level.

A disciplinary focus on source analysis, research and essay writing were also viewed as important. Linda (interview 2) was quite typical when she explained 'I think the research, component, has allowed for a greater level of thinking and greater understanding of working with evidence, so the tools of an historian, and a greater understanding of information literacy and being critical. It has developed a more critical appreciation for a variety of sources'. Teachers therefore, are emphasising the way the achievement standards lead students to the use of disciplinary processes.

Teachers however viewed their attempts to adopt a strong disciplinary approach to sources as somewhat compromised when it came to preparing students for the source interpretation standards assessed through examination. In the absence of prescribed topics, the source interpretation examinations require students to understand sources for a historical context in which they have no prior knowledge or learning. As Karen noted, 'that's part of the problem isn't it because the depth required for unpacking those sources is just not there, because it's not backed by any content knowledge' (Interview 1). Teachers have a choice over which standards they pursue and have increasingly become reluctant to enter their students in the source interpretation examination papers. So while teachers recognise the importance of interpretation of sources for developing the understandings required for effective history research, teaching the methodologies and thinking processes required to

interpret a variety of sources, in circumstances where there is no intention that students sit those standards, is likely to be less of a priority.

Planning history programmes to build a coherent, usable knowledge of the past

Clearly, given the enormous scope of what could be taught in history, teachers face a series of constraints as to how much history can actually be taught within the limited timeframe of a curriculum and the depth in which topics and themes can be explored. History teachers are therefore forced to make choices about what to teach, so it seems imperative that they are absolutely crystal clear as to what they wish to achieve through their selection.

However the interview data from both countries reveals that few of the teachers consider the overall shape of what students would learn when planning. George, one of the teachers in England was an exception, as he was keen that each year's work was based around a central theme, which were 'identity' (as in, who are the British?), the relationship between the individual and the state, and empires. For him different topics were included to help contextualise later ones:

> the Enlightenment ...there was only one lesson there but it becomes important then when we mention the French Revolution …when we do the Tudor or Stuart period, it's what the significance of this period is, and how it links together, more to just elaborate on the context more as opposed to oh here's just another topic.

Jane demonstrated the most overt and conscious approach to content selection; her schemes of work were characterised by large sequential taught thematic overviews, which created a layered, rather than linear, approach to knowledge construction:

> [Students are] able to assess then each historical period of time and go right, this is a period of rapid progress …and then they can say….well because we did religion last term and there was masses of progress there, or change, and whereas this time we're doing technology and there wasn't that much progress, so maybe the two correlate and they go

> well religion was strong and therefore maybe that explains why they're not progressing with technology and medicine, so that's the idea.

Another exception was Tanya, whose planning, combined depth studies and overviews. Many of these overviews provided a broader context for periods as well as providing a big picture of developments, into which depth studies were slotted to exemplify issues.

Most other teachers justified content selection for their curricula on the grounds of student and/or staff interest in topics, alongside concerns over resourcing. Consequently their schemes of work more closely resembled a series of chronological, yet randomly, selected series of individuals and events, with few attempts to build overviews. For example, looking at the schemes of work to see how the development of political authority in Britain was presented, showed most schools would look at medieval kingship (usually regarding the clash with ecclesiastical authority in the shape of Thomas Becket, and the Magna Carta), before hopping forward several centuries to look at the English Civil War (which in some cases extend to the Glorious Revolution), and then moving forward a couple of centuries to look at the campaign for female suffrage. Although each topic is worthy of study in its own right, expecting students to make meaningful connections between them as part of a coherent narrative is deeply questionable.

Similar issues were also evident in New Zealand. Powerful and valuable knowledge involves students being engaged in learning that enables them to generalise and recognise connections between ideas, so ideally teachers would plan for coherence, and the autonomy teachers have in New Zealand to select any historical content would appear to make this possible (Ormond, 2014). However the segmented nature of assessment in history where independent concepts and procedures are targeted, provides little encouragement for teachers to consider programming in an integrated manner. Furthermore, experience of assessment has led teachers to narrow the *events* selected for externally assessed standards to containable

events such as the Abyssinian Crisis 1935, the Montgomery Bus Boycott 1955-6, or the My Lai Massacre 1968. Particularly where the focus is on the *cause and consequence* of such events there is a tendency to teach them in isolation from the broader context of the period.

When the research participants described their programmes they tended to jump from identifying one topic to the next and made no comment on how the topics might relate to, or build upon, each other. Nevertheless, as in the English study, one interviewee, Linda, was an exception. She spoke of coherence and the yearly programmes were organised according to themes e.g. Conflict in the 20th century (Level 1), Revolutions (Level 2), and Empire and Oestrogen (Level 3). She also noted 'I'd like us to shift to having essential questions – having those dominant fertile questions … that challenge and they start to become our framework for the year rather than "we're doing Russian Revolution and we're doing you know". So that's where I want to go in the next year or two' (Linda, Interview 1). Another participant appeared to give some consideration to how the programmes worked as a whole - 'we've been very much thinking about what's the sort of range of things we can pull in at various points. So they've got that kind of broader knowledge and can draw greater connections' (Karen, Interview 1). A further interviewee recognised that a thematic approach had advantages but he did not feel that his students would cope – 'I thought about doing a thematic topic around nationalism and I actually thought I'd do Vietnam and Samoa and do a contrast. What I found is they couldn't get their heads around this – it was quite conceptual. I ditched Samoa' (Stephen, Interview 1).

There was however also recognition by some interviewees that their programmes did not consistently take into account the relationship between topics to build contextual connections. Bianca (Interview 1) mentioned topics being 'a mismatch' and 'a bit random' when describing her school's programmes. Co-construction of the selection of topics was the approach used by Matthew which made it very difficult to create a logically organised and

interlinked design and its ever-changing pattern from year to year as students select different combinations of historical topics from a list of options, would make it impossible to track and plan for building knowledge of particular concepts during the year and across the three senior year levels. Matthew referred to the approach as an 'ever changing jigsaw' in trying to use 'student voice to guide what we do' (Interview 2). However he recognised the element of luck and value when some linkages emerged -

> I give them a lot of options for the trend essay … It's funny that last year they chose the role of women in 16th-17th century England and then women's suffrage (in New Zealand) so the two pair up. Then they've chosen crime and punishment and paired it up with Jack the Ripper without any kind of push from me, but the two marry into each other – both years they've done that. (Interview 2)

The relationship between depth and breadth studies is important in seeking coherence and a usable knowledge of the past. Lee (2007, 58) has argued that students need to understand 'patterns of change … to build a big picture into which depth studies would fit. This kind of 'nesting' structure enables the depth studies to act as a test of the picture, which in turn gives the depth studies meaning.' While some teachers recognised the benefits of such framework knowledge, their programmes rarely exhibited this approach. In New Zealand the segmentation of the achievement standards have had a powerful influence on teachers' design conceptions, and while some teachers recognised the randomness of their selections and the loss of breadth, they felt compelled to place the pragmatism of *best fit* for assessment and, as with the research in England, student engagement ahead of programming for coherence (see Ormond, 2018). The idea of building a framework of knowledge that would be of value to a student, with a few exceptions, was notably absent from these teachers' curriculum planning. Instead other drivers, such as making teachers accountable for student success in high stakes qualifications, to serve an imagined future workforce, has

placed a premium on narrowed knowledge conceptions and procedural competencies which can be packaged and assessed.

Discussion

Educational policy curriculum reforms which have prioritised 'learning to learn', have commonly positioned critical thinking and generic skills-based forms of knowledge in the ascendance while knowledge particular to the disciplines has gained less attention. In a knowledge economy which 'places a premium on advances in knowledge' (Young & Muller, 2010, p.23) history may even appear to be of little use in progressing society's economic well-being (see Ormond & Morgan, 2015). In order for the discipline of history to contribute to the knowledge economy, an economy which is perceived as being in a continual state of flux requiring intelligent and flexible responses, history education needs to be able to confidently provide students with the means to investigate and scrutinise society's actions, in the past and present, to inform future thinking. Disciplinary knowledge provides the 'intellectual means for doubt, criticism and judgement' (Rata and McPhail, 2016, p. 59) so that for history the understandings of how history is constructed, interpreted and contested is therefore critical. Such powerful knowledge has the potential to enable students to both gain insight into the ways communities have responded in the past but also to contextualise those understandings in their considerations of the present.

As the research has indicated, this is a challenging task. While teachers expressed their belief in the value of enquiry questions, recognised and taught history in relation to second-order concepts and implemented pedagogical practices which explored disciplinary processes such as source interpretation and historical research, there was limited development of some of these critical features. In both nations understanding causal relationships was emphasised while investigating historical interpretations appeared to be more limited either

through non-engagement with the relevant achievement standards in the case of New Zealand, or through a narrowed application in the case of England.

The evidence also suggests that potentially valuable frameworks of knowledge are largely absent from teachers' thinking. The ability to cross-reference knowledge and for students to evaluate, analyse and interpret their substantive knowledge within a wider context is not strongly developed in teachers' programme designs. Understanding the inferential relations between concepts (McPhail & Rata, 2016), bodies of substantive knowledge and interpretations of those within a broad framework of knowledge, enables students to progress to deeper understanding. This challenges teachers' pedagogic practices too as they seek to structure learning of the discipline in ways which is rich and meaningful. There was evidence from both countries of teachers' struggles with this. In New Zealand there is recognition of the randomness and inadequacy of their programming with pragmatism coming to the fore while in England there was a lack of clarity over the nature of disciplinary knowledge for history versus less discipline specific competencies and ways of thinking.

A distinction can also be made here in evaluating the impact curriculum reforms have had on history in the two jurisdictions. While disciplinary knowledge is embedded in the curricula for both England and New Zealand, *The New Zealand Curriculum* is empty of specific content while England's provides some guidance. While in both places teachers have a reasonable level of freedom to determine the history they teach, in New Zealand disciplinary knowledge in the form of procedures and concepts dominates, sometimes at the expense of substantive knowledge. The impact appears less extreme in England where some level of prescription remains and certain topics appear to have become embedded in practice. Despite the differing levels of prescriptive direction however, both exhibited levels of constraint. Assessment compliance, resourcing, and time availability were among the reasons

given for narrowing the knowledge, both procedural and substantive, taught to students. In these circumstances, there are lost opportunities for history to contribute to the knowledge economy.

Conclusion

Underpinning the curricula reforms, which emphasise transferrable competences and generic skills, is the belief that a knowledge economy requires citizens to be adaptive and able to effectively utilise knowledge, derived from diverse sources, to innovate, progress and enrich society. However this particular form of curriculum development, as noted earlier, has been critiqued. As Chisholm (1999, 3) argues:

> New information and communication technologies offer ultimately non-controllable access to diverse and plural worlds - yet they do not assure the acquisition of the ethical and critical faculties needed for personal orientation and balance in negotiation of those worlds

For Wheelahan (2007), the move towards genericism in education promotes 'mundane', context specific knowledge, and although some may regard this as valuable, it is essentially unproblematised knowledge – i.e. young people learn about knowledge as a *product*, rather than seeing the *process* by which any knowledge is derived. It can be argued that to create genuinely adaptive, intelligent knowledge users requires a disciplinary, rather than generic competency based, approach to the curriculum. History has the potential to contribute to this when students are engaged in developing interpretations of the past, which may be relevant to new circumstances in the present or the future. Powerful knowledge, as suggested by Young and Muller (2010), incorporates features such as the reliability, contestability, and specialisation of knowledge. These are essential considerations in contributing wisely to any society's knowledge, including that of a knowledge economy. History with its interpretative elements and disciplinary strengths, combined with the potential to develop usable frameworks of knowledge, has the potential to contribute to a future-focussed society. However the data in this paper suggests that there is some way to go before this is fully

realised; if a knowledge economy is to be supported then perhaps curriculum reform should focus more on supporting teachers' understanding of developing disciplinary knowledge and appropriate frameworks of knowledge, rather than pushing education towards genericism.

Table 1

Achievement Objectives for History in *The New Zealand Curriculum* 2007		
Level 6	**Level 7**	**Level 8**
• Understand how the causes and consequences of past events that are of significance to New Zealanders shape the lives of people and society. • Understand how people's perspectives on past events that are of significance to New Zealanders differ.	• Understand how historical forces and movements have influenced the causes and consequences of events of significance to New Zealanders. • Understand how people's interpretations of events that are of significance to New Zealanders differ.	• Understand that the causes, consequences, and explanations of historical events that are of significance to New Zealanders are complex and how and why they are contested. • Understand how trends over time reflect social, economic, and political forces.

Table 1. History achievement objectives Levels 6-8, *The New Zealand Curriculum*, Ministry of Education, 2007.

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