

A BALANCING ACT: BLENDING LOCAL, REGIONAL, NATIONAL, EUROPEAN AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS

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Introduction

On Wednesday 24th April 1963 a young Jamaican, living in Bristol called Guy Reid Bailey was eagerly awaiting a job interview with Bristol Omnibus Company (BOC). His youth worker, Paul Stephenson who was also black, had rung up the BOC earlier to confirm that Guy had the correct qualifications and arranged the interview for him. But Paul wanted to know whether the fact that Guy was black would make any difference to his employment prospects, so he rang the BOC again to tell them that Guy was from Jamaica. The BOC promptly cancelled the interview. BOC would not employ black staff on the buses. The cancellation was widely publicized in the local and national press. A boycott of Bristol buses was organized; white Bristolians, members of the African- Caribbean community, students and others walked or chose other forms of transport to travel across the city. Protest marches were held and local and national politicians became involved. Negotiations continued with the BOC and in August 1963 the company BOC finally agreed to employ black staff. Raghbir Singh was the first coloured conductor appointed in September (Bristol City Council: 2007).

This story may be looked at from a variety of perspectives. It is the personal story of a young man wanting employment; the story of how people in a city took a stand against racial discrimination. It contrasts with the experiences of black people elsewhere in the UK at that time where in cities such as Birmingham and London, they regularly found employment on the buses. The story is also the story of one individual who like many others at the time was experiencing discrimination and whose experiences were finding voice in anti discrimination movements across the world, including the civil rights movements in the US.

A brief incident in one man's life – but within this story the relationship between local, regional, national and global history is all clearly exemplified.

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In terms of history, this incident provides the historian with opportunities to 'contextualize, to generalize and to particularize simultaneously' (Ethington 2007:469) and as this is undertaken, a fuller understanding of the event and the past is generated. In this way, a single event occurring over a several months may be contextualized within a larger time span, encompassing different areas of the world.

Why is a range of contexts important?

In this chapter it is argued that consideration of a range of contexts is vital for preparing children to be citizens in the twenty first century in an increasingly globalised world. Global access to the internet and the increasing use of mobile phones opens up a range of possibilities for action and also infinite sources of knowledge and information. Children and young people are presented with a bewildering amount of information and history may provide opportunities to develop children's thinking and analytical skills to question what they see. It is important that we take a critical look at how the world is represented to our children in schools and encourage children to challenge some of the stereotypes presented to them in the media. In terms of history, this may be in analyzing films – the characterization of native Americans in cowboy and Indians films or asking children who was discovering whom in the voyages of 'discovery' of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

It is important for children to interrogate a variety of different perspectives. In encouraging children to move out beyond their familiar experiences, opportunities arise to challenge taken for granted assumptions about the world. Children learn to position themselves within wider contexts and also to see networks of interdependencies with others. Through learning about different people and different pasts, children may become more aware of social diversity and through this awareness may be encouraged to respect different beliefs and values. Utilising a breadth of examples from history throughout the world provides opportunities to reflect on how past societies have resolved conflict and to consider possible solutions for the present (DfEE, 2000).

The developmental psychologist Bronfenbrenner expresses the networks established between child, family and the wider community within his Ecological Systems Theory which may also provide a useful lens for viewing the inter-relationship between different historical contexts. As illustrated in the diagram below the 'layers' of concentric circles represent the different communities which children engage with and which open up more widely as they grow older and have more experience of the world.

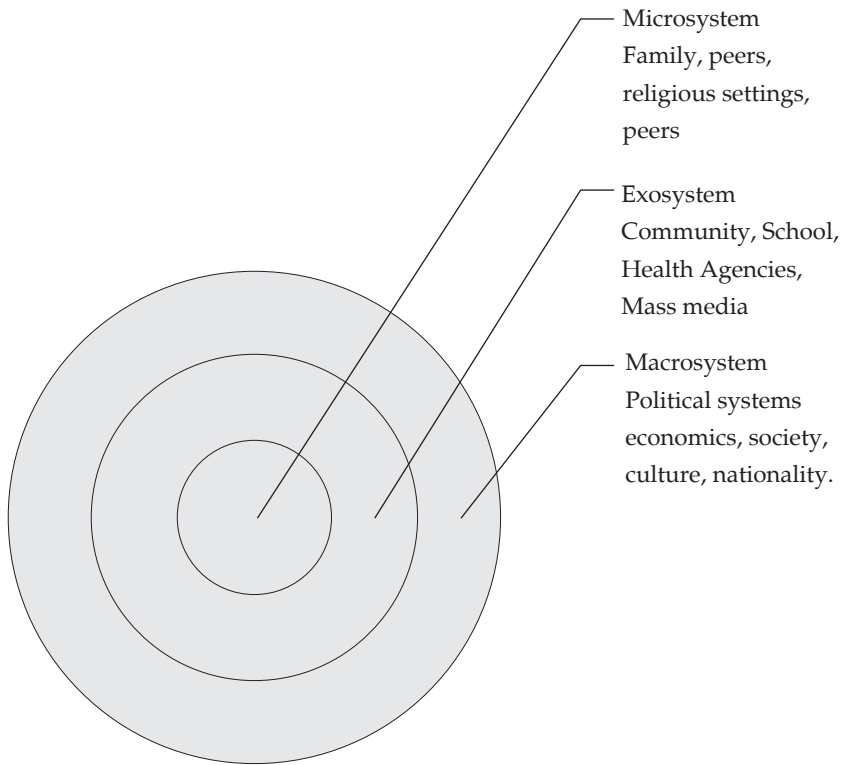


Figure 1 – Ecological Systems Theory adapted from Bronfenbrenner: 1979

Bronfenbrenner argues that, 'development never takes place in a vacuum; it is always embedded and expressed through behaviour in a particular environmental context' (Bronfenbrenner 1979: 27). He explains that development occurs as the 'growing person acquires a more extended differentiated, and valid conception of the ecological environment'. In terms of history education, we might see these layers as representing children's developing understanding of different historical contexts and the acquisition of a breadth of historical knowledge.

There is thus a good rationale for incorporating a range of historical contexts to enrich children's understanding of history. However, as the title implies – it is a question of balance – to what extent should these different contexts be included within the curriculum?

How does policy support a range of contexts?

Recognition of the importance of interrogating a range of historical dimensions is evident in different official policy documents. For example,

the English history national curriculum for Key Stage 2 (children aged 7-11 years) was predicated on learning local, national, European and world history through the statutory requirements to teach particular units of study. This has been the practice in English schools for nearly the past twenty years – with Ancient Greece being the European unit adopted and Ancient Egypt the most popular world civilization selected from a choice which includes the Indus Valley, the Maya, the Aztecs, Benin, Ancient Sumer and the Assyrian Empire. Within the British history study units there is a requirement for children to learn the histories of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. However, fulfillment of this requirement has been limited (DfEE, 1999). There are fewer resources which focus on the Scottish, Welsh and Irish perspectives, although recent resources from the Ireland in Schools project illustrating the networks of relationships between England and Ireland and their mutual interdependency are beginning to be used more widely in English schools (<http://issresource.org>)

There are similar challenges in studying British history at Key Stage 3 (11-14 years). Different aspects of British, European and world history are identified with the programme of study and the importance of linking local with regional, national and global history illustrated. For example, the study of the development of trade, colonization, industrialization and technology and the British Empire includes the effects on the UK and also a ‘focus on the British Empire and its effect both on Britain and on the regions it colonized, as well as its legacy in the contemporary world (eg. in Africa, the Middle East and India) (QCA 2008: 6).

There is no separate local history unit in the Turkish history and social studies curriculum but in different part of the Turkish curriculum policy makers ask teachers to use local historical sources in their classes. For instance in the explanations section of the New Social Studies and History Curriculum, teachers are asked to organize visits to museums, historic places, monuments and ruins around the school (MEB, 2005 and 2007). The curriculum expects that after those visits students will be able to imagine about past events. The official documents consider local historic places as useful tools for creative studies and active student learning. The curriculum also emphasised that the historic ruins and monuments are important not only as a historic document but also they are important national sources/values/assets and students should learn that it is a national duty to preserve and protect them. In the curriculum there is no clear implication that the local history has global connections. The official documents generally reflect the idea of seeing local history only as an illustration of national history (Aktekin, 2004).

The Council of Europe has instigated a number of projects to promote studying history in diverse contexts and through multi-perspective approaches in the past decade. *Learning and teaching about the history of Europe in the twentieth century* focuses on understanding forces, movements and events which shaped the twentieth history to enable children to understand contemporary Europe. Encouragement to adopt a comparative perspective and set events from individual countries into a broader European and global context is promoted in *The European Dimension in history teaching*. Finally the project entitled, 'The image of the other' is designed to promote approaches to teaching and learning history that reflect the cultural and religious diversity of European society. www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/historyteaching/Projects)

Beginning with myself and my family

In England there is a popular television programme entitled, Who do you think you are? Where well known celebrities trace their families' histories. It can involve celebrities traveling across the UK and beyond, to other countries and continents as they seek to find their roots. The popularity of this programme is evident of the interest which most people have in knowing something of their families' pasts. From an early age children are interested in listening to stories about themselves. 'Tell me what I did when I was little' are frequent requests from young children and so parents and friends begin to construct stories about their earlier lives. As these stories are repeated, they begin to acquire some reality and status of their own, so that they become part of the accepted history of the child within the family. Narratives which people construct about themselves and their families are described by Bruner as 'longitudinal versions of Self' where narrators not only recount stories but also seek to justify and explain them within a wider context (1990: 120-121).

Consequently storying about oneself and one's family can provide a stimulus for exploring different historical contexts and for very young children serve as starting points for developing their awareness of the past. For very young children the past is generally undifferentiated; 'once upon a time stories' are stories which do not happen now – but they may be far back in time with the dinosaurs or in more recent times in learning about their grandparents' experiences. However, what is important for young children is the realization that they also have a past; that their lives have changed in many ways since they were born (Cooper: 2002) Looking at baby clothes and artifacts provides opportunities to talk about changes in their own lives and also to explain how these changes have occurred and what their consequences are. So a child recalling being pushed around in her pram may identify how her body has become bigger and stronger which enables her to walk and run and now engage in a much greater range of activities.

As young children talk about their earlier life they begin to appreciate their own unique identity as well as those things which they share in common with other children in their class and community. Appreciation of different life styles and values is developed as they compare and contrast experiences; for example – all children may celebrate their birthdays but do they all celebrate in the same way? Children may have different favourite toys; grandparents and family members living in different parts of the country and the world. The theme of family and community provides a fundamental way for very young children to begin to develop their historical understanding and their place with a variety of contexts.

Family histories offer opportunities for linking different places across time and also for exploring key concepts such as identity, human rights and an understanding of diversity and different beliefs and values. Claire (2005) analyses timelines created by students which illustrate how family histories were affected by overarching events such as the World Wars, patterns of migration, economic development and participation in social movements. She cites examples such as Isabel who was able to record her background 'from slavery in Trinidad to primary teacher in England in 300 years', and Greg whose 'family was affected by the Irish famine, who has Pakistani, Guyanan, Portuguese ancestry as well as white English'. Greg had connections with both Islam and Christianity which he claimed, 'gave him greater respect and tolerance' and he was 'also aware personally of the way the Welfare State impacted on lives'. These instances reveal how individual histories may provide insights into wider historical themes and also how the 'present is always there in everyone's past'. Claire concludes that such histories may contribute towards a greater sensitivity to others' history and experiences and rejection of stereotypes (Claire 2005; 16-17).

What can we learn from the local environment?

The locality provides a rich source for historical study although its value has often been underrated with school curricula focusing on national and international histories. Evidence of the past and former ways of life may be found in streets, different buildings, memorials and monuments, landscapes and cityscapes. It is all readily accessible and available for study. The locality has been shaped by different people, communities and events. Studying local history enables us to question our environment and to develop our own understandings of the locality and the everyday places which we see. It provides opportunities for field work and enquiry based approaches to learning history and is an area which engages children's interests. Different approaches may include: studying development/change over a long period of time;

or a more in-depth analysis over a limited time span. On the other hand enquiries may also investigate local communities' involvement in a particular event, probably of national consequence, or exemplify developments which have had wider impact, such as the example cited at the beginning of this chapter.

Local history provides opportunities for learning outside the classroom; visiting museums and historic buildings or through walking a trail along particular streets and pathways and observing different features within the environment. It enables children to utilize a range of sources of information in their locality, to synthesise them and to draw some conclusions about their locality's past. Research for *Every Experience Matters* indicates that learning experiences outside the classroom are often the most memorable for young people and may benefit children's learning; emotional well-being; physical experiences and promote positive responses to their environment (Malone: 2008). Well planned historical field work may therefore make an important contribution to children's learning,

Local history and community learning

For children, studying local history may promote opportunities to involve all members of the family in their learning. Children can re-visit places in the locality which they have visited or learned about at school with members of their family, and family members and older members of the community may provide additional sources of information for their work. Wedgwood (2009: 286) puts the case strongly for local history as she describes the development of community museums in redundant cotton mill villages in North Carolina, USA. 'Smaller local histories and rivalries may be of more importance to people's self image than larger national events. The big events are learned about at school, at one remove, but the small events are part of our own ancestors' daily lives: they happened to *my* family and I have ownership of that – which immediately gives me some control and empowerment. People may need the comfort of small, localized identities'.

Studying local and regional history may help to explain the everyday histories which surround children and this may be of particular importance in regions which have experienced recent conflict. Barton and McCully (2005) discuss how children in Northern Ireland looked to schools and history textbooks to provide them with an understanding of national history and alternative perspectives on the recent past to the stories told them by their families and by members of their local communities. They also note however, that children draw selectively on the formal curriculum within

school to support their developing identification with the histories of their communities.

Local history and the wider content

Local history also provides opportunities to explore in more depth historical events, and large scale trends and developments. For example, Brown and Woodcock (2009:5) use enquiries linked to a local war memorial to encourage children to think critically on 'how far does the local experience support claims for WW1 being the 'Great War'? Studying the life of the Victorian engineer, Brunel may act as a starting point for investigating the effects of nineteenth century industrialization and improved communications on people's lives (Harnett: 2004).

Local history reflects developments both within and beyond the locality. Industrialisation and the growth of big cities in the nineteenth century required the provision of raw materials which linked factories with places across the world. Similarly in seeking markets for their goods, industrialists shipped their manufactured goods to all corners of the globe. There was a steady movement of goods across the world. One example of how trade impacted on local, national and global history may be seen in the development of the trade in enslaved Africans; manufactured goods sent from England were traded for people in West Africa; ships were built and fitted out to engage in the trade; the transport of people across the Atlantic and their sale provided profits which could be invested in estates in the Caribbean; further profits from the export of Caribbean sugar and rum to England enriched English business communities and provided capital for future investments. It was a market operating on a global scale; livelihoods were dependent on it and fortunes made. At each stage of the trade, there are individual stories and experiences which effected the locality and local communities.

As people travelled around the world, so they brought back souvenirs and mementoes of their travels. English gardens blossomed in the nineteenth century with the cultivation of new plants sent back from different parts of the world; furniture, household ornaments and architecture were all influenced by contacts with different cultures and ways of life.

Researching who lived in the locality over a period of time may also provide opportunities for studying national and global links. Movements of people to and within the locality can be traced in the United Kingdom through census data taken every ten years, which amongst other data also record people's place of birth www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/census Alternatively, websites such as www.movinghere.org.uk provides stories of people who have settled in various communities within the UK.

Challenges in teaching national histories

Creating the balance between studying national and other histories remains a challenge. The extent to which national history should be studied has been hotly contested in England (Phillips: 1998) and recent policy in England is tending to view the role of history as contributing towards social cohesion and a recognition of a diverse but shared culture (DfES:2007). Recommendations from the *Curriculum Review, Diversity and Citizenship* advocate that pupils should learn through the school curriculum to:

- * explore the origins of the UK and how different cultures have created the United Kingdom;
- * explore the representations of different racial, ethnic, cultural and religious groups in the UK and the world:
- * explore the consequences of racial and religious intolerance and discrimination

The Review also notes that ‘to make this notion of a diverse UK real for pupils, work needs to be done in the local community to harness **the local context**, stretching out from there to national and global issues’ (DfES 2007; 23-25).

This is a very different view to the more traditional approaches to learning national history which have been and continue to remain dominant in many countries today. In countries which have seen recent conflict or who have gained independence, the urge to teach a unified national story may be strong. Carras (2002: 13) argues that, ‘Since the nation represents such an important focus on identity in our region (South eastern Europe), and indeed in most of today’s world, it would be both undesirable and unrealistic to try to deprive it of its place as the centre of the history curriculum’. However Carras does go on to suggest ways in which a balance might be created which would include questioning stereotypes, promoting cultural history, including local and regional histories and considering major themes in the study of history such as the history of citizenship or the rule of law.

The contribution of a global perspective

So far the chapter has argued for the potential of including a global perspective to enrich understanding of other history contexts. There may however, be a justification for teaching global history in its own right. Otherwise as Cajani (2002) argues children may end up with a deformed view of history, ‘a great body – Europe – to which all other parts of the world are attached, like stumps, only in so far as their histories are related to the history of Europe (page 26). Approaches to global history may include the exploration

of different themes eg; democracy, citizenship, human rights or food, farming, technology and trade. It could involve studying different aspects of history; political, social, cultural, economic, religious and so forth.

Although it has its origins in the 1960s, Bruner's social studies programme MACOS – Man: A Course of Study still has relevance for contemporary curriculum planning. His original programme was a multi-disciplinary approach to the curriculum based on behavioural sciences which was underpinned by three key questions:

What is uniquely human about human beings?

How did they get that way?

How could they be made more so? (Bruner 1966:74).

Whilst this curriculum project did not specifically engage with history, it does provide some insights which might guide an approach to historical study and which could structure the creation and development of a global history curriculum. The questions may serve as a basis for extending children's awareness of similarities and differences within human experience over time and also contribute to developing a collective consciousness of human endeavours.

Developing a pedagogy to embrace different historical contexts

One of the key challenges to teaching a variety of historical perspectives lies with teachers and the range of pedagogical content knowledge which they possess (Shulman: 1986). Continuing professional development needs to update teachers with recent historical interpretations and also to provide examples of pedagogical approaches in the classroom. Teachers' own beliefs and values unconsciously influence their work and may perpetuate particular forms of knowledge. In terms of world history, teachers may adopt particular western standpoints. Said (1978) argues that western historians make sweeping generalizations and create stereotypes which cross cultural and national boundaries when they write about the 'other' in non European history. Whether one agrees or not with Said's conclusions, his work is a useful reminder how values unconsciously slip into our ways of viewing the world. As I write this chapter, I am also acutely aware that my thoughts are influenced by my own experiences of living in England and one of the purposes of this book is to share experiences and opinions with colleagues elsewhere in the world.

An awareness of different historical perspectives is important. In discussing the historiography of the British Empire Cannadine contrasts traditional approaches which often separated the history of the Empire from the history

of the British nation and more recent scholars who 'tend to disregard Britain' and focus on the history of their own nation and community. Cannadine advocates a more balanced approach since 'Britain was very much a part of the empire, just as the rest of the empire was very much part of Britain' and thus Britain and its empire has to be seen as 'an entire interactive system' (Cannadine 2001: xvii).

Viewing history as an 'interactive' system might provide a useful organizing tool for planning a history curriculum which takes into account a range of historical contexts. Account too needs to be taken of children's views and starting points. Cooper's (2000) research with children in England, Romania, Holland and Greece reminds us of the range of information which children have about the world and the serendipity way in which it is acquired.

Identifying starting points to engage children's interests.

Finding starting points to engage children's history interest and provide them with experiences which they can relate to are important considerations. Recent work with children (5-11 years) from a range of ethnic backgrounds using the collections at the British Empire and Commonwealth museum in Bristol illustrate how this may be achieved. One group of children focused on the life styles of people living in different parts of the Empire and contrasted their lives and experiences. As they made comparisons, children were able to develop their awareness of key features of human societies – the need for food, shelter and safety and how different communities organized themselves. Another group of children studied the experiences of the Pilgrim Fathers sailing across the Atlantic from England and settling to a new life in America. Their interest in the story was engaged as they were asked to think about how they might feel in a similar situation. Other children looked at the experience of racism encountered by early immigrants to Bristol from the Caribbean. They related it to their own daily experiences and recognized that despite anti discrimination and racist legislation, racial prejudice still remained. The museum visit acted as a stimulus to children's engagement which they were able to develop further through their work in the classroom (Harnett: 2006).

Pedagogical approaches need to take into account resources and ways in which children may be supported in identifying, explaining and synthesizing different interpretations to draw their own conclusions. Riley (2000: 8) stresses the importance of generating enquiries which capture children's interest and imagination and permit them to grasp an aspect of historical thinking, concept or process. Children's active engagement within historical investigations is important with careful facilitation of their learning by teachers. For

teachers, their roles require them to observe carefully and evaluate children's developing understandings and to consider when are the most appropriate times to intervene to extend children's learning or to support them in their work.

Concluding remarks

Decisions on organizing the curriculum rest with national governments and also with teachers in schools. Some of the examples in this chapter may provide teachers with ideas for exploring different contexts with their pupils and help them create productive links. Varied ways of organizing curricula experiences to include:

- in- depth studies of particular events and periods of time;
- overviews of key periods of history;
- thematic approaches to studying the past eg; farming; technology; culture
- comparisons across periods of time or place
- analysis of concepts eg; democracy; human rights

may all combine to provide children with a balance of historical perspectives taking into account local, national and global dimensions. In addition, well planned enquiries which require children to conduct investigations and draw conclusions from a range of sources of evidence will ensure that the century's citizens will approach the future with critical and analytical skills.

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