

JUNIOR CERTIFICATE SHORT
COURSE IN HOW IRELAND
WAS AFFECTED BY WW1
USING PRIMARY DOCUMENTS.

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Introduction

The inspiration to this research was from a new perspective that I encountered whilst studying for my Professional Masters in Education. Within this period, I was presented with the problem of how to teach history appropriately, whilst cultivating respect for the way in which knowledge of the past is constructed and a willingness to engage with complexity and tolerate uncertainty which naturally gives rise to powerful knowledge and to important skills and dispositions¹. This research will be explored with concern to the challenge of incorporating the decade of commemorations into the history classroom. There will be a special emphasis based upon Irish reaction to World War One and how it affected the 1916 Rising and the period leading up to this event. The introduction of Junior Certificate short courses is a useful programme for the exploration of different eras and events in history due to the lack of a specific curriculum and time constraints that are present in other programmes. As McNeill argues in other years *'the pressure teachers feel to cover content, often through use of the textbook, in order to have students ready for the end of year assessments'*² takes away from creative teaching. This programme aims to engage the student as an independent learner who is self-directed in their learning process. Also, it is hoped by doing this they will develop both an academic and social skill- set that will enhance their capabilities both as a student and a person. Throughout this module, this engagement with history through an analytical approach will hopefully foster a passion for the complexity and uncertainty of history.

¹ Burn, K., Counsell, C., Foster, R. and Fordham, M. (2016). Assessment matters. *Teaching History by the historical association*, 157, p.2.

² McNeil, L. (1986) *Contradictions of control: School structure and school knowledge*. New York: Routledge. p.221.

While history is no longer compulsory in schools up to Junior Cert level the fact is that a large percentage of students do not study the subject after the Junior Certificate exam. My hope when designing this module was to inspire more students to take history as a subject for their Leaving Certificate, and if this wasn't applicable, to at least stir up an interest in Irish history. I aimed to do this by designing a module that would embolden students to appreciate the role of history in shaping the culture and society that we live in today. The reason I chose this period, in particular, was because it seems that while the main events of the Rising had been thoroughly explored within Irish education. The period between the First World War and the Rising had I felt been sometimes overlooked despite its historical importance

The decade of commemoration is a myriad of different sources, viewpoints and opinions which naturally gives rise to the challenge of incorporating these sources into a balanced opinion. Due to many commemorations being celebrated over the last few years and with more due to follow, this made the designing of this course all the more applicable as many primary sources had gained mainstream attention. A multitude of resources were available online on sites such as the Bureau of Military History and the National Archives of Ireland.

With the recent commemoration of the First World War, I decided to design a programme based upon the Irish reaction to World War One and how it affected the 1916 Rising. The aim while doing this was to explore the complexity of the reactions and consequences of this period in Irish history using a variety of primary sources. This I felt was a major challenge as a teacher as I wished to leave my opinion out of the classroom so as to give the students a carte blanche on establishing their viewpoints on this period. My aim while doing

this was to try and develop the student's ability to research and interpret primary historical evidence from an array of backgrounds and viewpoints that could symbolise the complexity of this period in Irish society. As Barton referenced '*we cannot depend on any single source...for reliable knowledge; we have to consult multiple sources in our quest to develop historical understanding*'³. This was emphasised to the class and skills such as group work, critical analysis and collaboration of opinions were all facilitated to help this. To foster active learning through the use of primary documents, the use of short gobbets to assess some of the sources will facilitate the exploration and advancement of the aforementioned historians' skillset.

Overview

The difficulties of increasing complexity while teaching history is described in this context as '*not merely handling several causes... but also about judging their relative importance, which depends on an appreciation of the distinctive role that each one played and how they interacted with one another*'⁴. This was one of the most difficult conundrums that I faced when I was trying to design a short course for the Junior Certificate. This was mainly because as Barton argues any core resources that I put in place or recommended as a core document or text would directly affect the views of the students⁵. Therein lies another difficulty in increasing the complexity within history. Students must develop an appreciation of the notion of significance when engaging evidence with a view to being able to

³ Burn, K., Counsell, C., Foster, R. and Fordham, M. (2016). Assessment matters. *Teaching History by the historical association*, 157, p.2.

⁴ Burn, K., Counsell, C., Foster, R. and Fordham, M. (2016). Assessment matters. *Teaching History by the historical association*, 157, p.2.

⁵ Barton, K. (2005). Primary Sources in History: Breaking through the Myths. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 86(10), p.86.

understand not just with substantive knowledge. But also within the viewpoint of conceptual and contextual understanding of information. To try and avoid this pitfall the development of skills that a qualified historian uses when dealing with evidence is vital. One of the outcomes of this study shall be that a course in history will be designed to help students to become capable of accessing and critiquing the different types of historical sources to evaluate their origins, limitations and trustworthiness. The Leaving Certificate History Syllabus supports this, arguing that when *'we are trying to understand those facts, we need a number of skills of organisation and deduction, and of course we need imagination'*⁶. These skills help to challenge students' notion of complexity in history as they facilitate the interplay between substantive knowledge and conceptual understanding within the student's mind. This curriculum plan facilitates the scope for the students to have time to explore areas of their own interest which is also a key part of the key skills requirements of the Junior Certificate cycle. For example, the creative section of the key skills states that *'classroom climates that promoted creative thinking and problem solving... rewarded creative behaviour and encouraged thinking and exploring processes'*⁷

Another substantive result of this research shall be the development of the way in which this knowledge is arranged as well as the student's ability to build up knowledge over time. Literature argues that knowledge *'constructed over time. Building on that fundamental insight and on research rooted'*⁸ increases the retention of knowledge and the ability to

⁶ John Fines, 'Evidence: The basis of the discipline', in Hilary Bourdillon (ed.) *Teaching History* (London, 1994). p56.

⁷ Hanza, M. (2016). *Creating and Fostering a Learning Environment That Promotes Creative Thinking And Problem Solving Skills*. [online] Available at: http://www.juniorcycle.ie/NCCA.../media/.../Being-Creative-April_2015.docx [Accessed 11 Oct. 2015].

⁸ Burn, K., Counsell, C., Foster, R. and Fordham, M. (2016). Assessment matters. *Teaching History by the historical association*, 157, p.2.

explore subject knowledge by challenging students to see the causes and consequences of each concept. In this research the complexity and *'the interplay between substantive knowledge and conceptual understanding'*⁹ is explicitly linked with multiperspectivity and the multiplicity of sources. This is crucial to this issue when exploring sections of both the Junior and Leaving Certificate Syllabus which posits that the teaching of history should be explored with flexibility through the use of *'a variety of types of historical sources, historical narratives and analysis, biographical sources, exploration of themes and issues'*¹⁰. The challenge of getting students to *'construct, and to challenge, historical narratives, frameworks, arguments and analyses'*¹¹ is vital when trying to increase complexity while still targeting conceptual knowledge within class. The planning for differentiation when trying to advance the student's ability to deal with knowledge when dealing with the role of evidence and the notion of significance within history is vital. This emphasis on *'the development of skills in judging and discriminating between information types and sources'*¹² is a key part of the key skills requirement within the Junior cycle. Here thinking and information skills promote higher order reasoning and problem-solving with ever increasing complexity within all subjects. This is apparent throughout this research where students are challenged to look at events from multiple perspectives and to see the causes and consequences of these events both within and outside the Irish context.

⁹ Burn, K., Counsell, C., Foster, R. and Fordham, M. (2016). Assessment matters. *Teaching History by the historical association*, 157, p.2.

¹⁰https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Curriculum-and-Syllabus/Junior-Cycle/Syllabuses-Guidelines/jc_history_sy.pdf Department of Education, "Junior Cycle Syllabus". Web. 11 Oct. 2015.

¹¹ Burn, K., Counsell, C., Foster, R. and Fordham, M. (2016). Assessment matters. *Teaching History by the historical association*, 157, p.2.

¹²http://www.juniorycycle.ie/NCCA_JuniorCycle/media/NCCA/Documents/key_skills_oct_2012_WEB_FINAL.pdf

Research aim

The aim of the research I wish to undertake is to help students explore how Ireland was affected by the events of the First World War using a blend of primary and secondary documents.

Research methodology

Research methodology was balanced between finding key sources in terms of historical sources whilst also linking this to curriculum guidelines such as key skills and statements of learning these are listed below.

Key skills will be targeted in this course in the following ways-

Managing myself:

In this module students will learn to understand themselves and their role as a learner and researcher through developing personal goals and plans within the research and analytical areas of this module. This will also help students to develop strategies to make considered decisions, to take action and to assess their progress.

Staying well:

While this key skill recognises that learners' overall wellbeing this must be supported alongside their intellectual development. Being healthy, physically and emotionally, being socially active and being able to take care of oneself and of others helps learners become happy and confident. Within this particular module this key skill also will help young people become positive and engaged in their learning and supports them in the safe and ethical use of digital technology.

Communication:

Throughout this module this key skill will be targeted through the students' development of communication skills using a variety of methods. As well as developing literacy skills it will also develop learners' confidence in communicating, expressing opinions, writing, making oral presentations and performance.

Being creative:

Creativity enables learners to develop their imagination as they explore different ways of doing things and of thinking. Students during this module will learn to stay with challenges or tasks to completion and to learn from their experiences.

Working with others:

Students will engage and further their collaborative skills through the development of good relationships and to appreciate the value of cooperating to reach both collective and personal goals. Students will also learn to value diversity and to engage in collaborative work aimed at making the world a better place.

Managing information and thinking:

This key skill helps learners gradually improve their capacity to search for information from different sources. Students will develop their skills in judging and discriminating between information types and sources and develop strategies for organising information so that they can understand it and use it later. This skill also develops learners' thinking ability so that they can become more proficient in higher order reasoning and problem-solving.

Literacy: Students will enhance their literacy level through reading different types of media in order to gain an understanding of the different areas of the course. Here students will

analyse and critique various issues and sources at the different stages throughout the research.

Numeracy: Students will develop an awareness of the patterns, trends and relationships to numerical data within this course. Various means of assessing and facilitating the development of numeracy skills will be used throughout this course.

Statements of Learning targeted will be explored within this course in the following ways:

Statement of Learning 3- Students will create, appreciate and critically interpret a wide range of texts throughout this course from a range of primary and secondary sources.

Statement of Learning 6- Students will be able to appreciate and respect how diverse values, beliefs and traditions have contributed to the communities and culture in which she/he lives both in a national and international context.

Statement of Learning 8- Students will have the ability to value local, national and international heritage, understands the importance of the relationship between past and current events and the forces that drive change.

Statement of Learning 24- Students will be able to use technology and digital media tools to learn, communicate, work and think collaboratively and creatively in a responsible and ethical manner in order to research and comprehend the key issues and themes throughout this research.

Discussion and recommendations/ outcomes

The increasing of complexity and the development of students' ability to differentiate between subject knowledge and conceptual understanding is vital. This will have been exemplified in this research by the exploration of the interplay between a student's build-up of substantive knowledge being interlinked with the capacity to conceptually understand the multiplicity of perspectives and changing viewpoints within history. This has been underlined with examples that feature in the curriculum developed as part of this research. The notion of significance and the role of evidence is paramount to this concept of exploring history through underlining the importance of the establishment of the analytical and critical skills that an historian must possess when exploring history. These skills show the importance of history not just within an educational context but also the transfer of these skills to the pupils' daily life means that history still has a vital role to play in modern society. A recommendation in terms of the increasing of the analytical and evaluative skills of students is that cross- curricular cooperation be applied to prepare students to be inquisitive and question the world around them by becoming a research focused learner in whatever subject they are studying.

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