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HISTORY EDUCATION - SOME THOUGHTS FROM THE UK: interviews Peter J. Lee

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The interest in publishing an interview with Professor Peter Lee comes in sync with the wish of bringing to Brazil his research and reflections on what children and teenagers make of History. Such a wish departs from the presupposition that History teaching in Elementary School will advance little, if any, without History teachers' and researchers' serious consideration of learning -- that is, the cognitive processes involved in constructing historical thinking. These processes imply the understanding of what subjects make of historic ideas, and how they construct their perceptions of the past. Through this interview, it is also expected to contribute to the debate on the historical form and function on quotidian life, as it is postulated here (as his discussion also puts forth) that History is a way of thinking and interpreting human existence through time. History is not only an academic discipline, but also a public form of knowledge. Such dimensions articulate and intertwine in different planes, constituting the historical consciousness of both individuals and collectivities. The challenges that emerge here cannot be ignored, particularly those related to the teaching of History in school environments. This is especially true if one believes that teaching History is a powerful tool that enables "readings" of the world, bringing forms of inhabiting and existing

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in this world to its full potential while articulated to a collective belonging in a project of common futures.

Peter Lee was, until he very recently retired, a senior lecturer in the History Education Unit at the Institute of Education at the University of London. Having taught History in primary and secondary schools, Professor Lee has coordinated several research projects related to History Teaching and Learning, including CHATA (Concepts of History and Teaching Approaches) a project well-known in Brazil. Several of his publications investigate the ideas that children and teenagers have over History in several books, chapters, and articles – many of these with Rosalyn Ashby as co-author. Some of his articles have been translated to Portuguese, circulating among researchers concerned with understanding how children learn History. The questions in this interview have been elaborated so that Peter Lee's reflections may collaborate with the development of History Teaching and History Education research in Brazil. All contact has been made via e-mail, a rather useful tool that has shortened the distance between Florianópolis and London for a few long moments between July and October 2012.

Tempo e Argumento: the CHATA project (Concepts of History and Teaching Approaches) is often cited in Brazil because of its importance in investigating the ideas that children and adolescents have. Could you please talk a little more about this project for your Brazilian readership? Is there any other similar project currently underway in England?

Peter J. Lee: height of the battle of Jutland in World War I, just as the German fleet appeared to be in danger of destruction. Alaric and I went on to look at students' explanations in a different substantive context, namely that of Henry II's destruction of adulterine castles, but decided there were limits to pencil and paper and interview methods. We therefore developed our research techniques by using video cameras to record small groups of students working with little (and eventually no) adult intervention on historical problems. (These were 'problems' in the sense that students tended to see the institutions or actions in question as

very strange: why, for example, did the helots not overthrow their Spartan masters, or why, in Anglo-Saxon times, did people employ oath helping and the ordeal as a way of deciding whether accused people were guilty of crimes?) Research was carried out in primary and secondary schools with students aged between 8 and 16.

In research terms the most important outcome of this was a shift from pursuing the logic of thinking to trying to understand the conceptual basis of students' historical understanding. What were the second-order *ideas* they operated with? How, for example, did they construe the basis of historical knowledge: did they have anything like a historical concept of *evidence*, or were they treating history simply as given information? (We used 'second-order' here to distinguish the underlying concepts implicit in historians' approach to *any* knowledge of the past on the one hand, from their *substantive* claims about any particular part of the past on the other. Another way of putting this is to distinguish history as a form of knowledge or a 'discipline' from its 'content' — the statements and stories about the past that historians produce when they do history.)

Just after our first work on what is now called 'empathy' (but should perhaps better be called 'rational understanding') was published in early 1978, Alaric Dickinson and I encountered Denis Shemilt, who had been asked to give a talk to our students about the Schools Council History Project. We all quickly realized that we had independently been pursuing research with similar assumptions, and Denis told us that teachers on SCHP had reported that our initial findings from the Jutland task seemed to hold up in classroom work. We were all encouraged to find that independent studies in London and Leeds were coming up with very similar results. (It is important to emphasise at this point that none of the London researchers were ever part of the SCHP team, despite assertions in some of the literature to the contrary!)

In the early 1980s I began to work in an Essex comprehensive school with Rosalyn Ashby (who had been my student) making video recordings of students several times each week. We followed several classes over more than three years (from age 11 onwards), teaching together, collecting research data from small groups, and eventually integrating video recording into whole class discussion lessons that sometimes lasted for several lessons

of 90 minutes each. (Students learned to record teaching and discussion themselves, using the camera and a parabolic microphone with considerable skill.)

During this period contact between London and Leeds became ever closer, and in the late 1980s Rosalyn Ashby and I, together with teams of teachers in northern and southern England, were involved with Denis Shemilt in developing a follow-on course to extend what was by this stage called simply The Schools History Project. This follow-on course was known the Cambridge History Project, a new Advanced Level examination course for 16-18 year-olds, one goal of which was to improve students' understanding and knowledge of history by developing their second-order understandings. Once that was operating as a pilot examination course in schools, I turned (with Rosalyn Ashby and Alaric Dickinson) to the Chata project based in London, while Denis Shemilt was increasingly drawn into a period of administrative work in Trinity and All Saints College in Leeds.

It may be obvious from all this, and especially from mention of the classroom video research, that Chata derived from very extensive and prolonged classroom research (perhaps more than any other undertaken in English schools). It was emphatically *not* a piece of research somehow detached from classroom learning (and misguided assertions by one or two commentators that it used an 'experimental' methodology only betray a strangely idiosyncratic understanding of what constitutes an experiment). Chata was designed to follow up the earlier television-based classroom work, choosing to use more traditional pencil and paper and interview methods in order to deal with a large sample (more than 300 students). An important aim was to test the preliminary picture derived from video and classroom work, and especially from the long programme of teaching Rosalyn Ashby and I had carried out in Essex, to see if it held up with a wider range of students, and across a range of different content. Hence the decision was taken to ask students to complete three distinct task-sets, each of which dealt with four different key second-order concepts in the context of quite distinct historical substantive content. As a result of this methodology Chata generated a huge quantity of data, and some of it was never analysed (mainly because changes in the situation at the Institute of Education made it impossible for the research team to spend the

time that would have been required). Nevertheless, it was possible to produce work on the four key concepts, and this has been published in numerous papers throughout the world.

As regards your question on the current situation, I am unaware of any research in this tradition at present taking place in the UK, with one important exception. Arthur Chapman is building on his Chata-influenced doctoral work on students' ideas about historical accounts, using innovative web-based approaches in which students argue about competing accounts. (A particularly important feature of this work is that professional historians engage with students in the online conversations: for this and other reasons the research is closely tied to learning.) This research has the potential to take our understanding well beyond the initial Chata findings.

The statement that I know of no current research except Chapman's in the UK following the London-Leeds tradition is correct, but is nonetheless slightly misleading, for two reasons. First, work with similar goals and assumptions has been taking place in many countries (often, but not always, carried out by researchers who trained in, or have links with London) — specifically in Canada, Greece, Portugal, Singapore, Spain, Taiwan and the USA. As you are aware, Isabel Barca has pursued this agenda with enormous energy in Portugal, and this has also helped to arouse interest in some of the UK research in Brazil. Second, the focus in the English research has shifted to students' conceptions of big pictures of the past: the extent to which and the ways in which they relate a more or less coherent knowledge of the past to the present and future. Denis Shemilt, Francis Blow and Rick Rogers in Leeds are the leading figures in this. I pursued some small-scale personal research in this area in the early 2000s, and helped devise a small project in London involving Jonathan Howson, Stuart Foster, Rosalyn Ashby and I that reported in 2008. But Denis Shemilt is the innovator and driver behind current work on these problems.

Two facets of 'big-pictures' and 'frameworks' of the past require simultaneous study: first, how to devise frameworks that allow students to build a 'big-picture' of the past adequate for purposes of orientation; and second, how students' ideas of key second-order concepts central to such 'big-pictures' develop. Exactly what these concepts will be will be determined only as the research proceeds, but notions of historical *scale*, *generalization* and

accounts seem likely to be central, and I suspect that something similar to Walsh's notion of *colligation* may also be important. Even at this early juncture it is probably safe to say that ideas concerning the nature of historical accounts play a major role.

Tempo e Argumento: *The researches performed on History Education in Brazil have as main reference the Laboratório de Pesquisa em Educação Histórica (LAPEDUH) at Universidade Federal do Paraná (UFPR), which are mostly based on the works of Jörn Rüsen. In your article 'Walking backwards into tomorrow: historical consciousness and understanding history', there is an important reflection on to which extent Rüsen's theory can be useful or problematic to consider the role of History teaching in guiding the young of an era. Could you please speak a little more on the matter?*

Peter J. Lee: I have to be cautious here. Very little of Rüsen's work has been published in English translation and my ability to read German is more or less zero. Hence any comments I have made, or make now, should be treated as those of an 'outsider' who has access only to small portions of the evidence available. This situation also means that I cannot safely talk of Rüsen's wider theoretical base. Rather than try to repeat points I made in 'Walking backwards', I will just pick out some problems lurking in that discussion that we urgently need to address.

The key feature of Rüsen's work in English, from a London-Leeds UK perspective, is the way in which he offers a view of history and history education that takes history seriously by relating the historical approach to the past to problems of orientation and identity. Rüsen recognizes that history changes over time, and is informed by the everyday concerns of the lifeworld. But he also recognizes that it has its own methodological rules and practices (producing a 'theoretical surplus'), and can therefore take a critical stance toward the interests and demands of practical life.

The nature of history as a way of seeing the world (and one which can transform how students see themselves in time and how they conceive of the possibility of and status of knowledge of the past) is, of course, central to history education. Rüsen's treatment of history is immensely

more subtle and penetrating than some of the ‘social studies’ conceptions popular in the United States (and elsewhere). The kind of ‘social studies’ conceptions I have in mind here claim that school history is not the ‘same’ as academic history, that academic history is merely an outgrowth of nineteenth century institutional specialization, which therefore has no claim to be distinguished from (or even within) social studies, and that, consequently, history can have no justifiable place in school except as a means of promoting democratic citizens. They also tend to make somewhat unclear claims about any relationships between ‘academic’ history and the school ‘subject’ (a notion itself left immensely vague) of history, but seem to want to insist that the ‘discipline’ of history has only limited relevance to history education.

The main burden of these claims seems to be that ‘academic’ history has no privileged status in relation to collective memory or any other source of accounts of the past. Nevertheless supporters of a ‘social studies’ approach still seem unable to avoid calling upon something very like it as a basis for what should be taught. For example they still want to assert that narratives should be based on evidence, and emphasize in their demands for the reform of history teaching that students should learn how to use historical evidence, although they fail to address questions begged by the relationship between evidence and accounts. Of course it is much simpler to fall into confusion here if the characterization of history as ‘academic’ already appears to denote a narrow audience and possibly an esoteric activity unsuitable for lay people, let alone children or adolescents. The assumptions underlying this view seem to be based less on empirical evidence (some subscribers to a ‘social studies’ approach have produced valuable research evidence taking a positive view of what is possible for students), but on *a priori* beliefs about the nature of education and of ‘academic’ history. When they assert that ‘academic’ history is a social development like many others, it does not seem to occur to them that the social connections between ‘academic’ and other approaches to the past are not separated by a firewall. Our ways of seeing the world are *all* in time, and ‘common-sense’ is not fixed either. ‘Academic’ history has changed the ways in which we may all relate to the past, and this shows precisely in the recent reform agendas of the ‘social studies’ approach in which what counts as doing good history is taken for granted as a means of improving teaching, even while its importance is being dismissed.

We have to have some conception of what counts as history, but there is no great gain in squabbling over whether the conception of history with which one operates in education is ‘academic’, let alone that this disposes of ‘disciplinary’ aims as either obvious or inconsequential or (somewhat paradoxically) as both. Of course history is itself in time, and the growth of a formal university based discipline is an indication of changes in our approaches to the past. But it does not follow from the fact that history departments exist in universities that ‘history’ is only for academics, or that the kinds of thinking about the past that go on in universities have no bearing on anyone outside those institutions.

In stark contrast to the ‘social studies’ conception, Rüsen does not adopt a narrow and pejorative view of academic history, but equally he does not privilege it. Instead he offers a complex and interesting discussion of the relationships between academic history and other components of historical consciousness. He recognizes that there are different interests at stake in how we choose to approach the past. (Another way of putting this — I am not sure how far it would be acceptable to Rüsen — might be to say that different questions lead to differences in the *kinds of pasts* we construct). This is why his position is so much more productive than ‘social studies’ views which only understand any role for history in school in terms of its contributions to making students democratic.

The point is not, of course, that history is opposed to or separate from democratic values, but that it can never be justified simply as an instrument for creating democrats. This is because, if we were seriously to claim that school history’s role is to create good democrats, and it became clear that some students were ‘failing’ to become democrats, then we would have to fix the history to make sure that it was doing its job. In other words any empirical evidence that the goal of producing democrats was not being met would demand that the history we were teaching must be revised until it ensured that this situation was rectified. At this point history would cease to be history and become something else, perhaps some form of ‘citizenship education’, but in danger of sliding into something more like propaganda. But getting students to conform to some model of citizenship is a very different goal from enabling them to stand back and challenge both that model and the attempt to persuade them to conform to *any* particular model. It is not that citizenship education is illegitimate, but that

it does a different job from history education, and confusing the two simply destroys the possibility of guaranteeing a history education. We can guarantee democrats, or we can guarantee history, but not both simultaneously — a kind of ‘uncertainty principle’ for history education.

In fact history is not an instrument for creating certain kinds of citizen, however noble such goals may be held to be. Its relationship to democracy is much more interesting than this, in that history and democracy are both likely to be features of an open society. History may be necessary for the successful working of a democracy, and democracy may be one form of social and political arrangement that allows history. More importantly, history shares some important values with democracy: it presupposes *freedom* to give the best argument, it assumes *openness to arguments from evidence*, and it presupposes both *respect for persons* and *equality for people as sources of arguments*. Learning history is likely to encourage students to take democracy seriously, but that is very far from saying that its role in education must be as an instrument for producing democrats.

Nor is it the case that history (understood as resembling ‘academic’ history) simply supersedes or rules out other kinds of pasts. Many questions we ask about the past will start from practical and ethical concerns. These are *not* made somehow illegitimate by the fact that it is possible to approach the past in response to *different* kinds of questions that are *not* in any direct way based on our practical interests (in either sense of that word). Likewise we have practical and ethical reasons for espousing strong positions towards some past actions, and we can draw practical ‘lessons’ about how we ought to behave from our reading of the past (more of this in response to a later question below), and history does not rule these out. There is no fixed hierarchy of approaches to the past in which history always comes out ‘top’. The point is that different questions asked for different reasons demand different kinds of approaches. If our main purpose in asking about the past is to try to ensure social cohesion by providing an inspiring common past — a shared story of which ‘we’ (whoever that is in any particular case) can be proud, then history may turn out to be inferior to other forms of historical consciousness. The ‘collective memory’ of an ethnic group or culture may be immensely

more useful as a means of resisting the cultural hegemony of another culture than any historical exploration.

But a way of looking at the past that allows no one to own it, and moreover demands that we accept stories which run against our practical interests and even our deepest feelings — whether they are related to identity, wounds and burdens, or even triumph — allows readings of the past that open it up in different ways from those demanded by our practical interests. Indeed it may change our sense of who we are, what we can and cannot do, and even our beliefs about what can be asserted as fact. In that sense there is a way (perhaps several) of looking at the past which is different from others, and it does not matter if it is called ‘history’ or something else, so long as we recognize that it *is* different.

The claim that those who assert the importance of students understanding the ‘discipline’ are attempting to pre-empt alternative views by a trick of definition (appropriating the word ‘history’) thus rests on a misunderstanding of how history relates to other forms of historical consciousness. We don’t have to be able to set rigid rules about ‘methods’ to argue that history has developed increasingly powerful ways of approaching its tasks, or to try to distinguish ‘genuine’ history from something that is not. It is obvious that we cannot always *easily* distinguish, and that there is no clear dividing line. We are faced with something more like a continuum: we can tell that pasts at each end of the line are quite different, but have trouble where they seem to slide into each other. (Compare our distinction between red and blue, where again there is no clear divide, but we can still sensibly talk about two different colours.) An interest (both senses) in the past may start an enquiry, but then we have to start paying attention to whatever the most powerful concepts and tools available actually are. This means going above the line in Rösen’s matrix.

Rösen takes seriously the relationship between the historical discipline that has evolved as a hard won achievement over the past century or more and wider forms of historical consciousness. His framework allows us to explore the subtleties of this relationship, instead of narrowing it in the way ‘social studies’ approaches tend to do. But Rösen also tries to link his ideas about historical consciousness in all its forms to education in ways that promote

research into the ontogeny of historical consciousness. Again, this goes way beyond the concerns of ‘social studies’ approaches.

In this context the UK London-Leeds programme of research into students’ ideas about the second order concepts that underlie history has something in common with the empirical interests implicit in Rösen’s account of the ontogeny of historical consciousness, but has focused rather tightly on key disciplinary ideas. However recent work (particularly in Leeds) on the ideas with which students operate when trying to make sense of ‘big pictures’ of the past may open up the prospect of pursuing one kind of connection between those ideas and the development of historical consciousness. Students’ conceptions of historical accounts — the way sense is made of events or processes over time, the nature and status of ‘colligatory’ concepts (how they may group or ‘chunk’ phenomena), the status of competing accounts and the implications of the existence of alternative versions of the past for the security of historical knowledge or the legitimacy of historical explanations — seem to have a central role to play in the way in which and the degree to which students can handle long-run ‘pictures’ of the past as means of orientation in Rösen’s sense (See especially SHEMAIT, 2009). An important future research agenda is to explore *how* students construct meaningful accounts of long spans of history in ways that enable them to relate past, present and future, and at the same time to investigate the assumptions they employ in doing this. These would include their assumptions about how human societies work (substantive ideas) as well as conceptions of (for instance) the nature and status of historical accounts, the attribution of significance within different accounts and the relation between questions and colligatory concepts (second-order ideas). Another fruitful area of research might be to explore the development of the dispositions that underpin history (e.g. respect for persons, concern for validity of argument on the basis of evidence), construed as ‘rational passions’ without which students cannot be said to have understood history. This kind of agenda might connect usefully with aspects of Rösen’s approaches to history and moral reasoning.

Tempo e Argumento: *although there are national curriculum parameters in Brazil, there is great heterogeneity in what basic education does teach in History¹, even among schools in the same city. In your article ‘Towards a concept of Historical Literacy’, translated into Portuguese and published in 2006, you claim that “anyone who knows anything about History Education agrees that there is more to History than knowing memories of past events, but there isn’t always an agreement on what that ‘more’ can be.” Could you talk a bit more on ‘what or how’ History Teaching should be taught for children and adolescents?*

Peter J. Lee: this seems to be a question about the aims of history education, or about what there is that *could* or *should* be taught in teaching history. Answers to it will depend on how we construe history. If my earlier argument is accepted, history education can be regarded as a hard-won public form of knowledge, at its most developed in academic history. Plainly school students are not mini-historians (and most of them will have no intention of becoming academic historians). In living their lives they will want to think of the past in various ways, perhaps as lawyers searching for legally binding actions (e.g. promises or contracts), or maybe as members of religious faiths, resting their beliefs on traditions sanctified by the past. They might become politicians or diplomats, seeking to justify policies or assert claims to territories on the basis of what they can find in the past. Some of them may wish to insist on remembering wounds still hurting as a result of the mistreatment of their families, friends or their social group. Many of them will probably expect the past to provide them with examples of why they should be proud of their nation. All these are legitimate practical uses of the past, but none of them represents a historical approach in the sense I have been talking about. It would be merely foolish and simplistic to imagine that school history somehow simply replaces this practical intercourse with the past.

Nevertheless, history as a way of seeing the world, as a public form of knowledge and a discipline supported by academic institutions, also has its relevance to people’s lives. History that belongs to no person or group, and is accountable in its claims to a metacognitive

¹ In Brazil, basic education comprises 9 years in Elementary School (ages 6 to 14), plus 3 years in High School (ages 15 to 17).

tradition (changing, multi-stranded, but recognizably preserving its identity through change), allows us to see the world in ways that are not closed down by what we would like to find in the past, or even what we expect to find. Students who study history are introduced to a way of thinking about the past, present and future that tries to make true singular factual statements about the past, to give the best explanations it can, and to construct valid accounts of the past, all supported by non-arbitrary use of whatever evidence is available. These will all, of course, be relative to the questions asked, and start from particular stances, but these in turn will *also* be open to criticism and adjustment in an ongoing public form of knowledge. *None* of the claims to state facts, to give valid accounts, or to offer the best explanations will be defensible by reference to what students want to believe, by what authorities (text-books, teachers, politicians, religious leaders) wish them to believe, or by appeal to ownership of segments of the past. In learning history students will begin to learn that no final and fixed single account of any passage of the past can be given, but that this absolutely does *not* mean that all accounts are equally good answers to any particular question, let alone that we can say what we like about the past if it suits us. They will begin to learn that the *historical* past is not to be plundered to support what we want to say, but must be faced as something that we must wrestle with and understand on the basis of the evidence we have and explained in ways that are open to test.

Asking why students need to learn this kind of approach to the past is like asking why we should not remain ignorant, or in thrall to stories whose basis is their convenience for someone or some group. It is a question that already displays incomprehension of education. And claiming that youngsters cannot manage this, and are better off with fixed textbook stories, or lists of disconnected facts, is to make an empirical claim that does not stand up and appeal to a conception of learning that makes no sense. Understanding is never all-or-nothing. If it were, then most adults' understanding of the natural world would be worthless. Politicians' knowledge of history would count no more than that of an infant. Education is about opening up ways of seeing the world, not instantly producing experts. And research already suggests that students do indeed find it possible to learn history in this sense.

Tempo e Argumento: *also in 'Towards a concept of Historical Literacy' you posit that a proper concept of history literacy is still lacking. How has such concept been developed in your researches, and how can it contribute to a greater consensus on what to teach in History?*

Peter J. Lee: This question extends the previous one. Perhaps I can make the assumption here that the point of teaching a school-subject like history or natural science is helping students to understand the world in which they live in ways that enable them to flourish as autonomous human beings. This means that they need to know and understand both something of the knowledge that history or science is currently able to assert, and at the same time have some understanding of the nature and status of those assertions. One way of looking at this is to think of teaching 'subjects' like history or natural science as initiating students into metacognitive traditions. This implies that history education should involve students in

- 1) learning substantive historical knowledge: an engagement with historical content;
- 2) understanding central features of historical evidence, explanation and accounts (taken to include notions of significance, change and other key concepts);
- 3) acquiring the dispositions (rational passions) that underpin historical enquiry into the past.

With regard to substantive knowledge, we need to think in terms of nesting curriculum structures so that students may learn the importance of scale, and are able to zoom in and out (however clumsily to start with) between big pictures at the level of human history at one end, and detailed depth studies at the other. Such a nesting structure allows typical historical concern with action, and uneasiness with generalizations, to coexist with and fit into a sense of the importance of wider patterns of human development. The big pictures give one important kind of historical significance to the depth studies by locating them in larger-scale accounts, and the depth studies offer reasons for caution against expecting big pictures simply to be transposable down to a smaller scale, as well as allowing checks on their scope and explanatory power.

We don't know anything like enough about this set of history education goals, despite the simplistic assertions of politicians and even some historians about history as just knowing the facts. Research goals might include:

- Exploration of students' substantive ideas about how human affairs work: key concepts in areas like government, taxation, law, religion, warfare etc. (A good deal of work in some of these areas seems to be coming on stream now, but it is not always related to historical changes in the concepts concerned.)
- Investigation of key ideas that may be central to orientation, and of the way in which they make a difference to how students see things. Do they make a difference to how students behave — or, in perhaps more practical research terms, to the kind of choices they make if asked to decide upon actions or policies (social, economic, political, diplomatic)?
- What assumptions stand in the way of students connecting past, present and future?

As concerning the second item on the list, second-order understanding, we are not talking here about the ability to give philosophical analysis of these concepts, but the ability (for example) to *use* evidence in valid ways (rather than to treat it as information or testimony), or to *have some basis* for judging alternative explanations, or to ask questions about the *validity* of rival accounts as answers to different or similar questions. Note that it is not so-called 'skills' that are at stake here, but the development of conceptual understanding. The problem with thinking in terms of 'skills' in this context is that the notion of a skill normally refers to relatively single-track activities, like riding bikes or turning wood on a lathe. Skills can be improved with practice, whereas more complex cognitive activities demand reflexive thought and practice is never enough. Learning to think in the context of a meta-cognitive tradition might be better characterized in terms of acquiring abilities, rather than skills. Of course, merely attempting to legislate on the use of language may turn out to be a futile activity, even if justified by existing meanings. But there is another, very practical reason for eschewing the use of skills-talk in connection with history education. In the UK it has encouraged a generic approach to school history: head-teachers faced with demands for 'efficient' use of staff imagine that if history is about acquiring skills in communication,

analysis, or even the use of evidence, students can pick these up in other school subjects. Slack thinking by history educators helps to licence slack thinking among administrators and even politicians. (As an aside, it might be interesting to ask how far and in what way this claim is a ‘lesson’ of — recent — history, and what that means about how far and within what limits it can be used to think about the future.)

We know rather more about second-order conceptual understanding than about substantive knowledge, but we are still only at the first stage of coherent research. Possible research goals here might include the study of how key concepts relate to one another (Chata research suggested that, for example, the development of ideas about *evidence* was decoupled from the development of ideas about *explanation*, and, perhaps more surprisingly, from the more closely related concept of *accounts*). More interestingly, we need to understand what kinds of shift take place in conceptual change: is the latter best understood as gradual development, or is it more like a series of revolutionary jumps?

The third category in the list above comprised the dispositions that must be acquired if people are to be said to have learned history. Knowing what values they are supposed to espouse is a first step in understanding what history is, but if these values are merely noted or entertained, then there is still a sense in which the activity is not understood. Someone who doesn’t care whether singular factual statements asserted about the past are true or not, or who sees no reason to consider how valid a historical account is in relation to competing accounts, has not learned to see the world historically. This whole area of history education is more or less unknown territory.

The only point at which it even appears in the literature is when ‘empathy’ is under discussion, and often it serves only to confuse the logic of understanding action or past sets of values and beliefs on the one hand, and caring about people in the past on the other. The latter is essential, but it is not the same as reaffirming our participation in a social group or a nation state. Put briefly, what is required is a willingness to recognize people in the past as being worthy of the same respect we would wish for ourselves, and in the first place this means recognizing that they were as human as we are, and existed — were real — in the same way as us. And this is true whether they were ‘on our side’ or against ‘us’, whether they

helped ‘us’ or oppressed ‘us’. Caring here means a willingness to recognize that ill-treatment and resistance in our terms may or may not be the same thing in the passage of the past we are studying, but that we must take it seriously in either case. It also means respecting people upon whose shoulders our current world is built, in the same way that we would wish for such respect from our descendants.

History also demands respect for evidence, not simply as collecting material to support a claim, but as actively seeking out anything that is likely to prove problematic for what we want to say. Research in cognitive psychology suggests that this is difficult for adults, but we do not know how far such difficulties can be mitigated by targeted teaching. To the best of my knowledge, we do not even know how far students’ attitudes to truth and validity, or respect for persons, change in the course of a school history education.

If in the next few years it were possible to thrash out a conception of historical literacy, built from these and perhaps other components, and gain some measure of agreement within the field of history education, some of the narrower notions promulgated by politicians and administrators could be better resisted. A concept of historical literacy might warn us of the dangers of thinking history education is ‘really’ a matter of ‘knowing the facts’, or learning ‘the’ story, or acquiring ‘skills’. Someone who has had a history education will be able to marshal knowledge of the past to answer questions about long and shorter passages of the past in ways that meet certain standards of truth and validity, will be able to weigh possible explanations of whatever is in question, and demonstrate in so doing respect for people in that past. Empirical research shedding light on what it is possible for children and adolescents to learn will be extremely important in furthering this, even though it would describe ranges of achievement, not neat lists of discrete results. But at bottom what is at stake is an understanding of our place in time and our approaches to making sense of the past: unless we are clear about our aims and purposes, history education will be at best a kind of lottery.

Tempo e Argumento: even considering History’s total inability to make predictions, the idea that it teaches ‘a lesson’ still currently remains, as you have affirmed yourself in ‘Why learn

history?’, recently published in Brazil (LEE, 2011). Would not the idea that History has lessons to teach be still fundamental in teaching History for children and adolescents?

Peter J. Lee: the answer to this question really does depend on what one means by claiming that history teaches ‘lessons’. One first move is to say that the *past* teaches nothing at all, even if we may want to say that *history* can. Put another way, we can plunder the past (like the Bible) to support almost anything we want to say. But this is not a historical approach to the past.

What would it mean to say that history can teach lessons?

Children and adolescents have a limited range of experience to call upon when they wish to understand how things happen in human affairs. The historical past offers the possibility of vicarious experience of how human beings have found it possible to live and relate to one another: for example how institutions have operated in different circumstances, or how values and beliefs have appeared and been espoused or rejected. In this sense — being able to access a wide range of human societies or individual behaviour — students can learn from history. But they learn what has been done, and there is no guarantee that in trying to use such knowledge to think about the future they will get things right.

One way of construing ‘lessons’ in history is to think of them as generalizations that can support predictions. But we need to distinguish between different kinds of generalizations. A simplified list might include:

- (a) *generalizations* summing up a *finite number* of known cases;
- (b) *generalizations about an individual*;
- (c) *universal laws*, whether ‘confirmed’ or merely ‘probable’ - that is, ‘probably true’, which involves a different sense of probability from that which follows in (d);
- (d) *statistical laws*, asserting numerical probabilities – that is, of events of a certain type occurring in a population of events of another type;
- (e) *principles of action*.

Summative generalizations certainly exist in history, but they cannot serve as the basis of predictions. Knowing that all mid-18th century English parliaments were — in some sense

— corrupt, does not mean that 19th century parliaments were, let alone 21st century ones. Knowing that all the pieces of paper on my desk are white does not mean that all the pieces of paper put there in the future will be white. Unless we have something more like a universal law, or at least a statistical law, we cannot employ a summative generalization beyond the cases it summarizes.

Maybe in principle it is possible that universal laws or statistical generalizations could be discovered that are applicable to history. Alternatively, it could be argued that in giving explanations historians necessarily commit themselves to the (implicit) assertion that *some* law covering that explanation exists, even if no one can formulate it. But genuine universal laws applicable to history are likely to be of low probability, in the sense that the chances of their being true are small. There is an important reason for this. Just as there are not laws in physics about car radiators cracking that will explain why a particular radiator cracked, but instead laws relating changes in the pressure of liquids to their temperature and volume, so in history we should not expect that there will be laws about the overthrow of kings or the actions of entrepreneurs. And in history, unlike physics, we don't — so far, at least — have sets of abstract concepts of the right kind.

Even if such conceptual schemes were developed, there would be important problems about their employment in history. This is because the conceptual framework in terms of which many historical events are picked out and understood by the agents involved is the everyday practical one, in which things are done for *reasons*. Even on the most plausible analysis of reasons as causes (of the kind given by Donald Davidson), there remain serious difficulties for any claim that we can expect to achieve universal laws bearing on human action *construed as action*. We perhaps could (in the future) have such laws, but only at the price of a new abstract conceptual framework. The price to be paid would be that we should be unable to explain reasons *as* reasons and actions *as* actions.

Statistical laws, which may have a better claim to truth, are applicable to a limited range of areas where there are large numbers of events that may be regarded as 'the same'; typically they are to be found in demographic (and some economic) history. This is precisely where social scientists are making some small progress in beginning to understand patterns.

But while such ‘repeated’ events and processes are very important in historical explanation, much of history is outside their scope. The tracking and explanation of contingency has always been a central goal of history, and unless this explanatory ideal is abandoned, statistical laws will have a limited role to play, even if we can find them.

If the argument so far is accepted, intentionality and historicity remain central concepts in history. Political action, institutional moves or developments, economic manipulation or forbearance, all make reference to conceptions of what is going on which are at the same time accounts of what has happened. This is particularly clear in the case of policies, which are necessarily temporally extended. Conservative Party policy towards the EU, for example, brings with it a certain understanding of what has been done by and happened to the UK in the past, and of what the EU has been. Present circumstances are construed in terms of what they signify within the context of a conception of the past. The same is true of (for example) Hitler’s foreign policy, or the policy of ‘Appeasement’. More generally, traditions of all kinds involve shared understandings. These can be thought of as general principles which are applied to present circumstances, but often a tradition is maintained in the particularized and concrete form of an account of what society has done and suffered over the period of its existence.

In so far as future action is a continuation of a policy (or tradition), historical knowledge may provide insights into the future by suggesting what moves count as part of, or a break with, that policy. While it does not ratify the account of the past enshrined in such policies or traditions, it does create the possibility of understanding and evaluating them.

Moreover, given that any action is taken within a situation conceived in a certain way, knowledge of the historical (backward referencing) elements in that situation will help in any assessment of what is likely to be done. If we think of the history of the EU as a story of European states working to avoid the incessant armed conflicts of several centuries, this would lead to expectations about the future development of the EU different from those that follow from a story of bureaucratic encroachment on national sovereignties. This is not because we are entitled to expect that the EU will always continue to develop as it has in the past, but because of our changed understanding of how those who lead EU policies are likely

to see things. The point is that to understand what the EU is doing now, and to have a better chance to see what it may do next, it is necessary to know some history. Moreover historical knowledge may rule out certain conceptions of the past and so change our conceptions of the future – of what is possible and what is desirable. History's hold on the future is not confined to assessments of probabilities as to what may happen to us (or in spite of us) but offers us some basis on which we can decide to act. And, of course, since what is attempted is seldom what is achieved, historical knowledge may (with the sort of qualifications raised throughout this discussion) indicate where to look in order to see what might have a bearing on events, regardless of what any historical agents think they are doing.

We can see that the notion of a 'lesson' is a complex one. The possibility of history offering lessons does not rest solely on its possession of general laws of one kind or another. In dealing with human action, history suggests *principles of action* to which individual human agents subscribed, or which have operated in human societies at different times. When a teacher explains that generals don't fight battles unless they think they're going to win them, she is offering a principle of action which, taken as it stands, is simply false. But if she is teaching her students about 18th Century Europe, when training and maintaining professional troops was extremely expensive, and war was far from total, it draws attention to what is likely to be an important military premise. As such it shows how most generals were likely to behave (and in so doing suggests that a general like Marlborough was *different*). A principle of action is defeasible in individual cases without thereby being rendered worthless. Such temporally limited 'lessons' may or may not extend into the future. Expectations of a political party's future policies may be informed by principles of action to which its leaders have subscribed in the past. But this knowledge cannot simply be applied to the future as if that future were to become just another *instance*.

Historical knowledge can be regarded as (among other things) vicarious experience: it points to what might be expected, while at the same time making it evident that what is expected is seldom exactly what happens. It gives some conception of the range of possibilities, and — if taught in the right way — *opens up the opportunity to hold this conception reflexively*. Awareness of the basis of one's beliefs is only a necessary condition

of bringing them under control, not a sufficient one. And of course a sense of the probable is not a touchstone of the possible: experience of this kind is disastrous if it is taken to be mechanically applicable to the future.

History is concerned with the study of the past, not the future. But *some* knowledge of that past gives us a purchase on the future. That hold is not strengthened by trying to make history a source of quasi-scientific predictions: it only has something distinctive to offer when it remains itself. The claim here is *not* that historians and those who have studied history will be better at coping with the future than non-historians, because many things besides a knowledge of history enter into that. What is being claimed is that individuals with a knowledge of history will be better placed, not than any other individual who lacked that knowledge, but than they themselves would be without it.

Talking of ‘lessons’ of history may in any case be a trap. Nothing turns on the use of ‘lessons’ here, and it is important to think about generalizations of various kinds and the possibility of prediction in history, but there is a danger that we may get stuck in too narrow a notion of how history changes the way we see things. Perhaps it is better to think in wider terms, and talk of the power of history to *transform* the way we see the world. Richard Peters, the philosopher of education, used to say that a farmer and a biologist standing together on a dung heap in the farmyard could be thought of as standing on different dung heaps. It may not be exaggerating to say that someone who knows some history will, in some ways, live in a different world from the one inhabited by someone who is largely ignorant of history.

The transformations wrought by historical knowledge can be complex and subtle because they frequently involve reciprocal relationships between past and present. Our present ideas of what humans are and might become informs our view of, for example, the nineteenth century idea of progress, or Nazism and the Holocaust, or the development of the United Nations after 1945, and our understanding of these in their turn changes and enriches our understanding of who and what we are and can be.

Memories can colour how we see things. For example, after the Second World War the ideas of my father’s generation as to what Germans were like or were capable of, and

what expectations we should have of the them for the future, had consequences for foreign policy. But within that generation there were important differences. Those, for example, who knew something of German history, were aware of the scientific, philosophical and cultural impact of Germany before the Nazis, and hence saw a very different country and people from those who simply had memories of the war and its immediate origins.

The way in which history transforms how we see the world can be dramatic. Knowledge of the classical past, acquired during the Renaissance, changed Europeans' ideas of what and who they were, and their view of the possibilities for the future. The developing awareness of 'deep time' in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century radically altered people's ideas as to the kind of world they were living in and the animals that inhabited it. In so doing it eventually altered conceptions of humanity itself.

But transformations need not be so dramatic. In school history changes in how students see aspects of their world and their place in it can be more modest in scope, but perhaps more central to the immediate lives of individuals. For example, some students in a class of fifteen year-olds engaged in the SHP 'Development Study' of medicine, while considering the significance of Pasteur, were introduced to Kuhn's ideas about scientific paradigms, revolutions and puzzle solving. Many of the students were primarily studying science subjects for examinations at 16, and at the end of the lesson they approached their history teachers in great excitement, because they had always thought that natural science was a largely unchanging structure of knowledge, and that their lives as future scientists would at best consist in adding a few extra bricks to the edifice. Their picture of science had been overturned by knowing some history: they suddenly saw, as one of them put it, that 'We might even be able to make a big difference'. This was the beginning, for them, of a radical transformation.

History can also change how we see the world by overturning explanations, or suggesting better ones. Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel* shows how explanations of European hegemony in terms of cultural superiority, let alone race, are inadequate. Shifts in explanations like this can have consequences for our understanding of our identity and for our sense of the wounds we carry from the past, as well as more generally for our ideas of how

things happen. Black students, taught by well-meaning teachers over and over again about the triangle-trade, the lives of slaves in the American South, and the abolition of slavery, often assume that only black people were made slaves. Their whole sense of who they are can change when they understand that slavery was a normal feature of low-energy societies before the invention of the heat engine, and that Europeans and Asians were also enslaved in very large numbers. Equally, white students who smugly imagine that the problems of African countries are entirely self-inflicted may see the world very differently if they have to consider the evidence that slavery over several centuries played an important role in creating and maintaining those problems.

Some transformations can be more like ‘meta-lessons’ than lessons. History can encourage a degree of caution, making students aware of what *not* to say (perhaps best thought of as a change in *dispositions*). It can undermine the simplicities of a world categorized in polarities, or organized in generalizations masquerading as ‘laws’ or ‘lessons’, many of which have their origin in ‘memories’ of the past, but not in history. Crude claims like ‘appeasement now leads to wars later’ choose to make past and present similar in relevant ways, and historical knowledge (as well as evidence as to what can sensibly be asserted about the present) is required to test their validity in any given case. Analogies between migration and its consequences in the Western Roman Empire and migration into some EU countries, for example, or between the financial crisis of 2007-8 and previous recessions or the Great Depression, openly beg questions about the past as well as the present, demanding considerable historical knowledge. Without such knowledge they are likely to be incomprehensible or dangerously misleading; with it, they can enable us to see our present world in new and less simplistic ways.

The transformation history can offer of the ways in which children and adolescents see things can extend beyond specific content to more generalized conceptions underlying the way they see their world. Without historical knowledge, students’ ideas of what is *normal* in human affairs tend to be limited to the here and now. If they see their present world as defining what is normal for human life, unsurprisingly they expect little to change in their future lives. Technological change figures large in students’ thinking, but many of them think

these changes are coming to an end, or at least losing their impact on ‘ordinary’ life. For some 16-17 year-olds, for example, all the big inventions have already been made, and the future holds only improvements on what we *already* have.

In some areas of human life (religion or law, for example) adult ideas about what is normal may make grand claims to reach back into the distant past, but very often normalcy is simply the way we do things at present. The consequences of a localized notion of normalcy can appear in unexpected ways. Consider, for example, the impact of the internet and new technologies on reading habits. Debate about this often takes the form of worries about abilities or skills understood as the ‘normal’ achievements of young people, but now under threat. These worries do not simply vanish with historical knowledge, but once normalcy is considered in a historical context the whole picture changes. Even if we leave aside the point that for long periods of the past very few people could read, historical knowledge sets matters in a different light. The invention of writing, for example, led to the loss or downgrading of important human achievements and abilities in the *memorization* of origin myths and epic narratives central to the handing on of cultures. If new technology is killing literacy, the technologies of writing killed oral memory first.

We are perfectly at liberty to say that all these transformations are ‘lessons’ of history. But that way of talking seems to reduce complex and nuanced shifts of perspective and understanding to a misleading simplification. Complaining about word use may in the end be futile, but asking people to be careful what they say is perhaps a justifiable appeal to good sense.

Tempo e Argumento: *although reflections on History Teaching have strongly advanced, the difficulty in learning how children and adolescents learn historical concepts still remains. Departing from your research experience, is it possible to pinpoint some issues that may be generalized on how children and adolescents learn historical concepts?*

Peter J. Lee: this is a huge question, and all I can do here is to discuss some of the elements that would appear in any comprehensive answer. I will try to confine myself to a few central

issues. In the light of even the limited research so far available, history educators should probably abandon the assumption that history is just common-sense. Underlying history are ideas about how we can know about the past, give accounts of it and explain what went on it. It is these ideas that determine whether history seems to students to be a worthwhile form of knowledge, or something very odd (roughly speaking, *either* something simply ‘out there’ and given, *or* something more like hearsay, utterly untrustworthy and not knowledge in any real sense at all).

Younger students tend to take stories about the past as given. But soon common sense tells them that we can’t know about a past that is dead and gone: we weren’t there to see it. Even when teachers explain that we can say things about the past on the basis of traces left by it in the present, many students see these traces as being, in effect, reports. (If no-one tells us, truthfully, what happened, how can we know?) It soon occurs to them that people don’t always tell the truth, and have reasons for distorting their stories. So history must be just opinion (when it is not lies) — something resembling Ambrose Bierce’s definition of history as ‘broad-gauge gossip’.

The crucial move here is to recognize that some ideas are more powerful than others. Some ideas close down the possibility of history, while others allow it to proceed, and indeed allow us to make sophisticated and complex claims about the past that can be defended by reference to evidence, by testing against rival accounts that attempt to answer the same question, and by appeal to criteria for good explanations (e.g. scope, power and coherence with other explanations). It is therefore possible to speak unequivocally about less and more ‘powerful’ ideas in terms of those that stop history in its tracks, and those that allow it to go on. The *How People Learn* project in the USA and the *Assessment for Learning* project in the UK both stress the importance of understanding and addressing students’ prior conceptions if useful learning is to take place (as opposed to mere assimilation of more powerful ideas to pre-existing conceptions).

On this basis we can think of learning history partly in terms of second-order conceptual development, and view learning as (among other things) involving progression of ideas. We have some research knowledge about students’ ideas about history and how we can

know the past, so teachers can at least have some sense of what to expect when they meet the prior conceptions that students bring to school. The models of progression produced by research should be regarded as provisional, but are none the less important for that, since they allow teachers to be prepared to avoid the assimilation of new conceptions they are trying to teach to old, less powerful ideas that students already hold. As research develops a better understanding of students' preconceptions, it will become easier for teachers to predict what kinds of misunderstandings they are likely to encounter, and to make decisions on which of these prior conceptions block new understanding, and which can be built upon. (For example, the idea that historical evidence is equivalent to or depends upon *true reports* blocks a higher level grasp of evidence. Until students see that it is questions that 'create' evidence from sources, it is difficult for them to move on. But quite simple ideas about *testing* a report can be built upon to point up the role of questions, by helping students use their existing ideas to recognize that different questions asked of a source demand different tests. Notions of a source being 'reliable' then shift so that 'reliability' doesn't attach to the source as a fixed property of the source, but to what can be said about a source *given that we are asking this question rather than that.*)

Teaching demands an understanding of the conceptual challenges that face students, and progression is then a matter of *conceptual shifts*, rather than the simplistic and hugely damaging notion of climbing a ladder rung by rung. In the UK such misconceptions about 'ladder-like progression' have even led to teachers attempting to teach 'the next level up' in a progression model. This is absurd, because a progression model offers a picture of likely misconceptions, so teaching 'the next step on the ladder' is in effect to deliberately teach students misleading ideas. *It is always the most powerful ideas that we should try to teach:* the question then is how to simplify such ideas in ways that address students' experience. (Ask a child if there is anything in her exercise book about her. Then ask if, because there is nothing written in it about her, that means we can't tell anything interesting about her from her exercise book. Most children aged seven or above, and many younger ones, will immediately see that the fact that their book doesn't *report* anything about them does not mean that it doesn't allow us to answer some very interesting questions about them. Of

course, this example won't necessarily by itself bring them to understanding historical evidence, but coupled with other examples, including some from history, it can make an important initial step towards that goal.)

Conceiving progression in terms of conceptual shifts in answer to conceptual challenges allows teachers to ask themselves which challenges will mean something to their particular students. This is not always something that must remain in the hands of the teacher. Part of learning history is learning to think about the strengths and weaknesses of one's own answers to the questions one is addressing, and second-order understanding brings with it metacognitive components. These can be put in relatively straightforward ways: if I have to think about these sources, am I clear what question am I really trying to answer, and how that changes the ways in which I can use the source? But they can also suggest explicit teaching of new concepts, especially to older students. When they are trying to explain something in the past, older students can, for example, be encouraged to think about the different way in which *conditional* and *contingent* explanations operate. These ideas give students the means to operate metacognitively in approaching apparently rival explanations. Adolescents faced with explaining 'the rise of Hitler' (perhaps an unhelpful task) can ask themselves whether they are thinking of this in terms of what explains how 'some sort of national socialist or fascist movement' was successful in Germany, or whether they are trying to explain why the *specific* events that led to Hitler becoming Chancellor occurred. They can then ask themselves what it is that — for example — Marxist explanations are attempting to do, and how they might differ from explanations which trace the story of particular decisions (of the Nazis and their allies, and of those who opposed them) which led to Hitler attaining power.

One more issue lurks beneath any attempt to improve our understanding of learning history, and raises the issue of children's and adolescents' sense of whether knowing about the past is worth bothering with at all (even if they accept that it is possible). We need to remember that students tend to see the past and the present as entirely separate (there is increasing evidence for this, although many teachers may feel they do not need to be given evidence for something they meet all too often). This separation follows from the common-sense evaluation of the possibility of historical knowledge already mentioned. The past is

dead and gone. How can it possibly be connected with anything now, or more importantly, with the future? What possible point can there be in studying it? But there may also be a common-sense idea at work here about what ‘the present’ is (‘may’, because this is another blank area in the research, although recent work on students’ big pictures of British history is suggestive). If the present is conceived of as nearly instantaneous, then it is easy to see how students can assume that it is cut off from the past. If, on the other hand, they are confronted with characterizations of the present that carry with them (as it were ‘built-in’) references to the past, they can begin to see that the world in time is more complicated than they had thought. Describing men as ‘married’ or women as ‘widows’, characterizing state actions as breaking treaties, or saying what a political party ‘stands for’, all presuppose a past, and sometimes rather an expansive one.

If teachers ask apparently simple questions, like ‘How come we in Brazil speak Portuguese when our neighbours speak Spanish and Portugal is on the other side of the world?’ it is possible to alert students to the possibility that some aspects of the present only make any sense if we know about the past. If they ask students why their country seems to be friends with *these* people and wary of or even hostile to *those*, the students will again find it difficult to confine their thinking to a very short present. And once this is brought out into the open, there is even more scope for extending the ‘past-present’ by asking questions about long term policies, artistic traditions, and economic or demographic processes.

Tempo e Argumento: the concern with teaching and learning History in basic education leads us directly to the challenge of forming teachers that are able to work not only with substantive knowledge, but also those of a second order. This is still the greatest challenge in History Teaching Programs, due to the traditional idea that teaching History is to account for an enormous list of contents from Pre-History to the latest historical events in the world. In your opinion, what could change such traditional ideas in teaching programs, in order to better train teachers to teach History to children and adolescents?

Peter J. Lee: probably the most effective impact on how beginner teachers think about history may come from something that is not directly in the gift of teacher educators. What changed teacher attitudes most effectively in the UK was the development of high stakes examinations that demanded that history was treated as more than the absorption of discrete facts. For many teachers this was a liberation from an examination system that seemed designed only to try to catch out students by asking questions they could not have predicted or by requiring unexpected factual knowledge about expected topics. Such examinations were seen as a mere lottery. The Schools Council History Project exams, by contrast, rewarded precisely the historical thinking and understanding that many thoughtful teachers had always considered the most important outcome of a history education. Because high stakes examinations at 16 played such an important role in UK education, other teachers who had not participated in the SCHP became increasingly interested, and the proportion of schools signing up to the project steadily increased. (By the time the National Curriculum was introduced approximately one third of schools had subscribed to what was, by then, known as the Schools History Project.) The effect of this on teacher education was considerable. The ideas underpinning SCHP had been in existence before the project began, and in some universities similar ideas had been taught to beginner teachers. But the existence of a high stakes examination at 16 pursuing those ideas forced even those who were sceptical about the project to discuss it in teacher education courses, and prepare students to be able to teach it (albeit with mixed enthusiasm and even more mixed success). This was a radical change.

The impact of SCHP did not stop there. It offered a model of curriculum development in history that initially involved groups of teachers who wished to take part in demanding pilot work, constructing and trialling project materials and discussing its ideas. This work was not easy, and demanded a great deal of the participants' time, but the excitement of these self-selected teachers infected beginner teachers in training in their schools, and colleagues in other, neighbouring, schools. The success of this kind of model cannot, of course, be assumed in every national educational context. But the progress of the *Historical Thinking* (originally *Benchmarks*) *Project* in Canada seems to indicate that something along these lines may operate successfully in other countries.

Whatever the state of innovative teaching regimes that can inspire young beginner teachers and encourage teacher educators to rethink their courses, there are well known problems in persuading people to rethink their teaching of history. The obvious one is the assumption that all that matters for history is that students acquire detailed knowledge of the facts of history. Unfortunately, this is often treated as a problem of ‘method’, or of classroom skills. This can lead to the view that the central issue in teaching is one of craft knowledge, and to a tendency to assume that graduates straight from university will have problems of classroom control, or of managing to think up exciting methods, but will already ‘know history’.

Craft knowledge is very important, and for a long time was undervalued (or indeed simply not a conception with which people worked). But without serious thought about the aims of history teaching, which in turn requires reflexive thinking about what history is and what place it might have in the curriculum, craft knowledge is blind. I must stress once again that this is *not* to belittle craft knowledge. It is true that without craft knowledge teachers are likely to be impotent, but it is *also* true that if they are unaware of developments in our understanding of human learning and more specifically of what is known — however provisionally at this stage in our research understanding — about students’ understanding of history, they will often not be teaching what they think they are.

It is not just empirical knowledge that is at stake. ‘Best practice’ is often cited as a touchstone for improved teaching. But this is an almost meaningless notion unless there is agreement on the purposes and goals of teaching. In medicine it might make sense to talk of best practice, because there is some agreement as to outcomes (people get better or worse, live or die). In contrast in history education many of the problems rest on confusions or outright disagreements about what *counts* as history education. In this context ‘best practice’ is at best an empty idea, unless purposes and goals are clearly set out. This is why ‘theoretical’ understanding is important. Beginner teachers should expect their courses to help them to clarify their understanding of history, and to give them access to research in relevant fields. This kind of knowledge might be better described, not as ‘theory’ (which has connotations of ‘distance’ from practice), but as articulated or organized knowledge based on something more

than personal experience. As such it can be thought about and criticized, and can be made accountable for its basis in evidence, and the validity of its arguments, and thus can counter the sometimes very local and personal intuitions of craft knowledge.

Knowing recipes for classroom ‘methods’ is never enough. If beginner teachers have no apparatus for thinking about history, or knowledge of research, they face real difficulties in getting beyond the rehearsal of the historical content they encountered in their undergraduate courses. They can think of exciting games, find entertaining videos, or even organize novel role playing activities, but they will have trouble in making all these do real historical work, because they have no tools for thinking through their aims in teaching history. It is no easy task for teachers to harness new tasks to any worthwhile history if they have no clear sense of what there is to achieve except the handing on of information. For this they must be offered the means of teasing out their own conception of the aims and purposes of history teaching.

This may be connected to an interesting issue that has surfaced in the past few years, namely the empirical claim made by some American history educators that the idea of teaching history as a distinctive form of knowledge (the Americans tend to use the narrower term ‘discipline’, which has the disadvantage of appearing to tie history more closely to academic institutions) cannot enthuse teachers as the basis of reforms in history teaching. The claim seems to be that the only way to make teachers want change is to paint history as producing better democrats. Leaving aside conceptual issues, this empirical claim seems very strange from the UK side of the Atlantic, and even runs up against North American evidence.

First, in the UK it was precisely the idea of teaching history as a distinctive form of knowledge, picking out the concepts that gave structure to the discipline, which was the basis of the Schools Council History Project. This enthused history teachers in an astonishing way by giving them a sense of the power of historical ideas which they, in their turn, tried to pass on to their students. SHP (as it became) was not justified by appealing to simplistic promises to make students into democrats, although many teachers would have understood the more subtle relationship between democratic values and those of history. Such a justification would have aroused suspicions about transmitting ideologies, and might well have been counter-productive. Nevertheless, confining itself to justifiable claims about its impact on

how students thought about *history*, SHP had a massive impact on history education in the UK, eventually getting itself partially adopted (even if only partially understood) in some aspects of the National Curriculum.

Second, in the US the rationale for history education has consistently been given by appeal to its social impact, often smearing out its cognitive character. It has been justified as telling the national story, and — especially more recently — as making students better democrats. Yet it is in the USA that complaints to the effect that history teaching does not change, and that it is in desperate need of reform, have continued unabated for decades. So appeal to social goods has not been very successful in encouraging radical change in history education in the US, but in contrast, appeal to helping students understand a discipline or form of knowledge in the UK was dramatically successful. But other North American evidence also casts doubt on the empirical claim. Seixas' work in a small pilot in Oakland in California aroused enormous enthusiasm among many participant teachers, even when, like their UK counterparts in the early days of SHP, they found the change quite difficult. And the success in Canada of Seixas' *Benchmarks* project, now the *Historical Thinking* project, attests to the immense power the idea of teaching history as a form of knowledge holds for teachers.

If I may be forgiven a wild generalization, most people find anything that empowers them exciting, and that includes ideas. If we drop the language of 'theory' and 'practice', and recognize that learning to teach involves acquiring a conceptual apparatus and empirical knowledge of a systematic kind, we often find that beginner teachers respond with enthusiasm. Fear about classroom management must be directly addressed, so that young teachers can get beyond their fears, but even here it is important to show them how students who feel that *they* in turn are being empowered by their history are less likely to pose challenges to their teachers. How beginner teachers conceive history, and what they think is worth teaching, as well as knowledge about likely problems of understanding, all have a direct 'practical' effect on teachers' everyday classroom life.

The consequences of failing to give beginner teachers the means to think for themselves about history can be disastrous. In the UK we have seen this in the damaging teaching of *evidence* through notions of *bias*, or treating *reliability* as a fixed attribute of

sources. More recently muddled notions of *significance* have appeared, in which historical significance is assumed to be a fixed property of events, or is equated with human importance, and lists of criteria for the latter are given as if they elucidated the former. Currently, and more seriously, new ideas about ‘frameworks’ and ‘big pictures’ are elided with pre-existing notions of ‘outlines’ or ‘overviews’. Here and elsewhere apparently brilliant classroom activities can actually depress students’ understanding if they encourage students to cling to lower level ideas rather than to face up to the problems such ideas pose.

Teachers who wish to teach students more sophisticated ideas need to be treated as adult readers and learners. If beginner teachers meet only craft knowledge, they are condemned to listen to the opinions of everyone who can claim ‘experience’, unaware of the way in which their own wisdom conflicts with that of their neighbouring schools. Where more experienced people, who remain limited in this way, are in positions of influence or authority, they can do serious damage, muddling ideas which should be distinguished, or asserting as fact statements with no valid empirical support, and offering spurious guidance to teachers. Impressive ‘performances’ in the classroom may be a necessary part of teaching, but are not sufficient. Something worthwhile has to be learned.

Tempo e Argumento: *could you please talk a bit more on what you have been researching lately?*

Peter J. Lee: there is not much to say here! I am now more or less retired. But the areas of interest I am (rather slowly and stupidly) pursuing include attempts to begin to unpack the idea of *transformative* history (that is, history as changing how we see the world), the possibility of researching the development of ‘historical’ dispositions (for example respect for persons, or for evidence), and the acquisition of frameworks of the past, or of usable but historical ‘big pictures’. I also have worries about muddles over aims, ‘skills-talk’ and the reduction of thinking about history education in the UK to the production of classroom activities with far too little thinking about what they achieve.

I am trying to be selective about agreeing to write papers, and *very* selective about attending conferences, since in many ways I feel I have insufficient to say that is new. I'm hoping to find time to write a book with colleagues Ros Ashby and Arthur Chapman, if they think I can still usefully manage to produce any kind of argument.

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