Pedagogy

Underpinning this project is a commitment to creative shared learning, learning through talk, and through activity within a structured framework. The resources and activities are suitable for use across a range of subject areas.

In History, the investigative historian should ask questions.

Questions

Historians ask a range of key questions about the past: 

- **When** did it take place?
- **Where** did it happen?
- **Who** was involved?
- **What** happened – what do the sources tell us?
- What was the situation, the **context** then?
- What has **changed**?
- **How** did it happen?
- **How can we find out**?
- What else would we like to know?

The most significant, in terms of learning, are questions that ask **How do we know?** Answering these questions requires pupils to justify their responses. **How reliable is the evidence** upon which their decision is based?

**Why** did it happen? This is another big question, depending on evidence to back up the initial response.

Some questions elicit different types of learning to others.

**Closed questions**, to which there is a right or wrong answer, relate to factual knowledge: pupils either know or do not know the appropriate answer. 

**Open questions** encourage more thinking, as pupils need to be creative about their responses.

In History, the key questions, the **how** and **why** questions, call on pupils to explain and justify their responses, in the process developing higher levels of thinking. Such questions may be open or closed.

Big and Little Questions

Drawing on the work of Counsell and Byrom, pupils are invited to ask their own questions – e.g. what do they want to find out about their schools’ past – and to sort these questions into BIG and little questions. Big questions are those that are more wide-ranging than little questions. The little questions are, in effect, the sub-questions in the category to which the big question relates.

An example of a big question is **What were my school’s classrooms like 100 years ago and why were they like this?**

Examples of little questions are **What did the pupils sit on in their classrooms?** or **What did the classrooms smell like?**

So the big question can be followed by a series of smaller questions.
By sorting their questions into big and little questions, pupils’ analytical and historical thinking can deepen. This could be taught using a Questions Tree, where pupils choose a big question, written on the trunk of a tree, and fill the branches with supporting little questions. Some of the little questions may link with other little questions, and so the branches may intertwine. Through this ordering and prioritising of questions pupils start to address causation issues – why and how did school classrooms or schools change over time?

A similar strategy can be used with the card exercise, based on BIG and little points. When pupils have gathered all the information they want to use, it is helpful to organise their ideas into BIG and little points, whereby they choose the key big points from their information, and support the big points, with the relevant little points, backing up the proposal that the big point suggests.

By sorting the cards into a hierarchy or zone of relevance (see p16) pupils are encouraged to think more deeply. This sorting exercise, where pupils order the historical statements into an order of relevance and irrelevance, attempts to ensure that their responses and analyses are relevant to the question which they are addressing.

These activities then help them to structure their thinking, their talking and writing about historical issues. For more information on this please see http://czv.e2bn.net/e2bn/leas/c99/schools/czv/web/counsell.htm and Counsell (1997)

**Scaffolding**

The above activities are forms of scaffolding pupils’ historical thinking, ensuring that their work stays on track, relevant to the issue, and deepens their thinking. The interview questions, discussed below, play a similar role.

**The importance of talk and group-work**

Many of the activities suggested here should be done with the pupils organised in groups. The process of discussion about, say, the prioritisation of points, and why some are more significant than others, or sources for information, promotes analytic thinking and clarity amongst the participants. It also allows for delegation of tasks in the enquiry.

**Debate, role-play and drama**

Organising a debate about current compared to past schooling, or a comparison between different types of schools in the area has a similar scaffolding impact on analytical thinking, and encourages the organisation and prioritisation of historical points and data.

Putting pupils in role allows them to empathise, to understand what learning or schooling was like in another period or in another environment. It has also an important role in developing language skills as pupils take on different ways of thinking and speaking, according to place, time.

**Oral interviews**

This pack includes a question sheet for pupils to develop for use in interviewing older people about their experiences of school. Their engagement in adapting the questions to what they want to find out, but allowing them flexibility for finding out answers to questions they had not thought about previously, will provide material for their write-up, which if appropriately scaffolded and organised will further develop their historical knowledge and understanding.

**Visits to museums**

Visits to local museums will enable and facilitate the collation of data for the enquiry. It is important for the teacher to know in advance what the museum can offer, and to allocate different tasks in finding
out information, and allow for pupils to feed back to others in their class/group.

**Literacy events**
This project offers considerable scope for literacy development. Each pupil should have a logbook, in which they record all their research and classwork. Pupils will have access to a wide range of reading materials, which can also be used as models for their writing. Their note-taking skills will be developed throughout. For example school logbooks kept by headteachers can not only provide fascinating data, but can act as a model for their own logbooks – promoting reading and writing of narrative and reporting. Newspapers can act in a similar way.

It is hoped that pupils will be able to contribute to the school’s website by adding selected pages from their work on the project. Pupils could be encouraged to read poems about school, or to write their own about their school. Year 7 pupils could make booklets or websites about their school for in-coming Year 6 primary pupils.

**Preparation for teaching**

Before starting to teach, you should investigate where artefacts and archive materials relating to your school’s history are kept, and what these consist of. If you visit some of the resource centres mentioned below, assess whether one might be suitable as a school visit for your class(es). When you have finished your own trawl for evidence you should complete a chart of what is where for your pupils.

The sample lesson plans provide ideas for lessons, starting to investigate a school’s history. They can be adapted for your own needs. They help to show some useful teaching strategies for designing lessons and learning.

The activities using the photos and extracts provide suggestions, based on the sources in the pack.