

An aims and objectives approach to the teaching of Intermediate history.

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For a number of years I have been working with groups of fellow teachers in exploring the use of an aims and objectives approach to the teaching of history. In this article, I have drawn on this working attempting to explain and evaluate such an approach to teaching. Since the article has been written for the journal of the History Teachers' Association of Ireland, I have tried to use as many illustrations as possible from the Irish Intermediate Examination Syllabus and the 1978 Intermediate Examination paper.

The term 'Aims and Objectives' appears at the beginning of the Intermediate Certificate Programme for history and I feel it is important to indicate one's definition of these terms since they can be interpreted in many different ways. A colleague once described aims as the teacher's pious hopes and objectives as what the pupils can actually do. I have found this a useful distinction in that it helps to differentiate between aims as statements of the teacher's intent and objectives as an expression of pupil behaviour which will result from the learning process. In exploring the nature of aims and objectives it has seemed convenient to deal with them in separate sections.

Aims

An aim, then, is a statement of intent. It indicates what we as teachers hope that our pupils will derive from a study of history. Where we are operating in an examination orientated system, our prime aim may be to have our pupils attain as high a grade as possible in their examination. This must be an important consideration where a pupil's future depends on the examination results he or she achieves. Yet it may be difficult to justify taking up our pupils' limited time in school with the study of history if we do not have additional purposes in mind when planning our work; and we may find that pupils perform more effectively in their

examinations if they catch a glimpse of the value of history in understanding themselves and the world in which they live.

How are we to decide what our aims should be? Where we are constrained by a set national syllabus we may have to take the statement of content and the examination papers and work out what we see as valid aims in teaching pupils to deal effectively with them. These aims will shape our presentation of content and our method of teaching in the classroom.

One or two examples will illustrate how this can operate. We may be expected to teach about the Agricultural and Industrial revolutions in England as part of a wider study of the age of revolutions. If our aim is to make pupils aware of technological changes, a catalogue of inventions will suffice. If we want them to understand the economic effects of these changes we can provide statistics which show, for example, the increase in production and the effects on prices and sales. But if we think it important for them to appreciate how the way of life of the people was profoundly affected by these revolutions, then we must help pupils first to reconstruct the methods of supplying, making and distributing cloth under the domestic system and the conditions of everyday life which it dictated, and then, by way of contrast, make them aware of the conditions in the new factories and in the homes and towns in which the people working in the factories lived. If our aim is to make our pupils aware of the social structure of the new industrial society then we shall have to explore the home and way of life of manufacturers as compared with that of working people and possibly the differences between the life of skilled and unskilled workers. The change in status which may be imposed on people by technological change can be vividly brought out by studying the fate of those holding land who became tenant farmers as compared with those who became landless labourers or went to work in the new textile mills or the foundries. Should we think it important to introduce pupils to the nature of history, we are likely to ask pupils to locate and use evidence, secondary and primary, on the changes with which we are dealing.

Aims may, therefore, influence our selection of content and our approach in teaching set topics. They may also lead us to decide to teach particular areas of content. Where there is a prescribed syllabus with options incorporated in it, we may base our choice on the particular aims which we consider important in teaching history.

For example a teacher who wants his pupils to appreciate the importance of continuity but also to be aware of the impact of technological change and development on people's lives may select Option B (The Middle Ages) and Option F (The Nineteenth Century) from the Intermediate Programme. On the other hand, a teacher who wants to deal with important turning points in European history as part of our heritage may select Option C (The Age of the Renaissance and Reformation) and Option E (The Age of Revolutions).

Such examples of the influence of aims on content selection, illustrate how different teachers may have different aims in teaching history. This reflects the difference of opinion among historians themselves as to the purpose of studying history. Where one historian sees it as the study of man's progress in time, with an emphasis on change and development'; another may interpret it as being concerned with the thinking behind the actions of men involved in particular historical events or situations.² A third may view history as a means of teaching people about their heritage, local, national and international.-' Some may have reservations about using history as a means to an end. They see the value of history as a discipline, using available evidence to reconstruct and explain the past, as sufficient justification in itself for studying the past.'

Objectives

Aims tend to be teacher orientated; they represent the long term purposes of the teacher in dealing with areas of the syllabus. Objectives, on the other hand, concentrate our attention on what our pupils will be able to do when work on a topic is completed.

Because objectives indicate what a pupil will be able to do, action verbs are used in writing them. An objective is normally written in the infinitive

form of the verb, with the phrase "The pupil will be able to... " understood as a prefix.' Thus

"To explain and criticise the system of land holding and land use and the methods of farming under the three-field system of land holding."

Is an example of an objective

Objectives Relating to Knowledge and Comprehension

This is an example of a fairly general objective, requiring the pupils to show knowledge and comprehension of land holding and land use under the three-field system of farming. It indicates what pupils should be able to do after they have completed work on a relatively extensive topic.

General objectives may be broken down into more specific objectives which form component parts of the general one. For example, the initial parts of the objective given above -

To explain and criticise the system of land holding and land use ... under the three field system of farming may be broken into:- [The pupil will be able]

To indicate what is meant by strips.

To describe the way in which people were allocated their strips.

To suggest advantages and defects in this method of allocating land.

To indicate why this method of holding land is known as the three-field system.

To indicate and criticise the use made of the fields.

To indicate what is meant by common land.

To state what it was used for and to make a critical assessment of using it in this way.

To define the meaning of the terms 'tenant', 'rent', 'landlord', 'landholding' and 'land use.

To indicate the difference between owning and renting land.

To indicate that there were landlords, farmers who owned their land and farmers who rented their land and explain the difference between them.

To explain the three-field system of land holding and to suggest arguments for and against it.

Objectives do not in themselves provide a teaching/learning sequence for our pupils: but they may help us plan one. If I were preparing a work on the strip system of agriculture, the detailed breakdown of objectives given above would help me to see what I should teach. I would then work out what I considered an adequate definition of strips and make sure that in my teaching I included the information necessary for the pupils to grasp this definition. Similarly with the other objectives, I would work out what I would expect pupils to do if they were to achieve them and check to ensure that I was teaching them enough content to meet these requirements. Thus in selecting and teaching content, I would have objectives in mind.

It may be objected that it takes too long to write out detailed objectives as compared with content headings. My own experience, both personally and working with fellow teachers, has been that it is helpful in the beginning to plan work in relation to fairly detailed objectives derived from one or two to be covered. I found it increasingly easy as time went on however, to inter-relate my general objectives and my selection of content without having to write out detailed objectives. Gradually I became able to make a rapid review of content in order to detect the omission of any information which my pupils would require in order to attain my general objectives.

I found that one of the advantages of objectives was that they focussed attention on what my pupils would ultimately be able to do. For example with the general objective

To explain and criticise the system of land holding and land use under the three-field system

the following statement of content might now be drawn up:

The three-field system of farming, land holding and land use.

Strips - description - how allocated - advantages/defects.

Meaning of three'-field system - use of fields - advantages/defects.

Common land - meaning - use - advantages/defects.

Owning and renting land

- meaning of: landlord, tenant, rent, land holding.

- existence of landlords, farmers who owned land, farmers who rented land.

- differences between them.

Arguments for and against the three-f'eld system of land holding and land use.

In this statement of content there is a marked emphasis on teaching terminology and on evaluating particular elements of the three-field system before asking the pupils to make a general explanation and criticism of it.

The comprehension of words or ideas is a category of objectives which may be especially helpful to us in planning our work. Unless pupils understand the meaning of words we use in our lessons, they may be unable to make effective use of the information we are teaching them.

The rate at which pupils can acquire new vocabulary and concepts differs. This is illustrated in work which I undertook with colleagues in a National Working Party in Scotland. This involved the construction of sets of work guides, on the same topic, designed for pupils of different ability levels. These materials deal with life and work in a mining community, in a cotton town and the Scottish countryside in the 15th century. Pupils' achievement of the objectives for each set was carefully assessed with the help of a professional evaluator. Able pupils proved capable of mastering new words and ideas very rapidly. Pupils of average ability were able to deal with most of the new words and ideas to which we attempted to introduce them; but we asked them to deal with fewer of these and spent more time in explaining them and in having pupils make use of them in a variety of tasks which we set them. With pupils who had learning difficulties we found we had to teach the meaning of words which the other pupils already knew. For example, we found that there

was little point in expecting these less able pupils to understand the way of life of a worker in a textile mill if we had not ensured that they knew what cloth was and had a 'Picture' of a factory, a machine or a worker in their minds.

Objectives did not suggest to us the level of conceptual understanding of our pupils: only our own experience of working and talking with these pupils could do that. But they were of help in identifying the pieces of information needed to build a pupil's 'picture' of a historical situation or event. For less able pupils, we found we had to break down an objective to the point where we identified every piece of information needed to build a pupil's 'picture' of what had happened. We could then construct tasks which enabled the pupil to build up each piece of information, and reinforce his understanding of the information by asking him to use it in various ways. Thus the pupil could gradually build up his picture of what happened until he was able to write with understanding about it. We found, for example, when we were teaching less able pupils about the role of a mill-owner that we had first to ensure that they knew the meaning of cotton, thread, cloth, a mill, machinery and workers. Evaluation showed that, when we did this, pupils achieved objectives relating to the work of the mill-owner. With abler pupils it was not necessary to establish the meaning of these words which were already part of their vocabulary.

This is the key to teaching effectively may lie in building up a conceptual framework into which

'Is can fit new information. It would, pupil therefore, pay its to give close attention to building pupils' conceptual understanding in our teaching.

If conceptual understanding is necessary for the effective instruction and explanation of a particular event or situation, should we not then include concept learning as well as content in our detailed scheme of work. The requirements of the Irish Intermediate Certificate Examination paper in History for 1978 reinforce the case for this. Pupils are expected, for example, to define terms such as political theory, absolute monarch, enlightened despot and constitutional monarch. Thus it could be very

useful to make a list of terms and ideas to which pupils will have to be introduced to help them to deal effectively with the examination questions.

Objectives provide a kind of framework within which we may develop our detailed teaching. They help us to identify information, terminology and ideas necessary to build up our pupils' 'picture' and explanation of what happened in the past.

This approach to teaching may seem so systematic that it deprives pupils of the sense of adventure and the imaginative experience which they may derive from an exciting class lesson which catches the romance of history. It would be tragic if that happened. But there is no need to lose the lively re-enactment of people's actions and feelings when using objectives. What objectives may do is ensure that when we sail and suffer with Columbus we are helping pupils to embark on an experience which will take them to certain goals that will develop their understanding of the problems, situation and character of a great explorer, as well as make them aware of the drama, humour or pathos of his situation.

It is, however, important to avoid over-rigidity in our use of objectives. They must not be allowed to inhibit us from seizing opportunities to explore interesting side issues or new ideas not envisaged when our objectives were worked out. But the decision about which objectives should be pursued in a lesson lies with ourselves. There is nothing to hinder us from turning the lesson in a direction different from that anticipated; and a facility in identifying objectives may actually help us to make more effective use of pupils' questions or opinions. If we are accustomed to thinking in terms of building pupils' information to help them achieve particular outcomes, we may be able to do this the more readily with ideas or problems raised in class. Questions posed by pupils may, for example, offer an opportunity to introduce them to the idea that there may be no right answer and more than one side to questions - in themselves useful goals in the study of history.

So far, I have been dealing with objectives relating to knowledge and understanding: the type of objectives" indicated under the heading "Knowledge and Comprehension" in the Irish Intermediate Certificate

Programme. In writing this type of objective we are indicating that pupils will recall and show understanding of information. In undertaking the tasks which will demonstrate the required knowledge and understanding, pupils will have to exercise skills.

Skills Objectives

The syllabus statement for the Irish Intermediate Certificate in History sets out skills which pupils undertaking this examination should be able to practise. If we look at the 1978 paper, we see the ways in which the examiners have attempted to assess pupils' ability to exercise skills. For example, a considerable number of questions require a pupil to write a paragraph. Topics set

include the First Irish Farmer, Minoan Crete, the Irish High Crosses, the Statues of Kilkenny, the Council of Trent, the Boston Tea Party and the Chartist Movement in Britain. Pupils are given no guidance as to the aspects of these topics with which they should deal. Thus they must be able to identify which aspects are appropriate to answering the question set. They must then try to provide enough information relating to each aspect to earn them ten marks, and compress it all into one paragraph. Pupils who are trained to select and organise information from a mass of facts are likely to meet the requirements of questions asking them to write a paragraph. In writing an examination answer, pupils are drawing on their "book of memory". The skills needed to select and organise information from one's "book of memory" are similar to the skills used in reading and note taking efficiently from a book. It may be that we can help our pupils to meet examination requirements more efficiently and at the same time teach them skills of reading which will stand them in good stead in later life.

To make notes from books efficiently, it is necessary for pupils to learn how, to locate information preferably by using the index and statement of contents, select what is relevant to their purpose, and translate it into their own words and/or drawings. They may have to make references from it, for example to identify cause or effect. To make adequate notes

they must also be able to organise information under appropriate headings. Before they can do this, they must identify the main points being made in the reading matter and be able, if required, to reorganise the information under different headings to suit their purpose e.g. a book may give the heading 'ploughing' and provide information from which pupils can infer defects in a particular method of ploughing. If pupils are trained to re-organise information, they may be able to identify these defects, and record "methods of ploughing" and "defects" under separate headings.

This type of work may be helpful to pupils doing the Intermediate Certificate Examination in Ireland. Younger pupils may be asked to select information relevant to a particular topic such as Norman weapons or Norman ships. Gradually pupils may be trained to re-organise information under specific headings towards the end of the Intermediate course.

To enable pupils to exercise these skills competently, it will be necessary to demonstrate to them how this may be done. For example, the class can be given a particular heading such as "Norman methods of fighting" and then asked to read two or three pages of a book and write down items of information relevant to this heading. This work can be done by each pupil working individually or by pupils working in groups. With practice, most pupils should gradually become able to do this type of task for themselves.

Pupils who have mastered this skill may be helped to work out suitable headings for their notes. A useful exercise is to give pupils three headings for a particular paragraph or short section in a book and ask them to choose the most appropriate one and justify their choice. Group and/or class discussion of what is appropriate, and why, will give pupils who learn more slowly than their class mates an opportunity to benefit from the more highly developed skills of their peers. This kind of work should help pupils to select information they have memorised and organise it efficiently in paragraphs dealing with particular aspects of a historical situation or event, or series of events.

The development of these enquiry skills of selection and organisation of content through the use of books will be particularly important if teachers elect to have their pupils do project work to be assessed internally in the school, as the Intermediate Examination permits. Training in the use of books will be of great value to pupils going onto more advanced working history and it will contribute to the general education of the pupil. The current interest in language across the curriculum in Britain reflects the concern about the development of skills of reading for use in everyday life.

So far we have been considering skills of identifying and organising information to write paragraphs on topics which may be included in the Irish Intermediate Examination. An analysis of the questions set in the 1978 examination indicates a number of other skills which pupils may be required to exercise. These include a fairly simple interpretation of statistics, marginal use of pictures or map interpretation mainly as a cue for descriptive writing, and use of a timeline as an aid to pupils reconstructing a sequence of events.

Section 1 of the Intermediate Examination in History contains questions based on a given source extract. This suggests that pupils should be introduced to sources and trained in some of the skills of handling them. In the 1978 paper there is a range of questions requiring pupils to translate into their own words and interpret the meaning of parts of the source; draw on their own knowledge of people, events or developments to which the source relates; and detect the point of view or attitudes of the authors. This provides a useful guide to skills in using sources which pupils in the early years of the secondary school may be asked to develop.¹⁰

Pupils may also be asked to account for people's actions or ideas, or to show the effect of these on other people or on the society in which they lived. Thus it will be important to ask pupils to infer cause and effect when teaching them about past events and situations. For example, pupils who have been guided through a reconstruction of conditions in Ireland in the 9th century may subsequently, when dealing with the

Vikings, be asked to explain why the Vikings might have decided to raid Ireland. If pupils know about Vikings and their likely behaviour in raids on Ireland, they may be able to say what effects a raid would have on the people being attacked.

Attitudinal Objectives Work of the type discussed above may help pupils to develop attitudes specified in the Intermediate Examination Programme, namely:-

- i) to find rational explanations for historical events and developments;
- ii) to understand what it is like to be in someone else's position.

The skills of inferring explanation and- identifying the feelings and attitudes of people involved in past events or situations may be developed by means of class discussion or oral lessons. If pupils will be expected to exercise these skills in the examination, they will also need practice in dealing with them in their written class work. In dealing above with the danger of allowing objectives over-dominance in our teaching, I referred to the value of helping pupils to realise that there may be several points of view on a problem and there may be no 'right' answer. These are important attitudes which the study of history seems particularly able to promote: so many of the historian's conclusions are tentative.

In several questions in the 1978 Intermediate Examination paper, pupils are asked to select two out of a number of people and write an account of each person's experiences . Where the question is framed this way the pupils may presumably have the choice of writing their answer in the first or third person. On the other hand where questions specifically require pupils to imagine they are a particular person and to write an account of what they did or of what other people were doing in a particular situation, the use of the first person would definitely be required. In writing answers of this type pupils may be expected to indicate the feelings of the person whose role they are playing. Thus in teaching about the Vikings it will be important to ask pupils how the Vikings and the Irish might feel towards each other, for example during a raid.

Where pupils are expected to assume the role of a particular historical person, they may have to write in a given form such as a letter, a diary or a newspaper report. Presumably pupils will have to use the appropriate conventions for these forms of writing if the answer is to be acceptable. Unless pupils are shown how to exercise these, and how to write as if they were someone living at a particular point in time, with the degree of knowledge appropriate to the time and situation in which they are placing themselves, they will fail to meet the basic requirements of this type of task.

In developing skills and attitudes, as in teaching content, an objectives approach provides us with clear goals towards which we can work with our pupils. It also provides us with a basis for assessment. Pupils' work and examination questions may be based on the objectives. Pupils' performance will indicate whether they can effectively use content or skills in ways which we have planned. Where pupils' work is unsatisfactory and does not achieve the objectives set, we can review our teaching and try to devise ways in which we can help them to achieve a more satisfactory standard.

In dealing with objectives, I have dealt mainly with those appropriate to the Intermediate Examination. For many pupils it could be helpful to plan the development of their conceptual understanding and skills progressively from the first year of secondary education to the final year. We may, for example, set out to develop conceptual understanding relating to farming, industry, a parliamentary system of government, nationalism or civil war from the first to the third year. We may also concentrate in first and second year on the skills of locating and organising information under headings while teaching our pupils how to use books. In addition we may try to train them to identify the explanation for an event(s) given in a particular book.

In later years pupils may be asked to identify the explanation of events given in one book, together with evidence used to support it. Subsequently they may be able to evaluate various explanations for the

same event or series of events given in different books. It is, of course, possible for us teachers to present our pupils with 'model' answers for a sufficient number of topics to give them a fair chance of passing their examinations if they regurgitate them accurately. If we use this approach we are not giving much precedence to the aim of developing pupils' own skills so that they will be able to operate as independently as their ability and experience permit. My own opinion is that pupils given effective training in writing their own account of an historical event, situation or career on the basis of our teaching, books or sources will then be more able to deal effectively with examination requirements. If they are able independently to operate skills in dealing with the selection and organisation of content, they are more likely to write with understanding of the content with which they are dealing. Regurgitated notes, on the other hand, can frequently be written without understanding, which results in some odd statements. (We all have our stock of pupils' "howlers".) Pupils may also be less able to adapt their information to particular examination requirements if they have no experience of working on their own.

In applying an aims and objectives approach to a national examination system one is recognising the importance for pupils and their teachers of directing work in the classroom towards the examination requirements. But for teachers who have as one of their aims the introduction of pupils to methods of study appropriate to the discipline of history, the examination requirements may not be the only criteria they will apply to their planning of pupils' work. For these teachers, the development of their pupils' ability to use evidence to reconstruct and explain past events and situations and to make a critical assessment of that evidence may be the ultimate goal. Where they feel that examinations do not further such development, they may press for changes in the examinations. Meanwhile, how far they should devote time to developing certain skills despite their apparent absence from examination requirements may depend on a number of factors. These may include teachers' ability to deal effectively with the requirements of the

examination while still allowing time for other work, and the ability of their pupils to cope with additional work.

How can we identify skills objectives appropriate to the discipline of history? This will depend on our own analysis of the nature of our discipline. Efforts have been made to provide a classification of skills appropriate to work in the secondary schools." But we may find it more satisfactory to work out our own list of skills, drawing on our knowledge of our pupils' abilities and on interpretations of the nature of our discipline made by professional historians.

Whether or not we confine our use of an aims and objectives approach to the immediate requirements of the examination system, it can be of considerable value in the teaching of history. Aims indicate our intentions in teaching our pupils content, skills or attitudes. Objectives indicate specific uses which our pupils will make of such content, skills, or attitudes. If we identify aims and objectives, they will not provide us with a teaching or learning programme for our pupils. But they will indicate the purposes and potential outcomes towards which teaching and learning may be directed. They provide a kind of check list which may help us to select content, set tasks for pupil to deal with, and identify attitudes our pupils which we may encourage them to develop. The extent to which our pupils attain objectives in class work and formal assessment will give us information on how far our teaching has been effective in achieving the outcomes we consider important and indicate to us where we may have to adapt our teaching to achieve our purposes.

FOOTNOTES

1. See for example, E. H. Carr *What is History?* (London: Penguin 1964).
2. R. G. Collingwood *The Idea of History* (Oxford: O.U.P. 1946).
3. J. H. Plumb *Crisis in the Humanities* (London: Penguin 1964) and Ministry of Education, Pamphlet No. 23. *Teaching History* (London: H.M.S.O. 1952)
4. J. R. Hexter *The History Primer* (London: Alien Lane, The Penguin Press, 1972) and G. R. Elton *The Practice of History* (London: The

Fontana Library, 1969) - although the latter would not see this as appropriate at school level!

5. For further information on the writing of objectives, see for example, 1.

K. Davies *The Management of Learning* (London: McGraw-Hill, 1972) chapter 5, and 1. K. Davies *Objectives in Curriculum Design* (London: McGraw-Hill, 1976) especially chapters 6 and 7.

6. Detailed consideration of this work is given in: Scottish Central Committee on Social Subjects, Bulletin no. 4 *An Aims and Objectives Approach to the Teaching of History* (Scottish Education Department, Edinburgh: H.M.S.O. 1978) especially chapters 2 and 3.

7. Ibid. Chapter 3. 8. In dealing with skills of reading, I have drawn on information supplied by my colleagues in Aberdeen College of Education, Ronald Fyfe, M.A., M.Ed., Senior Lecturer, Educational Psychology, and Avis M. Swarbrick, B.A., Dip. App. Lings., Lecturer in the Department of Applied Linguistics. However I alone am responsible for the use I have made of it.

9. See A. Bullock, et al. *A Language for Life* (London: H.M.S.O. 1975) especially chapters 8, 10, 11, 12.

10. Discussion of the skills appropriate to the use of sources may be found in M. E. Collins: *A Consideration of the Use of Primary Source Material in the Teaching of History, with particular Reference to Intermediate Certificate Students in Ireland*, (unpublished M. Ed. thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 1977) and M. Palmer, 'Educational Objectives and Source Materials: Some practical suggestions' *Teaching History* XVI (1976) pp. 326-330.

11. See for example, Scottish Central Committee for Social Subjects, Curriculum Paper no'. 15 *Social Subjects in Secondary Schools* Scottish Education Department, (Edinburgh H.M.S.O. 1976) pp. 45-49;_ and J. Fines *Educational Objectives for the Study of History* Historical Association Pamphlet, TH35, (London 197 I.)