

# **The future of the humanities in primary schools – reflections in troubled times**

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## **Abstract**

This article reflects on the implications for practitioners, researchers and policy makers of the future of the humanities in primary schools, in the light of the challenges facing future generations. There is wide divergence in the four jurisdictions of the UK. The humanities are perceived as important, in principle, though curriculum frameworks differ. However, the status of the humanities is often uncertain, in practice, given the current emphasis on outcomes in literacy and numeracy. There is a lack of robust research on how and by whom the humanities are taught. The more theoretical articles suggest that the humanities, broadly conceived, are an essential aspect of young children's education, to enable a deeper understanding of human culture and identity and develop the qualities and values needed in a diverse world. Curricular breadth is needed and that a focus on propositional knowledge is limiting. While this has implications for the whole curriculum, History, Geography and Religious Education have key roles in meeting these aims and in engaging and motivating young children. A stronger policy steer to ensure that schools give more priority to humanities education, with greater investment in professional development in Initial Teacher Education and beyond.

**Key words:** primary humanities, human culture, diversity, values, curriculum breadth

## **Introduction**

This article contains our reflections, as the co-editors, on the issues raised in the preceding articles in the light of our initial concerns set out in the Editorial. Such reflections are inevitably influenced by our own position as academics with an interest in the humanities working in an English context, mostly in Higher Education. However, we suspect that many of the issues raised are relevant to other countries and jurisdictions outside the UK and would welcome further discussion of the extent to which this is so. We try not to be too definite or parochial, but believe that there are strong philosophical and practical grounds for a much more robust and nuanced discussion of the humanities in primary schools than has happened in recent years. We hope that these articles offer a good basis for such a discussion.

In writing for an international audience of practitioners and academics - some with an interest in specific subjects, some concerned with primary education more broadly, including groups such as school governors and parents/carers, professional associations and policy makers - we try to make a case which is pertinent across national, cultural and subject boundaries. Our argument is that most impartial observers would recognise that humanities education, however organised within the taught curriculum, should have a much stronger profile in primary schools. While our reflections are intended to be balanced, we make no bones about our passionate belief that the primary humanities are now even more important in the world we live in, and which future generations will inherit, than ever before.

The approach adopted is to outline, first, themes which emerge from the articles, including some areas not mentioned or discussed in depth, followed by a section highlighting key debates, dilemmas and challenges. A consideration of why humanities education in primary schools is so important is followed by one of how the primary humanities can best be conceptualised and taught to contribute to young children's education in a world characterised by diversity and change. Possible implications for the curriculum, pedagogy, teacher education, research and policy are then outlined.

## **Common themes**

Part 1 of this issue highlights the variation in how the humanities are conceptualised and approached in the four jurisdictions of the United Kingdom. While the curriculum in primary schools in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales is based on broad areas of learning, though within these subjects are identifiable, the National Curriculum in England is organised by subject. This divergence should make one wary of seeing the situation – in this and in many other respects - in England as representing the whole of the United Kingdom.

A second, linked, theme is the extent to which how the humanities is conceptualised reflects national culture and tradition. For instance, Jones and Whitehouse highlight how the curriculum in Wales (*Curriculum Cymreig*) seeks to emphasise Welshness and Robertson and her co-authors how Curriculum for Excellence has a distinctively Scottish feel. Greenwood and his co-authors show how the curriculum in Northern Ireland reflects the traditions of different sections of the community there. This is most obvious in relation to Religious Education and to how history is understood and interpreted. Similarities are evident in other jurisdictions. In Scotland, the term Religious Education refers exclusively to Roman Catholic Education contexts, while Religious and Moral Education, which refers to non-denominational contexts, 'recognises and addresses diversity of belief in Scotland and so considers non-religious perspectives and belief groups alongside religions.' (Robertson et al., this issue <insert page ref>) In England, the position of Religious Education as not part of the National Curriculum but with a locally-agreed syllabus, as in Wales, and compulsory, except where parents apply for their child to be withdrawn, reflects a historic compromise. Faith-based schools continue within the maintained system in all four jurisdictions of the UK. These considerations, and the question of 'whose history should children be studying?', provide a reminder that the humanities often deal with controversial issues and that no curriculum or pedagogy can avoid reflecting, in some way, assumptions and beliefs based on culture and tradition - even where thought or claimed to be neutral or value-free.

A third theme, in all four jurisdictions, is that of frequent change to the primary curriculum. While this might be seen as demonstrating politicians' wish to raise standards, or to impose their own view, the four articles in Part 1 suggest that the result for headteachers and teachers has often been one of confusion and 'initiative fatigue.' As one headteacher whom Barnes and Scoffham interviewed said, *'I'm not asking staff to assess in the foundation subjects... I'm reluctant to invest anything into the (foundation) curriculum at the moment because there are so many changes...'*

A fourth theme relates to the importance ascribed to the primary humanities in practice. The articles indicate that, however conceptualised, the humanities are seen to matter, at least in theory, in policy documentation. But Barnes and Scoffham write of the primary humanities 'struggling to survive' in England. They cite the view of the headteachers of the scant emphasis given in practice to History and Geography, not least because of the demands of inspection. The articles from the other three jurisdictions suggest that there are strong pressures on headteachers and teachers which result in a loss of curriculum breadth and balance. For instance, the observation that, in Scotland, there is a difficulty with the 'perception of the value of studying social studies which begins in the primary sector and persists into the secondary sector' (Robertson et al., this issue <insert page ref>) is indicative of the relatively low status of those elements of the curriculum not associated with literacy and numeracy skills and easily measurable.

Some of the articles in Part 1 address the differing challenges and how these are addressed in the Early Years and for older children in primary schools. For instance, in Wales, the Foundation Phase (3-7 years) emphasis on play-based and active learning is distinguished from Key Stage Two (7-11) in which subjects are more clearly delineated. While topic-based learning and teaching is advocated in policy documents in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, it is not clear the extent to which this actually takes place and with what success, in the absence of robust inspection of the humanities. The question of whether the humanities are, or should be, taught by specialists or generalists at the older end of the primary school is not considered in detail, probably since these areas have a relatively low status and it is assumed that History and Geography, at least, are taught by the classroom teacher.

The evidence required to make secure judgements on points such as the time allocated to the humanities, who teaches them (especially Religious Education) and the appropriateness of the qualification and knowledge of those doing so is lacking, not just in these articles but more generally. As Catling indicates, the inspection evidence on the humanities, either as separate subjects in England or as areas of learning elsewhere, does not answer these questions. The implication of Part 1 is that schools focus their time and energy very strongly on the areas which are tested and inspected, especially towards the older end of the primary school. The humanities face very strong competing pressures for time, resources and professional development. As one head teacher whom Barnes and Scoffham interviewed said, '*we are not judged on the humanities.*' In such a context, it is unsurprising that there is little detailed discussion of progression or assessment in the humanities; and that, even where teachers are enthusiasts, what is taught may be somewhat fragmented and incoherent.

In summary, there appears to be a wide variation in policy and practice across the four jurisdictions. There is a lack of robust research on how the primary humanities are taught and on models of what constitutes good practice, though no one model is likely to be universally appropriate. The articles in Part 1 do nothing to allay our concern that the humanities are marginalised in practice and that the standards agenda and accountability mechanisms too often wag the curriculum dog.

## Debates, dilemmas and challenges

This section highlights some key debates, dilemmas and challenges for the humanities, drawing on insights from both Parts. The two most fundamental questions raised are the aims and purposes of teaching the humanities to young children and how these can best be met in age-appropriate ways in the current climate. These are addressed in later sections.

Swift outlines six challenges, related to:

- the role of personal experience;
- the structure of knowledge;
- differentiating ‘knowing how’ from ‘knowing that’ in helping to empower young children;
- relevance;
- the value of ‘subjects’ in developing pupils’ understanding of what it is to be human;
- the different status of subjects.

In a later section, we shall argue that personal experience is central to how young children, especially, learn best and to the primary humanities, when well-taught; and that making the work of the humanities seem relevant in helping children towards a greater understanding of themselves and other people in relation to concepts such as time, space and belief is not easy, but essential. This section reflects on Swift’s other challenges.

One key debate in terms of curriculum organisation relates to whether the written curriculum should be organised in terms of discrete subjects or broader ‘areas of learning’ - with England adopting the former, the other three jurisdictions the latter. Eade emphasises that the humanities can be conceptualised in several different ways; and suggests that doing so as discrete subjects is problematic, with young children. However, structuring the curriculum on broad areas of learning may also present difficulties, especially in losing the distinctive features of different disciplines. We highlight the Cambridge Primary Review’s argument (Alexander, 2010) that a dichotomy between Curriculum 1 and 2 –the basics’ and ‘the rest’ - is a false one; and the warning in the 1985 White Paper ‘Better schools’ (DES, 1985), that

the mistaken belief, once widely held, that a concentration on basic skills is by itself enough to improve achievement in literacy and numeracy has left its mark; many children are still given too little opportunity for work in practical, scientific and aesthetic areas of the curriculum which increases not only their understanding in these areas but also their literacy and numeracy ... Over-concentration on the practice of the basic skills in literacy and numeracy unrelated to a context in which they are needed means that those skills are insufficiently extended and applied. (cited in Alexander, 2010, p 243)

Moreover, we draw attention to the Cambridge Primary Review’s (Alexander, 2010, pp 245-251) analysis of the muddled discourse of the primary curriculum, notably in relation to terms such as subjects, knowledge and skills. We suggest that to talk of disciplines, rather than subjects, can help to highlight the procedural and conceptual knowledge involved, and avoid the tendency to think that young children need only

learn a limited range of propositional knowledge. Learning procedural knowledge, and applying skills in practice, notably though fieldwork, is often very motivating for young children. Rather than seeing young children as not yet ready to explore concepts associated with the humanities and issues of identity and values, we affirm that these are essential to the education of the whole child, a point emphasised by Bruner more than fifty years ago (Bruner, 1960).

Another key question is that of who makes decisions about the primary curriculum and pedagogy, and at what level. While there is inevitably a tension between whether this should happen centrally or locally, we believe that the current state of humanities education in primary schools adds to the case that, while government has a place in setting out aims and a broad framework for the curriculum, decisions about the detail of the curriculum and how children are taught must be made at school, and teacher, level.

Priorities in the curriculum and pedagogy must be determined by a coherent set of aims. We believe that the humanities, and the arts, are central to how children come to be educated and to develop as well-rounded people. To justify this claim, the next two sections consider why young children should study the humanities; and then what the humanities are, and how they should be conceptualised to align best with how young children learn.

### **The case for the humanities in primary schools**

The title of this article includes the words ‘troubled times’. The editorial suggested, and the articles tend to confirm, that these are ‘troubled times’ for the primary humanities. However, these are troubled times more generally. In political terms, the decision in the referendum in June 2016 that the United Kingdom should leave the European Union and in November the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States, both unexpected, seem to indicate a significant level of disaffection with the results of globalisation for a large, usually dispossessed, element of the population. They can be read as a reaction against politicians’ failure to recognise and respond to the sense of disillusionment and alienation of many people. In many countries, governments are struggling to deal with some children being radicalised and attracted to terrorism, with politicians often seeing schools as a key site where possible indicators of young people being radicalised can be identified and steps taken to avoid this. More broadly, and even more seriously, there is the looming threat to the planet posed by climate change, environmental degradation, shortage of water and war.

One significant change in children’s lives in recent years is the widespread availability of electronic media and the internet. As a result, most children from a young age are likely to witness troubling, often distressing, events through the media and may require sensitive support and teaching to help them to make sense of these. A second is the huge range of information now easily available. Much of this is of questionable quality or veracity – in what has come recently to be referred to pejoratively as the post-truth era. There are strong pressures, not least from the media, for children from a young age to be, and to see themselves as, consumers. Such trends highlight the need for children to develop the skills, habits of mind and dispositions related to critical thinking (see Bailin et al., 1999 for an academic discussion, Fisher, 2013 for a more practical one). While critical thinking has usually

been associated mainly with older students, the ability to interpret and critique evidence is vital for younger children not only to develop the habits involved over a long period but because younger children may often be more trusting and less critical than older students.

We are not convinced that the case for the primary humanities should be based on instrumentalism - that they are useful - though many of the qualities which the humanities help to develop are essential for the world of work (see CBI, 2012). We suggest a broader view based on a belief that learning through, and about, the humanities helps develop the qualities and values associated with acting as an educated and empowered person in the context of diversity and change; and that this can start from a young age.

Rowley et al. (2007) suggest that stereotypes are becoming embedded by the age of 9 or 10. As such, attempts to promote thoughtful attitudes towards those who are different and to challenge stereotypes are particularly important by this age. The interlinked nature of emotion and cognition suggests that this requires not only factual information but a range of experiences to help children understand the world from perspectives other than their own. For stereotypes to be challenged, children must understand both similarities and differences, but this is easier, and more effective, if they are encouraged to look for similarities first and then to explore variety and diversity, rather than 'othering' what is not similar. Such work, helping children to become more empathetic, has the potential to challenge sexist, racist and homophobic beliefs and behaviours. This should make it less likely that children, in the long term, will come to feel excluded and become involved in anti-social behaviour. Moreover, such an approach has the potential to contribute to the implementation of policies to avoid young people becoming radicalised, though it would be hard to establish this with any degree of confidence.

We are concerned at the number of children who feel disaffected with a schooling system which all too often labels them in terms of success and failure from an early age. Studying History, Geography and Religious Education, when well taught, has the potential to engage and motivate all children, including many who find school learning difficult or lacking in interest. In part, this is because of the emphasis on people and places, which is inherently interesting, in part because of the types of pedagogy involved encouraging active learning, for instance through the use of fieldwork and story and an emphasis on ways of thinking and doing. Therefore, the humanities have a crucial role in a genuinely inclusive curriculum.

We believe, following Nussbaum (2010), that there is a strong argument, that the humanities, and the knowledge and qualities associated with these disciplines, provide a foundation for how children become active and engaged citizens in a democratic society. This leads us to suggest that there is a pressing need for humanities education in an increasingly complex world; and to argue the case for humanities on the grounds of the development of the 'whole child', particularly in children:

- understanding concepts related to human culture such as time, space, and belief in how human beings can understand themselves and their relationship with the natural world, places and with each other;
- developing skills and habits associated with critical thinking such as assessing and interpreting information;

- exploring their own identities, values and beliefs and enabling them to be interested in those of other peoples;
- learning to understand, and empathise, with people who are different, as well as those who are similar, challenging stereotypes and becoming more humane and compassionate individuals.

The humanities can help children to develop a wide range of types of knowledge and skills. Although these may be regarded as ‘powerful’ knowledge – and in one sense they are – we hold somewhat conflicting views about this term, as used by Young (2008). This may be inappropriate for young children, if it is used simply to mean subject knowledge, especially mainly propositional knowledge. However, we believe that the humanities have the potential to become, in Swift’s words, ‘powerful knowledges, sense-making knowledges - empowering for all who have the opportunity to engage with them, rather than simply being recalled, or imposed on others, as the knowledges of the powerful.’ (Swift, this issue <insert page ref>) Such a rationale resonates with Cox’s argument for children to become empowered agents and participants in their learning, both in subjects associated with the humanities and more broadly.

Although the humanities are under considerable pressure in all jurisdictions, especially given the current emphasis on literacy and numeracy, we believe that primary schools must be required, encouraged and supported, to teach a broad and balanced curriculum well. We shall return to what this might entail, but first address the question of what the humanities are in relation to primary aged children.

### **What are the primary humanities?**

In proposing this issue of *Education 3-13*, we specified that the primary humanities should be seen mainly as History, Geography and RE, possibly with other subject areas such as citizenship. Discussion with authors and reviewers suggested that ours was too narrow an interpretation, with some asking why a modern foreign (or native) language, literature, music, or drama were not included. On reflection, we agree, though paradoxically some boundaries, however artificial, are necessary in order to explore the work of the humanities – and, indeed, learning a foreign language might be linked with English in the broader category of ‘language’, just as drama and music might be included as part of ‘the arts’.

The articles in Part I describe how the humanities are conceptualised and placed in the primary curriculum in the different jurisdictions of the UK, reflecting to some extent national culture and traditions – and outline the challenges and opportunities these present. Those in Part II suggest various different ways in which the primary humanities might be conceptualised. Eade presents a case for seeing the humanities less in terms of subject knowledge and more in terms of outcomes which are not readily or easily measurable, such as procedural knowledge and qualities. Cox argues that values are implicit in how children are taught and that children’s agency, participation and empowerment are essential aspects of teaching the humanities and active citizenship. Swift affirms the importance of interdisciplinary learning and outlines some of the challenges presented. We believe that this discussion should prompt a broader debate about the aims of primary education, the place of the humanities, and the implications for curriculum and pedagogy.

One clear message relates to the importance of the learning environment and how any topic or subject is studied. EAUDE's emphasis on the different types of knowledge involved – and on avoiding too strong a focus on propositional knowledge – indicates the importance of children from a young age learning different types of procedural knowledge. This, when seen in conjunction with COX's examination of how values are learned, and her argument that knowledge and pedagogy are never value-free, emphasises how the learning environment and relationships help to shape values and beliefs. If children, from a young age, are to learn to work in different ways, for instance as historians and geographers, scientists or philosophers, and more broadly as enquirers and interpreters of evidence, they must be initiated into what LAVE and WENGER (1991) call communities of practice, where they learn to do so, as 'guided participants'. In the case of the humanities, this involves learning to understand and interpret human culture, not just to memorise propositional knowledge. Procedural knowledge, for instance in interpreting evidence in the field, is a vital part of the toolkit of historians and geographers and encourages children to be, and become, active and engaged learners.

Humanities education emphasises the study of human culture, and cultures, to help children understand how people live and interact with the world around them. In EAGLETON'S (2000, p 131) words, 'culture is not only what we live by. It is, also, in great measure, what we live for. Affection, relationship, memory, kinship, place, community, emotional fulfilment, intellectual enjoyment, a sense of ultimate meaning.' We suggest that this captures the importance and variety of culture in a more nuanced way than MATTHEW ARNOLD'S widely used definition as the 'the best which has been thought and said', often used to argue for a subject-based curriculum. However, as GALTON et al. (1999, p 196) point out, ARNOLD went on to explain that the subject matter is a means to an end, the end being to create thinking individuals by developing all parts of society and all parts of our humanity. Such considerations suggest that humanities education for young children should be seen as part of a broad curriculum offer, more like a 'liberal arts' curriculum than one which encourages children to specialise at an early age in particular subject areas.

Understanding and interpreting culture is a necessary part of the development of the whole child and this cannot be, and should not be seen as, value-free. SMALL'S argument (2013) that the humanities inherently have a subjective element reminds one that the humanities, like the arts, encourage and enable children to respond in different ways and learn types of knowledge which are different, in several respects, from those learned through studying mathematics and science.

Part I highlights many challenges facing the primary humanities, with similarities to the pressures on 'the arts.' Music and art are widely seen to encourage emotional responses and nurture children's imagination, and as such are associated with cultural and spiritual development. History, Geography, and RE, well taught, can act in similar ways, offering particularly fertile opportunities to explore culture and identity and to engage and motivate young children. For instance, they help children to empathise with those who are different in time, place and belief, or to imagine what it is like to be other than who they are and so to understand more about their own, their family's and their community's identity.

We do not believe that setting sharp boundaries between subjects is always helpful, as this may discourage interdisciplinary and cross-curricular thinking. We suggest



that broad areas of learning, as adopted in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, may be more appropriate for young children. We recognise the importance of children having a secure foundation of disciplinary knowledge and the challenges that this implies for many primary teachers. Cross-curricular teaching through topics is one answer but too often the distinctive historical, geographical and religious knowledge becomes so diluted as to be virtually non-existent. It is therefore worth considering the distinctive contributions of History, Geography and RE, while arguing that children must be encouraged to interpret their experiences not only through these lenses, but also through others - such as mathematics, science and art - and to learn to select those which are most appropriate.

History as a discipline is essential for children to understand how they fit into the larger national and international narratives over time. Without a sense of history, contemporary events are unintelligible. Children need to understand, at an age-appropriate level, concepts such as change, continuity and causation and the passage of time, but the question of 'whose history?' is increasingly salient in a world of greater diversity. While content is necessary, understanding competing perspectives and narratives is central to a nuanced view of history; and we believe that children can be helped to do this from a young age.

Similar considerations apply to Geography in relation to both place and people. Concepts such as place and space, scale, environment, climate and migration help to make sense of many of the challenges apparent in troubled times, as informed global citizens. An emphasis on memorising propositional knowledge, rather than on comparison and interpretation of different views, provides too fragile a basis for this.

Understanding the role of religious faith is increasingly necessary in troubled times where faith is a major source of identity for many people world-wide and often a source of conflict, though many children may have only a rudimentary knowledge of religion and of religions. Religious Education is the subject area least open to generalisation across different jurisdictions and schools. In some systems, it may not be seen as part of the school's work. In some schools, teaching RE may not be part of the classroom teacher's role. We remain unclear about who actually teaches RE, with, we suspect, this being the subject area most likely to be taught by those who are not qualified teachers, separately from the rest of the curriculum. It seems likely that in many faith-based schools there is a strong residual emphasis on the confessional aspect of RE and that most schools are cautious about addressing the more sensitive, controversial aspects, except where teachers have a secure knowledge of RE. Given the controversial nature of religion, not least where there has been a tradition of religious conflict and identity being based strongly on adherence to a particular faith community, RE is arguably the area which most requires teachers to have a significant level of accurate and nuanced knowledge.

We have considerable sympathy, in an English context, with Barnes and Scoffham's suggestion that the humanities have a strong contribution to make to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC), as discussed by the RSA (2015) for instance. However, we are not optimistic about the likelihood that this will result in a higher profile for these aspects of children's development, given that what SMSC involves, and how provision can best be made, remains contested; and that it rarely seems significant in informing inspectors' judgements.

## **The way ahead – possible implications for the curriculum, pedagogy, teacher education, research and policy**

We recognise the danger of over generalising, without being sure to what extent our views are supported by robust inspection or other evidence about how the humanities are actually taught. To encourage a wider debate within and beyond the profession about humanities education with young children, this section offers reflections on possible ways forward.

The articles in Part 1 confirm that the position of the humanities and how they are conceptualised within the primary curriculum in the four jurisdictions of the United Kingdom varies considerably. We are troubled about the status of the primary humanities in terms of the time allocated to them in practice and the level of qualification and expertise of those who teach them. In most schools, the humanities seem to be marginalised, in a climate of performativity with the current emphasis on outcomes in those aspects of literacy and numeracy which are tested. The articles in Part 2 highlight that the humanities can be conceptualised, and teaching organised, in different ways; and that the humanities provide opportunities for children to learn different types of knowledge, in ways that are engaging and motivating, from those emphasised in a skills-based approach to literacy and numeracy.

We believe that the requirement in legislation in most countries for curricular breadth and balance is correct and that this means that the current prioritisation of core subjects – and only the more measurable aspects of these – should be questioned. The primary curriculum needs to be rebalanced to provide more emphasis on the human and subjective dimensions of learning. Education is not just about what can be tested. A greater recognition is needed that, especially for young children, skills in literacy and numeracy must be linked to content which is engaging and motivating; and that this content should often be humanities-based. Moreover, the humanities help children to learn, and refine, different types of knowledge and skills related to enquiry, interpretation, reasoning and formulating an argument. While such opportunities are not limited to History, Geography and RE, these disciplines offer fertile opportunities to explore human culture and personal and collective identity. Without such opportunities, children will not be fully equipped with what is necessary to cope confidently and thoughtfully with change now and in the future.

This discussion illustrates the importance of pedagogy, particularly teachers' ability to use a wide range of pedagogies to engage and motivate children. We recognise that concerns about the quality of teaching of History, Geography and RE to young children have been evident for many decades. The range of teacher knowledge required is a major challenge for classroom teachers, especially at the older end of the primary school. We are somewhat sceptical of the view that the humanities are best taught by subject specialists, recognising that the generalist's role offers opportunities for teachers to discover and draw on children's existing funds of knowledge and to work in cross-curricular, interdisciplinary ways, as exemplified, for instance, by the article on Scotland.

We are reluctant to make specific, definite recommendations about pedagogy, or curriculum organisation, as these should be a matter of professional judgement. However, the evidence suggests that procedural and conceptual knowledge, and

critical thinking, are best learned through children's active participation and questioning, and interpretation, of different types of evidence; and that the application of skills in different contexts tends to lead to more secure conceptual development. The challenges of global citizenship (see Bourn et al., 2016) should lead to more emphasis on critical thinking, so that children can interpret what they see and read, and on qualities such as compassion, empathy and thoughtfulness. Children from a young age should be helped to engage with questions that may be controversial and uncomfortable – and their teachers must feel able, and equipped, to enable this in a safe space. While Philosophy for Children offers one approach to enable this, pedagogies which encourage and enable children to learn in such ways are needed across the curriculum.

We are concerned that the focus on literacy and numeracy in the last twenty years or so (and many teachers' consequent lack of experience in teaching the humanities in any depth) has resulted in a loss of teacher expertise, especially in terms of conceptual and procedural knowledge, and the confidence which this brings. We are particularly worried about this in a generation of primary teachers who have been encouraged to focus on literacy and numeracy skills, rather than the interdisciplinary nature of young children's learning and cross-curricular links.

We believe that decisions about pedagogy must not be left solely to individual teachers, given the loss of collective expertise in recent years. A significant investment in professional development in Initial Teacher Education and beyond is needed if primary classroom teachers are to acquire the necessary expertise to teach the full range of the curriculum. Given the constraints of time in Initial Teacher Education, addressing this in any depth is likely to prove problematic. Therefore, the main focus, at least in the short term, must be on continuing professional development. The subject associations for History, Geography and Religious Education, and the associations concerned with primary education, could play a valuable role, notably in terms of identifying the conceptual structure of the disciplines, in ways that are accessible to practitioners, and in providing sustained opportunities for continuing professional development. However, this must not be only on the basis of individual subjects, even though subject associations will wish, understandably, to advocate for their subject. Rather, teacher education must take account of how young children learn and of the pressures faced by classroom teachers who not only have to fit a quart into a pint pot but to do so under considerable pressure to narrow the curriculum.

The introduction - or reintroduction - of inspections of the specific humanities-based subjects (or disciplines or areas of learning) would provide invaluable evidence about the current state of how, and how well, these are taught. This could, and should, provide the basis for informed professional discussion about the balance of the curriculum, as taught. Moreover, there is a strong case for more funding of research into humanities education in primary schools, notably in respect of successful models of curriculum organisation and pedagogy, given the severe constraints on time which headteachers and teachers feel.

While much of the analysis in this issue, and this article, paints a somewhat gloomy picture about the current situation, the enthusiasm and commitment of many headteachers and teachers to ensure that young children encounter a rich and broad

range of learning opportunities, including the humanities and the arts, provides a source of hope. Yet, this seems to be in spite of, rather than as a result of, policy.

We believe that a considerable change in thinking about education policy is needed, rethinking the aims of primary education and how humanities education can contribute to that. While the nature of such change will rightly vary between systems and countries - and there may be much to learn from an international perspective on how different systems, jurisdictions and cultures view, and teach, the humanities - we caution against the tendency to 'cherry-pick' any particular approach from those systems deemed as successful on the basis of test scores. Any change should reflect national priorities, traditions and cultures, and the aims which underpin and flow from these, while recognising the changing context of children's lives.

## Conclusion

A clearer policy steer is needed to encourage headteachers and teachers to ensure a stronger emphasis on the humanities, however conceptualised or organised within the primary school timetable. To some extent, this is a matter for future revisions of the written curriculum, though further immediate changes are unlikely to be welcome. But there is room for primary headteachers and teachers to take the initiative to ensure that they provide for their children a broad and balanced curriculum. More engagement with professional associations, on the lines outlined above, would seem an essential precursor to such changes. In the short term, changes to the inspection frameworks to ensure that curricular breadth and balance has a more prominent place in how schools are judged might provide a simpler, quicker and more effective solution.

In troubled times, different ways of thinking are needed, without discarding the wisdom of traditions and experience. We believe that these articles provide a sound basis for a nuanced debate about the aims of primary education, with humanities education, and the arts, having a higher status and profile. Only in this way will there be a chance of equipping all children with what they need to be active and engaged citizens, able to cope confidently and compassionately with the many and varied challenges that lie ahead.

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