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THE research & **ED** GUIDE TO

THE CURRICULUM

AN EVIDENCE-INFORMED
GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

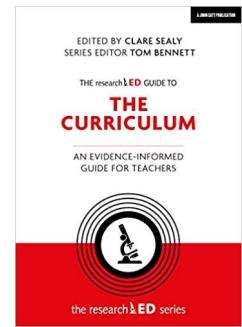


the research & **ED** series

Journal Club no. 9

Autumn Term 2020

Via Microsoft Teams
Presentation
(by Paula Lobo)



Back in the day... (Tom Bennett)

... teachers often taught 'a patchwork quilt of topics'

....teachers often 'threw darts' at an encyclopaedia; content wasn't really considered

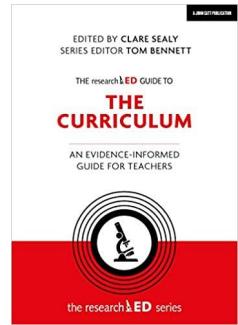
...reteaching happened a lot, because things had been forgotten after a few months

....curriculum content often didn't fit together

....teachers often didn't consider what to teach and what order to teach it in

...but now we are 'present at the birth of a new era in education design'; the curriculum is a 'prime engine of school improvement'.

Why think about curricula? (Clare Sealy)



- Every time we choose to include something, we are also choosing *not* to include other possibilities: the responsibility of choice is a big one
- We need to make careful and informed choices about curricula
- The teaching of 'generic skills' does not work; we can't expect children to know that they need to teach themselves some bits before others (because they need it to understand the later bits)
- By carefully identifying which knowledge is needed and then teaching that first, the power of the student to think critically and creatively is set free: subject matter is as hard or easy, boring or interesting, as prior encounter unlocks.

EXAMPLE: If we want Year 8 to understand the Wars of the Roses, they need to understand who 'barons' are in Year 7; otherwise they won't understand why the fifteenth century was so unstable



Substantive concepts

Powerful

As a group
might challenge
king

Can get
soldiers

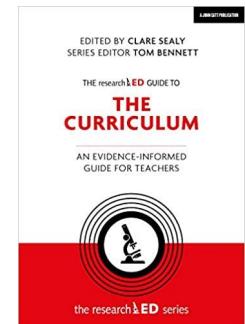
Barons

Land is
wealth
and power

Own land
– lots of it

Could
switch
allegiance

Owned
land on
both sides
of Channel



Powerful knowledge

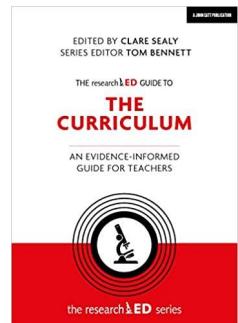
- Schools in a democracy should all be working towards access to 'powerful knowledge' for all pupils
- Powerful knowledge is the best knowledge we have in each subject, but 50% of pupils in this country are denied access to it
- Powerful knowledge is specialised and acquires its authority from the specialist communities of researchers in academic disciplines
- Powerful knowledge therefore relies on pupils having access to the specialist knowledge of teachers.
- Knowledge is not inert and it is not 'injected' or 'mechanically inserted' into pupils; pupils develop a *relationship* with knowledge and this is hard, slow, incremental work
- Learning new knowledge should therefore not just be about memorisation, it is a *step* to acquiring new knowledge.

EXAMPLE: Here is the ‘powerful knowledge’ that we, ideally, would like Year 7 historians to come away with by the end of the year.

By end of Year 7, what do we want for our ‘takeaways’? (assuming c.1000 to 1600)

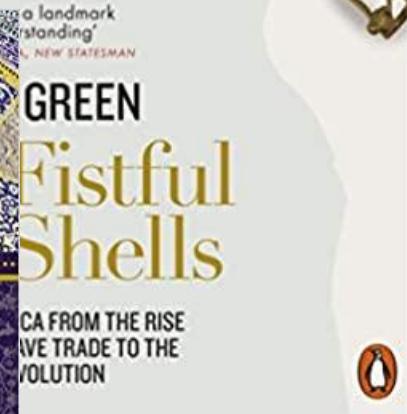
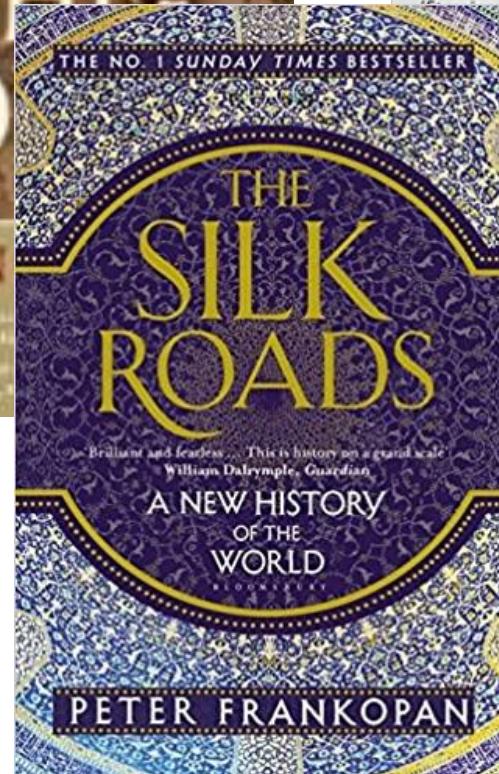
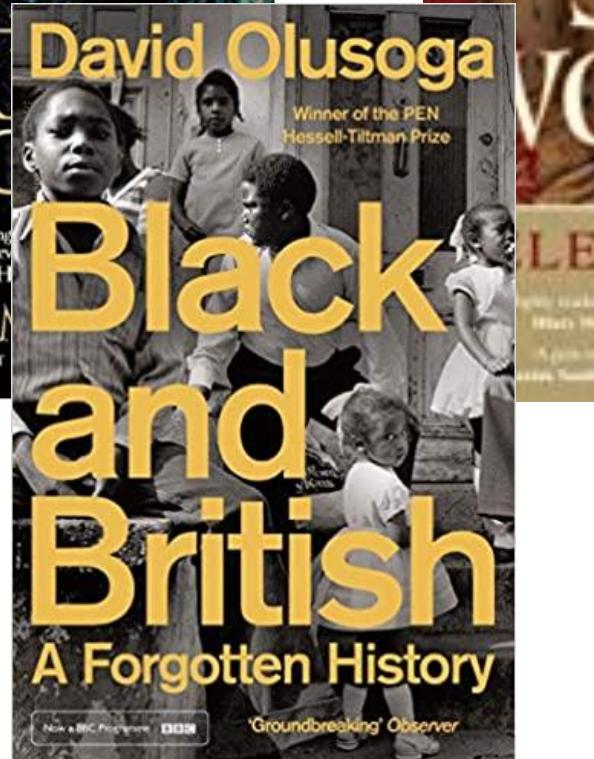
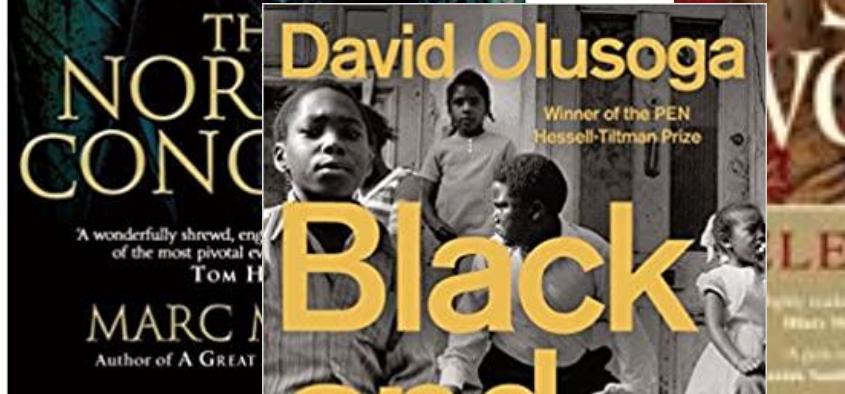
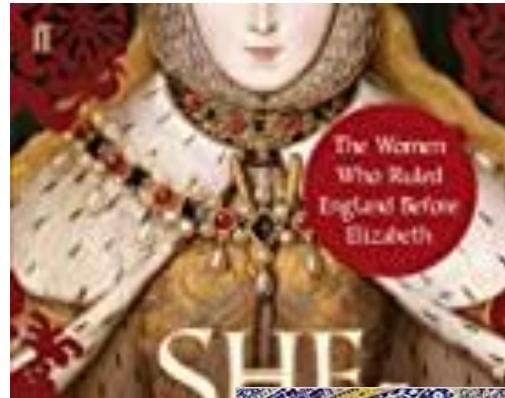
- better grasp of medieval Christendom – more joined up, more sense of period around idea of Christianity, operation of Christianity, localisation of Christianity, and how these change over time, so that Reformation doesn’t pop out of nowhere
- better grasp of medieval Islam – more joined up, more sense of period around idea of Islam, operation of Islam, localisation of Islam
- better sense of the interaction of Islam and Christianity across 1000 to 1600? (in ideas, in art, in politics, in trade)
- better understanding of diverse civilisations & cultures (building on KS2 ancient world), taking each seriously, varying the perspective, ensuring they are not addressed purely as adjuncts to studies of European empires
- better grasp of medieval Europe, from heresy and humanism, to towns and trade; instead of English exceptionalism the connectedness of England to her neighbours
- better grasp of medieval Europe situated in a much wider world – more joined up, more sense of period (trade, its changing centres of gravity across Asia; North Africa, comparable expanding empires)
- better foundations laid for LATER Y8 & 9 study of migration, diversity, the origins of racialisation & constructs of race, interplay with early empire and colonialism
- sense of the European geopolitics, better grasp of the power players, power brokers, operation of power in society, changing patterns over time through secure chronological framing and narrative moorings
- more diversity (ethnic, cultural, social, gender) within English history & in history of British Isles, but *not* in a tokenistic way
- a clear arc of narrative across England’s pre 1600 political stories within all this, supplying:
 - a framework that acts as a provisional factual scaffold for continuous modification
 - enough security in the national stories to also disrupt them with divergent local stories
- responsiveness (both underlying and visible in EQs) to changing historical scholarship

Communities of specialists

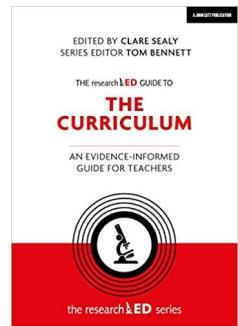


- Curriculum subjects are ‘communities of specialists’
- A knowledge-led curriculum should treat school subjects as communities of teachers and researchers; pupils should be ‘neophyte’ members of these communities
- Learning a subject successfully is not unlike joining a community as a beginner and gradually developing new relationships and acquiring new knowledge
- It means teachers need to have not only a reliable store of subject knowledge, but an understanding of their role as members of a virtual community of specialists that guarantees the knowledge they have
- If a school lacks the funds to employ qualified specialist teachers, it will be unable to claim to have a knowledge-based curriculum
- Teachers are ‘curriculum makers’; they have to ‘make’ the curriculum with their students: the way in which teachers relate to pupils and the tasks they set may be as important as what is in the curriculum.

EXAMPLE: Here are some of the texts that I'm reading this year; it's vital that academic scholarship should inform my teaching.

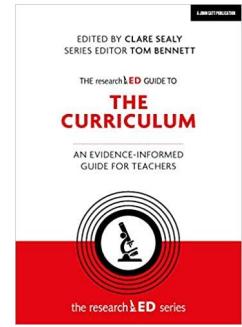


Understanding school subjects



- It is vital that school leaders seek to understand the nature of the academic disciplines / school subjects. This knowledge should inform discussions and decisions around both curriculum and pedagogy within schools
- A rigorous school curriculum model lies at the heart of democracy and a free society
- Subject disciplines make different types of meaning, and they make it in different ways
- We need to consider: what is the most important knowledge for citizens? Which knowledge will bring the most meaning?
- Continual curricula conversations – including conversations around choice and the inclusion of texts from other cultures – is vital and must be continued as part of a democratic society

Disciplinary and substantive knowledge



- The job of schools is to teach children about meaning.
- 'Students are entitled to learn wonderful **substantive knowledge** because it is their inheritance; substantive knowledge allows children to find meaning in the world
- The best way to guard knowledge and prevent it being corrupted is to share it, to teach it, to put it into the curriculum
- The creation of any curriculum is an exercise of power, which is why we need to teach about **disciplinary knowledge**; students trained in this knowledge will be able to critically evaluate the inclusion of knowledge in the curriculum

EXAMPLE: Here are some of the questions that the OFSTED History lead will be asking about disciplinary and substantive knowledge:

Summing up



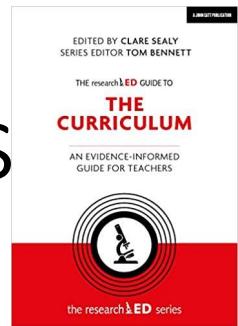
Inspectors will focus on the *what* of your history curriculum:

- What knowledge you intend students to learn
- The scope and breadth of the curriculum
- The components and how effectively they are sequenced

And:

- How teaching and assessment relates to curriculum intent
- The process of curriculum debate and renewal

Questions to ask school subjects



- What is the quest of this discipline?
- How many subjects actually is it?
- What kinds of things carry meaning in the discipline?
- How is new knowledge generated in the discipline's field of production?
- How is the knowledge linked in the discipline?
- What does it mean to practise this subject in a scholarly way in the classroom?
- How does the recontextualised school subject differ from the discipline and what purposes do these differences serve?
- What can and can't/shouldn't the subject do?