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### 'It's not just fun, it works!' Developing children's historical thinking through drama

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# 'It's not just fun, it works!'<sup>1</sup>

## Developing children's historical thinking through drama

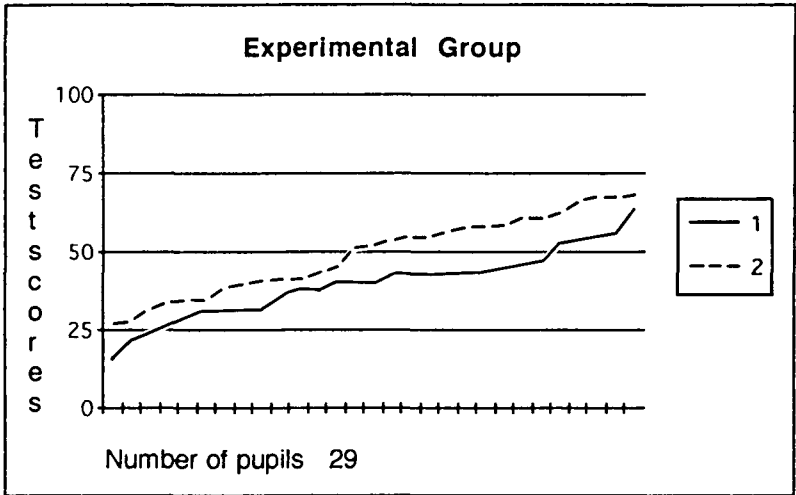
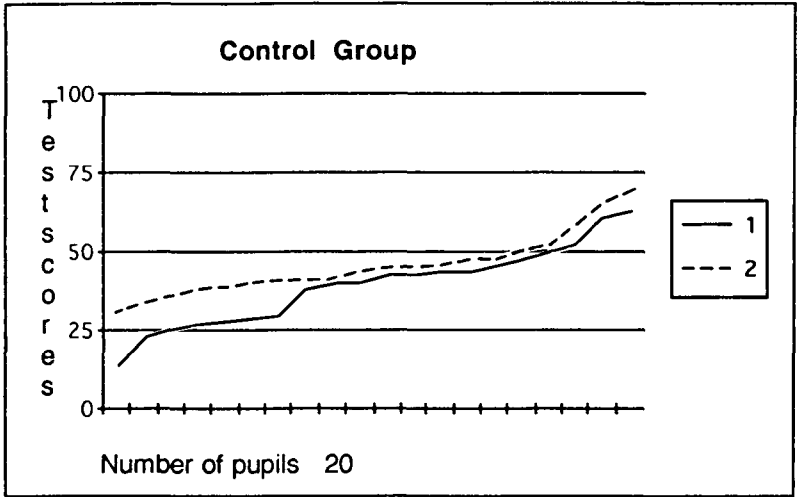
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The proposition for our research was that teaching history through drama is a means of developing children's historical thinking to a significant degree. In a 12-week project in a Cambridge City primary school, we set out to demonstrate that teaching history through drama is an effective means of developing children's historical thinking and of delivering the National Curriculum Attainment Targets in history at Key Stage 2. When at the end of our 12 weeks we analysed our research data, we came up with some exciting and surprising findings: whilst we found that drama successfully developed the historical understanding of a broad band of middle-range ability children beyond that of their peers in another class, the methods used were only marginally effective for the most able in the class and may not have helped the least able at all.

At the beginning and end of the research period we tested two parallel Year 5 classes who were spending the autumn term of 1992 studying Core Study Unit (CSU) 6: Explorations and Encounters 1450–1550 (HMSO, 1991: 29).<sup>2</sup> For most of the term the two classes were engaged in broadly similar learning strategies based on a mixture of whole-class teaching, group work and individualized learning. But one class was also taught by Lesley and Paul (the researchers) for six Friday afternoons in the school hall using a number of drama learning strategies to broaden and deepen the children's historical understanding of the Aztecs and their encounters with Europeans in the 'new world'. This class, which we call the *experimental* group, performed slightly less well than the *control* group (the group that did no drama) on the pre-test (see Figure 1). But the results of the

Graph showing test scores for both tests in ascending order



1 PRE-TEST  
2 POST-TEST

Figure 1. Comparative test scores of groups

post-test showed that a proportion of the experimental group had begun to out-perform their peers in the control group in a statistically significant way.<sup>3</sup>

### THE TEST<sup>4</sup>

The test focused on the three Attainment Targets (ATs) of National Curriculum history and was divided into two parts: the first part addressed AT1<sup>5</sup> (40%), and the second part AT2 and AT3<sup>6</sup> (60%). The same test was given twice to both classes: the pre-test was given the week before the history through drama began; the post-test was administered nearly two weeks after the completion of the drama sessions.<sup>7</sup> The researchers and the class teacher of the experimental group devised a criterion-referenced five-level mark scheme for each of the ten questions set; this mark scheme was slightly adjusted in the light of pupil responses to the pre-test (Macintosh, 1979: 23), but no further adjustments were made for the post-test. We then calculated the difference between each child's pre-test and post-test score (see Appendix 2).

We were heartened to note that the average increase in test scores for the experimental group (9.86%) was higher than for the control group (6.35%) when the groups were compared as a whole, but we were advised that this difference might not be strongly statistically significant. We therefore decided to look more closely at the broad bands of ability (as defined by the pre-test) within the groups to see if anything special was happening to particular groups of children within the cohort. The results of this investigation are presented in Table 1.

An examination of Table 1 suggested to us that something rather exciting had been happening for the children in the middle range of ability in the experimental group. Could it be that teaching history through drama was reaching that section of the class so often left uninspired by less active approaches to classroom management and organization?<sup>8</sup>

Table 1. Analysis of the average increase in test scores (pre-test to post-test) from the lower, middle and upper ranges of ability (as identified in the pre-test)

<i>Ability range</i>	<i>Control group</i>	<i>Experimental group</i>
<b>Lower range</b> 14%–39%	8 pupils Average increase: +13.25%	12 pupils Average increase: +9.4%
<b>Middle range</b> 40%–49%	8 pupils Average increase: +2%	12 pupils Average increase: +12%
<b>Upper range</b> 50%–69%	4 pupils Average increase: +1.25%	5 pupils Average increase: +5.6%

It was at this point that we sought the assistance of a colleague in the maths department of Homerton College to help us probe the statistical significance of our test results. Rex Watson suggested that if 'ability' be taken as following a normal distribution pattern, it might be more appropriate to take a larger proportion in the middle band, and two smaller but equal portions in the lower and upper bands. He isolated the middle 60 per cent of the cohort (12 pupils from the control group and 18 from the experimental group) thereby narrowing the lower band to 20 per cent (4 in control group, and 6 in experimental group) whilst leaving the upper band as in Table 1 above. He then applied the one-tailed Mann-Whitney U-test to each group and found that improvements of the experimental children over the control children were statistically significant at the 5 per cent level for the middle 60 per cent; changes for the top and bottom 20 per cent were not statistically significant, and it was noted that in the lower ability range the control group actually out-performed the experimental group. Appendix 3 contains Rex Watson's statistical analysis of the data supplied in Appendix 2.

So something interesting and statistically significant did seem to have been going on for the 60 per cent of children in the middle range of ability as defined by the pre-test. The qualitative evidence of the difference between the pre-test and post-test had impressed the researchers when marking the post-test; some of this evidence is worth quoting here. The second half of the test<sup>9</sup> had focused on the Spanish conquest of Hispaniola: SOURCES A–F Questions 4 and 5. Some middle-band pupil responses to these questions are reproduced below.

Question 4 asked the children to study SOURCE C and explain whether the information in SOURCE C showed that what Columbus was saying in his letter (SOURCE B) was true. Here are two pupil responses from the middle band of the experimental group:

*Pupil A's pre-test response:*

'Most of it is true.'

*Pupil A's post-test response:*

'Not completely it shows that the Spanish have got better mining equipment or they have discovered new lands.'

*Pupil B's pre-test response:*

'Yes I do think it is true'

*Pupil B's post-test response:*

'Yes it does say that he is telling the truth, but the Spanish may of discovered more islands.'

Pupils A and B have responded in the post-test at Level 5 of the mark scheme, having only achieved Level 2 on the pre-test. Level 2 anticipated a 'no it doesn't' or 'yes it does' response without a reason; Level 5 demanded a response which

SOURCES FOR PAPER 2

**Profit and Loss**

When Columbus arrived in what came to be known as the New World, he hoped to find spices and gold. Only a small amount of gold was found in Hispaniola, but after Columbus brought sugar cane to the island in 1493, the Spanish settlers began to make a lot of money from the West Indies.



The people of Hispaniola meet Columbus (1493)

SOURCE A

**HISPANIOLA. A letter from Columbus.**

'Hispaniola is a wonder . . . the plains and meadows are both fertile and beautiful. They are most suitable for planting crops and for raising cattle of all kinds, and there are good sites for building towns and villages. In Hispaniola there are many spices and large mines of gold and other metals.'

SOURCE B

**MONEY GAINED BY THE KINGS AND QUEENS OF SPAIN FROM THE ISLANDS OF THE WEST INDIES**

Year	Royal income
1503	8,000 gold coins
1509	59,000 gold coins
1512	90,000 gold coins
1518	120,000 gold coins

SOURCE C



Woodcut showing a battle between Spaniards and Indians on Hispaniola in 1495

SOURCE D

'In this time, the greatest killing of people was carried out, whole villages being wiped out. The Indians saw that their kingdoms, lands and homes were being taken away. Each day they saw their people suffering through the cruel and inhuman treatment of the Spaniards – crushed to the earth by the horses, cut in pieces by swords, eaten and torn by dogs, many buried alive and suffering all kinds of torture.'

**Bartolomé de Las Casas in *The General and Natural History of the Indies* (1523)**

SOURCE E

' . . . the microbes and viruses that the Spanish introduced spread such diseases as measles, influenza, typhus, pneumonia, tuberculosis, diphtheria, and pleurisy, any one of which could bring death to the Taino population – and then in 1518, the even deadlier smallpox . . . they were the real killers of the Tainos and the Caribs.'

**From *The Conquest of Paradise* by Kirkpatrick Sale (1991)**

SOURCE F

included specific reasons why there might have been an increase in the supply of gold.<sup>10</sup>

Question 5 asked the children to 'Compare the picture of the battle between the Spanish and the Indians (SOURCE D) with the picture of the arrival of Columbus (SOURCE A). The children were then asked, 'Why do you think that the Spanish and the Indians appear friendly in SOURCE A but are fighting each other in SOURCE D?'

*Pupil C's pre-test response:*

'I think that the Indians think that they are visitors who are going to be friendly.'

*Pupil C's post-test response:*

'Because when Christopher Columbus went from Hispaniola he made some people stay. They wanted their treasure and the people who lived on Hispaniola stopped them and killed them. When Christopher Columbus heard he started battle with the people who lived on Hispaniola.'

*Pupil D's pre-test response:*

'In SOURCE A they are friendly because they are trying to make a good impression.'

*Pupil D's post-test response:*

'I think the Indians are friendly on the arrival of Columbus because they didn't know what he was like, and they are fighting because the Spanish are greedy.'

Pupils C and D successfully make a comparison in the post-test whereas in the pre-test they don't get beyond a comment on SOURCE A. In the post-test they are also both successfully cross-referencing to other sources not mentioned in the question (e.g. reference is made to the Spanish desire for treasure) but they only reached Level 4 on the mark scheme rather than Level 5 because they failed to spot other possible reasons for conflict by cross-referencing to the other sources on the paper.<sup>11</sup>

It might be suggested that these results were achieved by teaching to the test since the test was based on Exploration and Encounters materials. The content of the first part of the test was concerned with the reasons why people risked their lives to find a new sea route to the Far East; the second part of the test presented a range of sources and views on the Spanish conquest of Hispaniola, some of which are reproduced above. Yet very little of the history through drama project focused on these particular topics; indeed only part of one of the six sessions discussed the reasons for Columbus's voyage. On the contrary, five out of the six Friday afternoons focused on the Aztecs and Cortes, and no work on Hispaniola was attempted during the history through drama project. Thus any progress made by the experimental group over the control group between the beginning and end of term might be attributable not to teaching to the test in terms of



content, but to the transferability of the skills learned whilst studying the Aztecs and Cortes through drama.

It is also interesting to note that these pupils were approaching Levels 6 and 7 of AT3 in their answers to Questions 4 and 5 in the post-test, whereas according to the model of assessment developed for the National Curriculum, children in Key Stage 2 should be operating between Levels 2 and 5, while Levels 6 and 7 are more likely to be achieved by 14- and 15-year-olds (TGAT, 1988, para 108; DES, 1991, para 22). This would suggest that perhaps the age-stage framework for National Curriculum history is an inappropriate tool for analysing the development of children's historical thinking, and that the higher levels of the statements of attainment are in fact accessible to quite young children. Booth and Husbands have recently reminded us that you have to analyse the context in which children learn to understand the development of their historical thinking, and that an analysis of context must include teaching methods, teaching materials and the kinds of questions being asked (Booth, 1993; Booth and Husbands, 1993). Once this is understood it becomes possible for Key Stage 2 children to reach quite sophisticated levels of conceptual understanding provided the context is made accessible to the children through the professional knowledge of the teacher. This should also serve as a reminder that if teachers stick too rigidly to the age-stage framework prescribed in the statements of attainment in National Curriculum history, they may well be lowering their expectations and underestimating children's potential to perform at some of the higher levels.

### THE RESEARCH IN CONTEXT

Much of the published work on teaching history through drama has necessarily been of a descriptive nature. Teachers unfamiliar with dramatic conventions have needed to look to journals like *Teaching History* for models of how to introduce drama into their repertoire of teaching skills.<sup>12</sup> Some of this valuable work has involved quite elaborate preparation in terms of costume, props, and off-site historical experiences which can make drama seem rather remote from the normal classroom experiences of children. We therefore chose to work wholly within the school setting, without props or costume, but relying on the technology of a photocopier and overhead projector available in most schools. We also believed that some form of quantitative analysis, albeit tentative in its conclusions, would add weight to the growing body of qualitative evidence that using drama is an effective means of teaching history.

We chose Exploration and Encounters 1450–1550 partly because of Paul's interest in world history in the National Curriculum, and partly because we believed that the topic would provide some interesting opportunities for the investigation of AT2 through the clash of Spanish and Aztec cultures. But first we needed to find a school with two parallel classes working on Explorations and

Encounters during the autumn of 1992, the term during which we had set aside seven days for teaching and researching the project. Once the two-form entry primary school had been found, we established that its intake was divided approximately equally between children from private housing estates and those in rented accommodation. We were also assured that the two classes were parallel mixed ability groups, though, as our test showed, the control group had slightly more than their fair share of brighter children (see Appendix 2). We also secured the full cooperation of the two class teachers involved, one of whom observed the entire experiment.

We were also conscious of the need to identify the dramatic conventions that would effectively deliver the Attainment Targets in history.<sup>13</sup> We found for example that the teacher in role was an effective means of delivering AT1, whereas AT2 and AT3 were often best approached through small-group work. Furthermore we found that whole-class teaching and discussion focusing on overhead transparencies created islands within the drama for consolidating knowledge and introducing new concepts and materials.

### HITTING THE TARGETS: AT1

Throughout our planning we kept all three Attainment Targets in view, but we concentrated more on AT1 at the start of the project while we got to know the children. We often used whole-class teaching and discussion for introducing new material to the children, and we found that the teacher in role was one of the most effective means of getting across a lot of information in an active and interesting way.

Whole-class teaching was sometimes used to introduce new information which the children would need to know for a subsequent dramatic frame. These sessions were often lively encounters which went beyond their original purpose. For example, Paul introduced the children to certain aspects of Aztec education with an overhead transparency of a child being punished and one of an Aztec warrior ready for battle. Paul asked the children questions about these pictures and fed in appropriate information until the children's own questions began to shape the discussion:

'What happens if they kill somebody instead of taking them alive?' (AT1 3 iv)<sup>14</sup>

'Would they get sacrificed if they were killed?' (AT1 3 iv)

'Why did they sacrifice people?' (AT1 2 iii)<sup>15</sup>

'Why don't they sacrifice people now?' (AT1 3 ii)<sup>16</sup>

'How do people know that all this stuff's true?' (AT2 vi)<sup>17</sup>

'How do you know that they (the Aztec glyphs) were made by the Aztecs and not by some later civilization?' (AT2 iv)<sup>18</sup>

'What is the age at which most people got sacrificed, or the earliest age that people get sacrificed?' (AT1 3 v)<sup>19</sup>

'Did everyone that they fight have sacrifices to the gods?' (AT1 3 v)

'Why don't our mums hang us over peppers and things so that we get our eyes stung and things like that?' (AT1 3 ii)

The purpose of these children's questions clearly went beyond the mere passing on of factual information. As Paul, in answer to some of the more routine questions, sketched in the detail of Aztec education and the training of warriors, some quite searching issues relating to interpretations of history were being raised by some children. The children then had to put some of this information to use in what we described in a previous article as the 'challenge' of drama whereby pupils are challenged to make use of information in dramatic form thus helping them to internalize new concepts, ideas and information (Goalen and Hendy, 1992). The children were asked to stand in two lines facing each other in a 'story tunnel' while Paul, in role as the Chief of the Jaguar warriors, asked the wounded soldiers at the end of an Aztec battle to say what had happened to them.

Whole-class discussion is not of course drama, but it was a useful means of providing interludes between dramatic frames and opportunities for the children to pursue ideas out of role. However AT1 can also be successfully approached through drama: with the teacher in role as the provider of information, the children in role can be helped to make sense of their own roles and to understand better the history they are studying. For example, one afternoon Paul played Christopher Columbus trying to recruit a crew for the Santa Maria from a group of men (played by Lesley and the children) looking for work at the port of Palos. Here is an extract from the scene to show how information related to AT1 can be conveyed through drama:

*Columbus* . . . So why are you the sort of person who would be good for my voyage?

*Child 1* Well in the past I have been making a few boats and fishing rods and . . .

*Columbus* So you are a carpenter?

*Child 1* Yes.

*L. Hendy* He is an excellent caulker sir.

*Columbus* And a caulker too! You can mend ships that are leaking. That's a very valuable skill; thank you very much. I think I'm going to be able to work with you. . . . So why do I need you?

*Child 2* I've had six years' experience and I come from the same town as you.

*Columbus* So you do. I recognize you. I've seen you in Genoa haven't I? What a coincidence! Tell me why I need you.

*Child 2* 'Cos if a shark comes up I'll kill it.

*Columbus* A deep sea fisherman. We may need that skill. Don't laugh. If

the food does run out; if the ship's biscuit is all disintegrated and full of maggots and we need to fish, we'll need your skills to survive.

We have no evidence that the children retained this information relating to AT1; the test dealt with other topics. But the children remembered this session in our final discussion at the end of the project and several said how much they had enjoyed the work on Columbus. This written comment was fairly typical of those who enjoyed the session on Columbus: 'My favourite session was the one about Christopher Columbus because John and I were experienced sailors and I was his boss.'

### HITTING THE TARGETS: AT2 AND AT3<sup>20</sup>

Additional dramatic conventions were used to deliver AT2 and AT3. We began with a whole-class discussion during which Paul showed the children a number of overhead transparencies of the paintings of Antonio de Solis (1610–1686) depicting the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs. The discussion focused on the idea that these paintings could be seen as representations of *how the Spanish saw themselves*, and through careful questioning the children developed the idea that the Spanish painter had depicted his countrymen as brave, fearless, invincible conquerors whose superior technology and fighting skill would overpower the massed hordes of Indians facing them. We also discussed why the Spanish were portrayed in this way.

We then asked the children to work in small groups and to read some sources on *how the Aztecs saw the Spanish*. The contrast with how the Spanish saw themselves in their portraits was a means of introducing the nature of AT2, interpretations of history. AT2 had already been touched on during our second session when we had asked the children to interpret some pictures on Aztec education and make up a scene showing their varying interpretations of the education of a boy or girl. But the new exercise was more sharply focused on AT2 and we asked the children to return the following week as if they were Aztec warriors reporting back to Moctezuma on the arrival of the Spanish on the Mexican coast.

The following week the warriors arrived back at Moctezuma's court and described to 'Angry Lord' (Paul) the strange sights they had seen.

*Warrior 1* They have got these big kind of dogs, about that high, with really big teeth.

*Moctezuma* But the dogs in our country are only this high (pointing somewhere near the ground). There aren't any dogs at all that high.

*Warrior 1* But we saw them. They *were* this high.

*Moctezuma* Are you sure you were feeling alright when you saw these dogs? You are not exaggerating at all? Your story is true? . . . I can not believe this. You must have seen something else. It must have been a dream.

*Warrior 2* They can ride them like this!

*Moctezuma* So they go on the backs of these dogs?! Please be seated. (To the guard:) Find someone who has got some good news.

We then devised an exercise which we have called ‘alternating viewpoints’ in which we tried to recreate alternately the feelings in the Spanish camp as they contemplated the awesome might of the Aztec empire, and the concerns at Moctezuma’s court as they registered the arrival of those white-faced, black-bearded aliens (possibly gods?) and their strange animals and fiery machines. We began in the Spanish camp with Cortes (played by Lesley) congratulating the troops on a successful engagement with the enemy, and Escudero (played by Paul) trying to persuade the Spanish to return home to Cuba with their booty. We then switched to the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan where Moctezuma (played by Paul) was telling the story of the god Quetzacoatl whom he believed was returning to reclaim his kingdom and who listened as his courtiers told him of the signs and portents they had witnessed of the end of the Aztec empire. Once again a lot of information was conveyed in these two scenes as the following extract shows:

*Moctezuma* What does this dream mean? A man with a pale face came with a dragon that could spit fire. What could this mean? Could the dragon be sent against us by the gods? Do you think that could be the meaning of your dream?

*Courtier* Well indeed, the mountains have been spitting fire for some time. They have been dormant for many hundreds of years, but now they are spitting fire. Is this a portent of things to come?

We then returned to the Spanish camp to find the argument between Cortes and Escudero being brought to an abrupt end by the realization that Cortes had scuttled the fleet so there was no alternative but for Escudero and his malcontents to follow Cortes into the heart of the Aztec empire.

In this way we developed the idea that history can be looked at from different points of view. Paul then told the story of the fall of Tenochtitlan as an introduction to the next dramatic frame, the death of Moctezuma. Here we divided the class into four and gave each group a different version of Moctezuma’s death: we then asked them to be prepared in a fortnight’s time to perform their version of Moctezuma’s death to the rest of the class. The scenes were duly performed at the start of the next session and in the discussion that followed we probed the children’s understanding of the problems of interpreting evidence.

In the discussion we first clarified with the children what the four different versions of Moctezuma's death were. We then asked them why there were different interpretations of his death:

- Child 1* It's because there were four different groups and they each had their own opinion.
- Paul* That's a very good reason because there are four different groups. . . . There's possibly a second reason though too.
- Child 2* No one actually saw what happened.

In this brief exchange lay the essence of much of what children need to learn about interpretations in history in order to make sense of the past presented to them by historians. *Child 1* is on the way to suggesting that different groups may form different interpretations because of their selection of evidence (AT2 Levels 6 and 8);<sup>21</sup> while *Child 2* is pointing out that deficiencies in evidence may lead to different interpretations of the past (AT2 Level 4).<sup>22</sup> We then pursued the issue of motive and in whose interest it was to pin the blame on either Cortes or the Aztecs for Moctezuma's death:

- Paul* . . . Who might have wanted us to believe that Cortes killed Moctezuma?
- Child 3* The Spaniards because they wanted him to be great . . .
- Child 4* Cortes might have done it, if he was paid for it; if someone wanted him dead . . .
- Child 5* The Aztecs because they wanted Cortes to go to prison . . .
- Child 6* In all the different four groups it was Cortes who sent Moctezuma up so it was actually his fault.
- Child 7* The Aztecs because they wouldn't want people to think that they killed Moctezuma.
- Paul* So whose interests is it in to put the blame on the Aztecs? Who might have wanted us to believe that it was the Aztecs who threw the stones who killed Moctezuma?
- Child 8* Cortes because he doesn't want the blame.
- Child 9* The Aztecs would want to put the blame on Cortes because they would be afraid that the gods might be angry with them.

The discussion continued along these lines for several minutes with the children making judgements about the reliability and value of the historical sources by reference to the circumstances in which they were produced. This of course is AT3, Level 7.<sup>23</sup>

Finally we redivided the children into three groups making sure that there were representatives from each of the four previous groups in the new groupings. We then set them the task of planning and presenting a TV documentary on the death of Moctezuma to illustrate the four different versions of his death. To add

realism to this exercise, we videoed their AT2 presentations, gave a copy to the school, and kept one for research purposes.

## CONCLUSION

After we had recorded their TV documentaries, we discussed the project with the children. Here are some of their edited comments on the history through drama project:

- Child 1* . . . When you do this it is fun and you actually take it in more.
- Child 2* In the class there was a book . . . *A Portrait of Cortes* . . . I thought he was a painter at first. Now I know what he was.
- Child 3* . . . It helped me to understand more when we started doing it . . .
- Child 4* It was good because when you are just writing it down, you were writing down your own ideas, but when you do it in a group and you forget, you've done it with people so you can go and ask them what you've forgotten.
- Child 5* I wanted to know about other old things, 'cos it made me interested in old things.
- Child 6* It showed me that it was actually exciting when you got into it the right way.
- Child 7* I wanted to look in books and things afterwards because when you talked about say the sacrifices, I wanted to find out the details.

We had found it fun too and it had certainly made us do lots of reading in order to teach in an active way a topic that was new to both of us. But more significantly, the research demonstrated that Year 5 children are capable of operating at Levels 6–8 of AT2 and Levels 6 and 7 of AT3, whereas children at Key Stage 2 are normally meant to operate within Levels 2–5 (TGAT, 1988, para. 108; DES, 1991, para. 22.) This may suggest that under certain conditions it might be possible to achieve the rise in standards in primary classrooms called for by the 'three wise men' (DES, 1992), and indeed our quantitative analysis shows how the middle 60 per cent in the ability range of our experimental group were able to improve their performance on our test to a statistically significant degree. Furthermore, our qualitative data reinforced our view that it would be mistaken to stick rigidly to the age-stage framework of the statements of attainment, since to do so would be effectively to lower expectations and prevent children operating at the higher levels in appropriate contexts.

However, a note of caution should be sounded when interpreting those results which are related to the statements of attainment in National Curriculum history, since these statements of attainment, which are based on an age-stage

framework for measuring progression, are increasingly being called into question by researchers who are re-emphasizing the importance of context, content and teaching style when studying the development of children's historical thinking. These researchers emphasize that the statements of attainment in history do not necessarily constitute a hierarchical progression: indeed some statements might be said to be free standing and accessible depending on the context, content and teaching style of the lesson (Booth, 1993; Booth and Husbands, 1993). We certainly found that specific pedagogical activities with Year 5 children could lead to high-level outcomes in terms of the published statements of attainment when accompanied by appropriate source materials and active learning, but we make no claim that our Year 5 students achieving Levels 6–8 were ready for GCSE or Key Stage 4 (a theoretical possibility at these levels), since we are well aware that history is a context-bound subject in which young children using simple and accessible sources are capable of achieving high levels of conceptual understanding which more complex sources would obscure. What we are convinced of is that the methods described in this paper bring high-level conceptual understanding within the range of a far broader band of ability than would have been possible through more conventional teaching strategies.

## NOTES

- 1 We owe our title to the present Deputy Principal of Homerton College, Tim Everton. The work described in this paper was made possible by a small research grant from Homerton College. The teaching methods used were developed with the help of an ERTEC grant in 1990 and through the support of the then Acting Deputy Principal, Sylvia Williams.
- 2 History in the National Curriculum was introduced in England in September 1991. At Key Stage 2, which covers National Curriculum Years 3, 4, 5 and 6 (the 7–11 age range), schools must follow a programme of study consisting of nine study units: five or six Core Study Units (CSUs) and three or four Supplementary Study Units (SSUs).
- 3 Our inspiration for this quantitative analysis was the seminal work of P. J. Rogers and F. Aston (1977).
- 4 The test with its level of response mark scheme is reproduced in Appendix 1.
- 5 Attainment Target 1 is defined as 'Knowledge and understanding of history'. It has three strands which are concerned with: (1) change and continuity; (2) causes and consequences; (3) knowing about and understanding key features of an historical situation (HMSO, 1991).
- 6 Attainment Target 2 is defined as 'The development of the ability to understand interpretations of history'. Attainment Target 3 is defined as 'The development of pupils' ability to acquire evidence from historical sources, and form judgements about their reliability and value' (HMSO, 1991).
- 7 Thanks to Martin Booth at the University Department of Education, Cambridge, for comments on an early draft of this test and for his wisdom during discussions when the ideas for this research were germinating.



- 8 The discussion paper by the 'three wise men', Alexander, Rose and Woodhead (DES, 1992) has recently drawn attention to the issue of raising standards in primary classrooms.
- 9 See Appendix 1 for Paper 2 of the test and its mark scheme.
- 10 The researchers and the class teacher of the experimental group devised a 'levels of response' mark scheme:  
Q4  
Level 1: No response or misunderstood e.g. 'trying to make a good impression'. (1)  
Level 2: No it doesn't or yes it does without a reason. (2)  
Level 3: Mentions gold. (3–5)  
Level 4: Mentions increase in gold gained in Hispaniola; or yes and no with pros and cons. (6–8)  
Level 5: Reasons for increase in gold supplies, e.g. mining or wealth through agriculture. (9–10)
- 11 The 'levels of response' mark scheme for Question 5 was as follows:  
Level 1: No response. (1)  
Level 2: Spots difference in date or states that they hate each other, but gives no explanation. (2)  
Level 3: Notes difference in dates or peoples depicted in sources with some explanation. (3–5)  
Level 4: Cross-reference to taking gold or land. (6–8)  
Level 5: Cross-reference to other sources showing killing or disease. (9–10)
- 12 See also the seminal work of John Fines and Raymond Verrier, *The Drama of History* (London, 1974); and *Teaching History* Nos 51, 57, 60, 68 and 69 for some recent examples.
- 13 Appendix 4 summarizes some of the teaching methods used together with their learning objectives.
- 14 Attainment Target 1, Strand c, Level 4: 'describe different features of an historical period' (HMSO, 1991: 3).
- 15 AT1 b, Level 3: 'give a reason for a historical event or development' (HMSO, 1991: 3).
- 16 AT1 c, Level 2: 'identify differences between past and present times' (HMSO, 1991: 3).
- 17 AT2, Level 6: 'demonstrate how historical interpretations depend on the selection of sources' (HMSO, 1991: 8).
- 18 AT2, Level 4: 'show an understanding that deficiencies in evidence may lead to different interpretations of the past' (HMSO, 1991: 7).
- 19 AT1 c, Level 5: 'show how different features in an historical situation relate to each other' (HMSO, 1991: 4).
- 20 See Appendix 4 for a summary of the learning objectives and dramatic conventions described in this section.
- 21 AT2 Level 6 is defined as: 'demonstrate how historical interpretations depend on the selection of sources.' AT2 Level 8 is defined as: 'show how attitudes and circumstances can influence an individual's interpretation of historical events or developments' (HMSO, 1991: 8).
- 22 See Note 18.
- 23 AT3 Level 7 is defined as: 'make judgements about the reliability and value of historical sources by reference to the circumstances in which they were produced.' See HMSO (1991: 10).

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## APPENDIX 1

## THE TEST: LEVELS OF RESPONSE MARK SCHEME

*Paper 1: focus on Attainment Target 1*

The sources for Paper 1 are not reproduced here for reasons of space. They consisted of pictures and written sources on the reasons for expansion and comprised two sides of A4.

*Mark scheme:* this was slightly adjusted in the light of pupil responses to the pre-test (Macintosh, 1979: 23), but no further adjustments were made for the post-test.

*Questions 1, 2 and 3* were basic comprehension questions designed to gauge the accessibility of the sources. (max. 10 marks)

*Question 4:* 'Do you think that spices were more important to cooks in the Middle Ages than they are to cooks today?'

Level 1: No response. (1)

Level 2: Yes or no (without reasons). (2)

Level 3: Yes or no but with a limited reason. (2–4)

Level 4: Understands problems associated with food preservation making valid comparisons between the 15th century and the 20th century. (5–8)

Level 5: Same as 4 but introduces cultural comparisons. (9–10)

*Question 5:* Gold and silk were valuable in the Middle Ages and are still valuable today. How do you explain the fact that gold and silver are still valuable today but spices are not?

Level 1: No response. (1)

Level 2: Chooses one of the three giving a reason. (2)

Level 3: Chooses two and gives a reason. (2–4)

Level 4: Discusses gold, silk and spices. (4–6)

Level 5: Is able to discuss all three giving sophisticated economic reasons such as ease of distribution and quality of manufacture. (6–10)

*Question 6:* Why were European sea captains at the end of the Middle Ages prepared to risk their lives in the search for a new sea route to the Far East? Explain your answer carefully.

Level 1: No response. (1)

Level 2: A response which is only tangentially connected to the question or that repeats the question, e.g. because the world is flat or because they wanted to get to the Far East. (2)

Level 3: Mentions search for gold, silk and spices, and/or problems with overland route. (2–4)

Level 4: Explanation in terms of a balance between reward and risk, including specific reference to becoming rich and famous. (5–7)

Level 5: Explanation in terms of personal gain and national gain, i.e. personal riches and opening of trade routes. (8–10)

*Paper 2: focus on Attainment Targets 2 and 3*

The sources for Paper 2 are reproduced in full on p. 367.

*Mark scheme:* this was slightly adjusted in the light of pupil responses to the pre-test (Macintosh, 1979: 23), but no further adjustments were made for the post-test.

*Question 1:* Look at the picture of Columbus meeting the people of Hispaniola in 1493 (SOURCE A). How do the people of Hispaniola appear to be acting on the arrival of Columbus?

Level 1: No response. (1)

Level 2: Any response without elaboration. (2)

Level 3: A response with a simple explanation. (3–5)

Level 4: Response which shows that some people are doing different things. (6–8)

Level 5: A response which understands the implications of cultural differences and raises questions such as 'how can we know?' (9–10)

*Questions 2a and 2b* were basic comprehension questions designed to ensure that pupils had studied the sources referred to in 2c. (No marks were given for these responses.)

*Question 2a:* What can you see in the picture (SOURCE A) that Columbus describes in his letter (SOURCE B)?

*Question 2b:* What does Columbus mention in the letter (SOURCE B) that is not in the picture (SOURCE A)?

*Question 2c:* Why do you think the picture (SOURCE A) and the letter on Hispaniola (SOURCE B) do not give the same information?

Level 1: No response. (1)

Level 2: One is writing one is a picture. (2)

Level 3: One is writing one is a picture; you can tell one from the other (i.e. some elaboration). (3–5)

Level 4: Because they are not by the same person (i.e. indicates importance of purpose of source). (6–7)

Level 5: Further elaboration on the nature of the sources: e.g. 'The picture is just a moment in time; the letter is a summary of information over a period of time.' (8–10)

*Question 3:* In SOURCE B Columbus was writing to the Treasurer of the King of Spain. He would want to make a good impression. Does this mean the information in the letter is going to be true? Explain your answer.

- Level 1: No response. (1)  
 Level 2: Yes or no. (2)  
 Level 3: Yes or no with some explanation such as emphasis on motive of writer. (3–5; only 3 if explanation repeats phrase ‘because he wants to make a good impression’.)  
 Level 4: Yes or no with significant elaboration (e.g. points out lack of bad points in letter). (6–7)  
 Level 5: Yes and no giving pros and cons for each. (8–10)

*Question 4:* Look at SOURCE C. Does the information in SOURCE C show that what Columbus is saying in his letter is true?

- Level 1: No response or misunderstood, e.g. ‘trying to make a good impression’. (1)  
 Level 2: No it doesn’t or yes it does without a reason. (2)  
 Level 3: Mentions gold. (3–5)  
 Level 4: Mentions increase in gold gained in Hispaniola, or yes and no with pros and cons. (6–8)  
 Level 5: Reasons for increase in gold, e.g. mining and wealth through agriculture. (9–10)

*Question 5:* Compare the picture of the battle between the Spanish and the Indians (SOURCE D) with the picture of the arrival of Columbus (SOURCE A). Why do you think that the Spanish and Indians appear friendly in SOURCE A but are fighting each other in SOURCE B?

- Level 1: No response. (1)  
 Level 2: Spots difference in date or states that they hate each other, but gives no explanation. (2)  
 Level 3: Notes difference in dates or peoples depicted in sources with some explanation. (3–5)  
 Level 4: Cross-reference to taking gold or land. (6–8)  
 Level 5: Cross-reference to other sources showing killing and/or disease. (9–10)

*Question 6:* Now read all the sources again. Why do you think that some people thought the conquest of the West Indies was a good thing, and others thought it a bad thing?

- Level 1: No response. (1)  
 Level 2: Because people have different ideas – there are good people and bad people. (2–5; 2 for tangential explanations)  
 Level 3: Explanation which refers to sources. (6–7)  
 Level 4: It depends whose side you are on. (8–9)  
 Level 5: Appreciation of historian’s role: looking back. (10)

APPENDIX 2

<i>Control group</i>			<i>Experimental group</i>		
<i>Pre-test %</i>	<i>Post-test %</i>	<i>Difference</i>	<i>Pre-test %</i>	<i>Post-test %</i>	<i>Difference</i>
14	38	(+24)	16	32	(+16)
23	41	(+18)	22	28	(+6)
26	36	(+10)	24	35	(+11)
27	34	(+7)	27	35	(+8)
28	31	(+3)	29	39	(+10)
29	48	(+19)	31	27	(-4)
30	45	(+15)	31	40	(+9)
38	48	(+10)	31	34	(+3)
40	39	(-1)	32	44	(+12)
41	45	(+4)	36	54	(+18)
43	42	(-1)	38	45	(+7)
43	51	(+8)	38	55	(+17)
44	42	(-2)	40 Pupil A	61	(+21)
44	46	(+2)	40	55	(+15)
46	59	(+13)	40	42	(+2)
48	41	(-7)	43	42	(-1)
51	44	(-7)	43 Pupil B	69	(+26)
53	70	(+17)	43	58	(+15)
61	53	(-8)	44 Pupil C	61	(+17)
63	66	(+3)	44 Pupil D	67	(+23)
			44	52	(+8)
		Average increase	45	57	(+12)
		6.35%	46	41	(-5)
			47	59	(+12)
			53	63	(+10)
			54	58	(+4)
			55	52	(-3)
			56	68	(+12)
			63	68	(+5)
					Average increase: 9.86%

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## APPENDIX 3

Thanks are due to Rex Watson, Department of Mathematics, Homerton College, for writing this appendix and calculating the results.

It was decided to analyse the data in three ability bands according to performance on the pre-test, for both control and experimental groups. For each group the upper band consisted of the top 20 per cent, the middle band the middle 60 per cent, the lower band the bottom 20 per cent. In each case the one-tailed Mann-Whitney U-test was used, entailing the production of a combined ranking order of improvements (possibly negative) from pre-test to post-test. Some detail is given here in relation to the first case of the upper band.

*Upper band* With 4 children in the control group (C) and 5 in the experimental group (E), the ranking order of improvements, from worst to best, is CCECEEEEC. Of the 20 pairs of Cs and Es, 6 have E preceding C (and so 14 the other way), from which we give the Mann-Whitney U-value to be 6. This is not significant at even the 20 per cent level. (Siegel, S., *Non-parametric Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences*, International Student Edition, 1956, Table J, p. 271,  $n_1 = 4$ ,  $n_2 = 5$ )

*Middle band* 12 in C group, 18 in E group. Accounting for ties as usual, of the 216 C/E pairs, 62.5 have E preceding C (and so 153.5 the other way), giving U-value to be 62.5. This is significant at the 5 per cent level, though not at the 2.5 per cent level. (Siegel, Table K, pp. 276–7,  $n_1 = 12$ ,  $n_2 = 20$ )

*Lower band* 4 in C group, 6 in E group. Again taking ties into account, of the 24 C/E pairs, 18.5 have E preceding C (and so 5.5 the other way), giving U-value to be 18.5. This is not of course significant at say the 20 per cent level. (Indeed the control group children have generally improved more than the experimental group.)

## APPENDIX 4

<i>Learning objectives</i>	<i>Method of learning</i>	<i>Leader's role</i>	<i>Materials needed</i>
<p>Frame 1</p> <p>AT2, AT3</p>	<p><i>Whole group in role</i> Aztecs telling Moctezuma of their first impressions of the Spaniards</p>	<p><i>Teacher in role</i> as Moctezuma II who listens, asks questions and makes comments</p>	<p>Information from Aztec accounts about first meetings with the Spanish</p>
<p>Frame 2</p> <p>AT1b, AT2</p>	<p><i>Alternating viewpoint</i> Whole group in role as 1 The Spaniards talking to Cortes 2 The Aztec nobles talking with Moctezuma The scene shifts alternately to show the same event from the two viewpoints</p>	<p><i>Teacher in role</i> 1 As Cortes, proud and ambitious 2 As Moctezuma, perplexed and troubled</p>	<p>Information about Cortes' first encounters with the Aztecs</p>
<p>Frame 3</p> <p>AT3</p>	<p><i>Small-group work</i> From four different versions of Moctezuma's death create a prepared scene</p>	<p>Leader as adviser and interpreter of information</p>	<p>Four versions of Moctezuma's death taken from Aztec and Spanish sources</p>
<p>Frame 4</p> <p>AT2, AT3</p>	<p><i>Reflection on action</i> Pupils discuss different versions and why they should be different</p>	<p>Leader makes sure the pupils understand the different versions. Needs to direct the pupils to why they might differ</p>	<p>Same as above</p>
<p>Frame 5</p> <p>AT3</p>	<p><i>Small-group work</i> Pupils, divided into groups, prepare a documentary film based on the accounts of the death of Moctezuma</p>	<p>Leader as adviser and provider of information</p>	<p>Same as above</p>
<p>Frame 6</p> <p>AT2, AT3</p>	<p><i>Presentation</i> Each group presents their documentary which is filmed on video</p>	<p>Leader acts as camera person</p>	<p>Video camera Video tape</p>