

Including the Muslim Contribution in the National Curriculum for History

— Dr. Matthew L.N. Wilkinson

Introduction

History education has a key role to play in creating the informed, critical attachment of young people to the nation and in creating the feeling that young people belong and can participate in national life.

The Curriculum for Cohesion Team, comprising Muslim and non-Muslim academics and community leaders, believes that it is essential that the true socio-cultural breadth of important historical events is represented on the curriculum and taught in the classroom. This is on the principle that the more accurate the History that is taught, the more socially inclusive it will be.

Muslim pupils: the role of history

The majority of Muslim pupils in English schools find their National Curriculum History (NCH) learning interesting and believe that they derive useful knowledge from it. This includes elements of compulsory British history as well as elements that currently come under the Diversity core concept such as Slavery and the Holocaust.

- Muslim pupils also feel, as a group, that compulsory school History is an important tool for **engendering essential knowledge for the critical British citizen** and that
- History at school provides an important forum for **reflecting on complex ethical, social and moral issues**.

However, at present the positive impact of compulsory school History is weakened by the perception that History is not as useful or important as other subjects in terms of employment.

The Islamic heritage and the curriculum

History also suffers from the fact that Muslim pupils' Islamic heritage, which this and other research shows is of great importance to c.90% of Muslim pupils, **is absent from the curriculum** as delivered in classrooms despite the presence of optional Islamic history modules on the curriculum itself.

This absence is connected to the fact that **teachers do not understand how to connect the achievements of Islamic civilisation with the important 'big' curricular themes** of social and technological change. The subject also suffers from a deficit of value at school and a deficit of Muslim parental support.

Remediation: a five part strategy

To remedy this situation, Curriculum for Cohesion suggests a five-part strategy to maximise the benefits of compulsory History for all pupils:

- 1 **Re-totalising partial and incomplete episodes taught on NCH by incorporating more**

international history into the core substance of NCH, including the British national narrative.

- 2 **Forging a history of the present by ensuring that important current affairs are set in a deep and complex historical perspective** to help pupils make sense of the world around them...with an eye to their future by showing how core historical skills such the retrieval, interpretation and presentation of information are vital skills that are valued by employers.
- 3 **Re-imagining an intrinsic History-for-Citizenship.** This means ensuring that all pupils, Muslim and non-Muslim, leave school with a strong, detailed understanding of the changing historical relationships between Parliament, the People and the Crown. This will help engender a sense of national responsibility.
- 4 **Also all pupils, Muslim and non-Muslim, need to understand how and why ideas of religious tolerance and secularism came about in Britain.**
- 5 **Creating communities of historical learning** to connect school-based curriculum learning with family and out-of-school histories through the mediation of interested adults.

Essential Muslim related historical knowledge

In keeping with the general approach above, three limited but essential pieces of Muslim related historical knowledge need to be woven seamlessly into the curriculum. In order of priority, all pupils should know that:

- **Muslims, and also non-Muslims** working within the framework of Islamic civilisation, made a **vital contribution to the preservation of knowledge and the progress of science and civilisation**. The contribution of female Muslim scientists should be included in this understanding;
- **The Muslim presence in Britain and the interaction of Britain with the Muslim-majority world is part of a long-standing relationship between Britain and Islam** that stretches back long before the period of post-World War II migration, reaching as far as relations between Anglo-Saxon and Viking England with Umayyad Spain in the 9th century;
- **Muslims contributed in great numbers and with great commitment to the defeat of tyrannical regimes by free peoples in the First and Second World Wars** and that these wars had great repercussions for the Muslim-majority world.

Dr. Matthew L.N. Wilkinson is Director of Curriculum for Cohesion. Curriculum for Cohesion is a collaboration of teachers, academics, community leaders and employers who are developing humanities education to help all children succeed in the 21st century. (Reproduced by permission of Curriculum for Cohesion)