

Report to the Minister of Education and Skills,

Ruairi Quinn T.D.

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History in the development and promotion of literacy and numeracy at second level.

We in the H.T.A.I. would argue that the teaching of History to all students at Junior Cycle would promote higher levels of literacy and numeracy. We completely support the aims and objectives of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. We believe that having History as a core subject will assist in the achievement of those aims and objectives. Every target set out in "Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life" can be met by the study of History. The following are just a few examples:

Target one: "...the development of children's ability to become effective communicators ..."

According to the Council of Europe report on the teaching of History in Conflict and post - conflict areas (2009): *"History teaching in a multiple perspective manner will give students analytical skills that will assist them to have more critical minds. It is therefore a subject that can assist in a very vital part of a child's development."*

As students engage with historical texts they will learn how to both use and interpret language. They will learn that literacy is not an

objective skill but something that is subject to nuance and interpretation. As this skill is learned, students will then be able to use language to form cogent and coherent arguments as well as being able to recognise subjectivity and bias in the language of others. 1.

Target two: “.. the importance of oral and written language in all its forms (including print, writing and digital media)”.

History is uniquely placed to afford students the chance to access all sorts of media. As well as written documents written across various time periods, students can study cartoons, films, posters, maps, government documents, graphics, illustrations, timelines etc.

Page 51 of the Literacy and numeracy strategy expresses the idea that students engage with non - literary texts. Boys especially show interest in such texts and tend to do better in the subjects which provide access to them. History can offer a plethora of such sources.

Target three:“ Foster an enjoyment of reading among children and young people”.

After English, History offers the best scope for the introduction of reading in the classroom. If the Junior Cycle is to be changed to being partly portfolio assessed, then this could provide the opportunity for students to engage with historical books as well as historical fiction. These could be read and reviewed as well as being tied into further study based on those books. For example, the novel “Goodnight Mister Tom” set in wartime England could be the starting

point for a project on World War Two and its effects on children.

Target Four: "Increase the awareness of the importance of digital literacy.."

There is a wealth of online resources that can be used as the basis for an ICT based study of History. For example, the availability of the 1901 and 1911 census returns online has immense potential for both local and national History projects. This can only increase the digital literacy of students. 2.

Target five: "a broad balanced and fulfilling curricular experience ... the social, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic and physical dimensions."

Any teacher of History can attest to the fact that this is a subject that spills out over the academic and into a wider spectrum of education experiences. The study of local history can lead to the excitement and enthusiasm of the discovery of new facts. Students emotionally empathise with tragic characters in History such as Anne Frank. Students often let their imaginations and aesthetic skills aid in the bringing to life of historical events. As it says on p. 43 of the strategy, they will develop "positive attitudes and motivation".

Target six: "All learners should also have the opportunity to engage with..learning approaches, including cooperative learning, differentiated learning, active learning and problem solving activity."

History can easily include all of these approaches. Students can cooperate on specific projects that could form part of a portfolio. Students from the same area could create a local history study. The fact that a myriad of sources are available for History means that differentiation can occur. There is almost certainly a source available for all skill sets and ability levels. History also offers a valuable opportunity for non - Irish students to study the History of their own countries. This is a rewarding experience that is already open to students at senior cycle. History is also perfect for active learning, for example, an archaeological dig or interviewing locals to gather an oral history archive.

3.

Students could also be set historical puzzles to try and solve and then be able to present and defend their conclusions. For example, what really happened at the Kilmichael ambush during the War of Independence?

Literacy and Communication skills can be promoted by History in the following ways:

Students become literate as they develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions to interpret and use language confidently for learning and communicating in and out of school and for participating effectively in society. Literacy involves students in listening to, reading, viewing, speaking, writing and creating oral, print, visual and digital texts, and using and modifying language for different purposes in a range of contexts.

Students develop literacy capability as they learn how to build historical knowledge and to explore, analyse, question, discuss and communicate historical information, concepts and ideas. Historical texts typically include those that recount a sequence of events, present past events as a narrative, discuss concepts and ideas, and argue a point of view. These texts are often accompanied by graphics such as illustrations, maps, tables and timelines that provide significant information and are supported by references and quotations from primary and secondary sources.

Students understand that language varies according to context and they develop their ability to use language flexibly. This includes understanding and using the language features of historical texts including topic vocabulary, past tense verbs for recounting events, complex sentences to establish sequential or cause-and-effect relationships, the wide use of adverbs to describe places, people and events, and extended noun groups employing descriptive adjectives. This is truly a high level of sophisticated literacy. 4.

Numeracy

Students become numerate as they develop the knowledge and skills to use mathematics confidently across all learning areas at school and in their lives more broadly. Numeracy involves students in recognising and understanding the role of mathematics in the world and having the dispositions and capacities to use mathematical knowledge and skills purposefully. They realise that mathematics is a real skill that they will need and that it has concrete effects on the lives of people.

Students develop numeracy capability as they learn to organise and interpret historical events and developments. Students learn to analyse numerical data to make meaning of the past, for example to understand cause and effect, and continuity and change. Students learn to use scaled timelines, including those involving negative and positive numbers, as well as calendars and dates to recall information on topics of historical significance and to illustrate the passing of time. There is a huge access to numerical sources in History, such as census statistics, C.S.O. studies. The world economic situation has made students aware of a multitude of sources based on facts and figures. Such sources will aid the numeracy skills of History students in the future.

Critical and creative thinking

Students develop capability in critical and creative thinking as they learn to generate and evaluate knowledge, clarify concepts and ideas, seek possibilities, consider alternatives and solve problems. Critical and creative thinking are integral to activities that require students to think broadly and deeply using skills, behaviours and dispositions such as reason, logic, resourcefulness, imagination and innovation in all learning areas at school and in their lives beyond school.

5.

Critical thinking is essential to the historical inquiry process because

it requires the ability to question sources, interpret the past from incomplete documentation, develop an argument using evidence, and assess reliability when selecting information from resources. Creative thinking is important in developing new interpretations to explain aspects of the past that are contested or not well understood. Such skills are critical in a post conflict Ireland. Histories are always being rewritten and revised. Our citizens need a high degree of social literacy in order to recognise manipulation and bias. This is especially true in the next decade as various groups seek to place their own interpretations on crucial events in our history. We need to ensure that we pass our national identity on to a generation who will be culturally and historically literate.

Conclusion:

History teachers want to engage with all the education partners in the promotion of literacy and numeracy in our schools. There are a huge number of History and English teachers in this country. That fact is no mere coincidence. The same skills and the same promotion of literacy, numeracy and effective communication skills are found in both subjects. While English teaching is being expanded at Junior Cycle, the subject it could most easily cross over with, History, will no longer be core. This seems incongruent. The study of History is the study of everything. Surely that is worth preserving.

Some quotes to think about:

"An attack on historical literacy is also an attack on the idea of citizenship. We in Ireland know only too well that public historical narratives can become fossilised into tribal myths. But the answer to this problem is not less History but more. History provides some protection against the manipulation of emotions by distorted and selective histories."

Fintan O' Toole, "The Irish Times", 9/10/11

" ... History is the greatest story ever told.."

An Taoiseach Enda Kenny T.D. 8/6/11