

A CLASSROOM APPROACH TO DEVELOPING HISTORICAL SKILLS*

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INTRODUCTION

Dr Mathews has presented a theoretical discussion and it is my purpose to provide some classroom examples and make some suggestions for the teacher who wishes to promote the development of historical skills.

After some general comments, specific attention is given to the concept of empathy and to a checklist for judging the reliability of sources.

THE INTEGRATION OF SKILLS AND CONTENT

This is a necessary starting-point; skills and concepts must be approached within a historical context; they cannot be learned in vacuo. The matrix given in Appendix 1 provides an example of how the present Standard 6 syllabus could be analysed in terms of skills and concepts.

WHAT SKILLS?

One would want to be clear about what skills should be promoted and what action is implied in the promotion of these skills. The circle diagram in Appendix 2 provides a useful summary.

THE ASSESSMENT OF SKILLS

How are teachers to assess the quality of the skill which a student shows in a particular answer?

Let it be said immediately that impressionistic and intuitive marking is not good enough. What is required is marking on a levels of response basis. Each question has one or more targets or objectives. The questions are set with these objectives in mind and students are assessed according to the extent to which they succeed in meeting the objectives or hitting the target. In other words, the marking is criterion-referenced.

In preparing a mark scheme, likely responses are graded hierarchically in a series of levels related to the extent to which students demonstrate the skills/knowledge demanded by the question. This is the difficult part in identifying the likely levels of response. Levels may be

adjusted after some of the answers have been considered.

On some questions, the mark range may fall within one level; elsewhere a band of marks will be identified appropriate to the level within which the answer falls. Then the teacher must look at other factors - such as the extent to which the answer is given illustrative support or the strength of the argument - in order to identify the final mark. So it is the quality of thought that is being assessed, not primarily the degree of factual content. All levels of response should be expressed positively, even at the lowest level.

How many levels? It depends on how complex the question is. Henry Macintosh,¹ who has had considerable experience in this type of assessment, states that pupil answers inevitably fall into six categories, in making comparisons between sources. Denis Shemilt², in investigating pupils' ideas about historical sources, uses four levels.

TWO PARTICULAR SKILLS

EMPATHY

Empathy is a mode of thinking incorporating a number of skills. It has been defined as the ability to understand the motives, feelings, problems, beliefs and values of people in the past. Remember that an imaginative interpretation must be based on knowledge and the source(s).

There are really four past worlds:

- the past as it actually was;
- the past as those there at the time saw it;
- how they said it was; and
- how we see it today.

Possible Assessment Levels for Answers

Level 1: uses knowledge to describe a way of life; not an empathetic response.

*Paper presented at SAHA Conference, Stellenbosch, 20.1. 1994.

Level 2: "everyday empathy"; some awareness of a specific situation but seen in terms of modern values and ideas or relies on hindsight.

Level 3: "restricted historical empathy". Candidate understands the role of hindsight and of different values, attitudes and beliefs but does not deal with the wider context.

Level 4: "Contextual historical empathy" where the thinking and feelings of individuals within the group may be shown. The situation and the overall context should be woven together to produce a coherent overall account.

Sources of Empathy available to the teacher - see Appendix 3.

EXAMPLE OF A GOOD EMPATHY ANSWER
(from the Natal Senior Certificate Examination)

"Imagine that you are an Arab Refugee who is about to swear this oath. Explain your aims and why you consider your cause to be justified. Mention the conditions in the refugee camps." (20)

Source:

*"Palestine is our country,
Our aim is to return
Death does not frighten us,
Palestine is ours,
We shall never forget her.
Another homeland we shall never accept!
Our Palestine, witness, O God and
History
We Promise to shed our blood for you!"*

[Oath of the Palestinians]

ANSWER

I am Joachim - I was the tender of a flock of sheep as large as the plain on which they

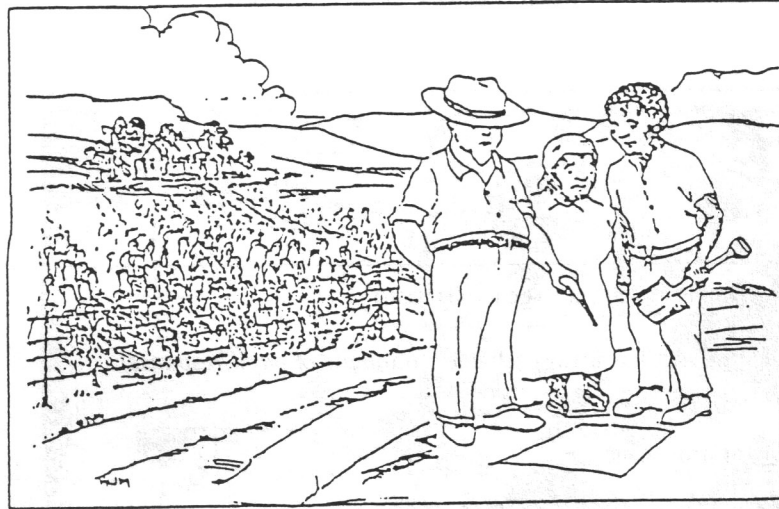
grazed. My home was close to the earth. I could wander where I pleased. But then when I was fifteen my father called me home. He told me of how the Jews had taken the land that belonged to my father's father and his father before him. He told me how they treacherously proclaimed that this land was theirs. And my father's anger I could feel. He spoke of the mighty United States that flooded the Jews with money. So much that they could build towers to reach the sky - and so much that they now had guns and airplanes so that they could fight the mightiest of nations. Then I returned to my flocks and soon the war came. My family - father, mother, two sisters - all were killed and the flocks scattered. With my uncle's family I fled. But where we fled those treacherous Jews caught us. We were confined in camps. For three years I have been only here - surrounded by barbed wire, living in a hut of flimsy wood. Food is always too little. Diseases spread quickly, killing young and old. And where we rise in protest, with inhumanity the Jews fire into crowds. But now I will no longer be beaten into submission by people of a foreign God. With this oath I will pledge the avenging of my family and my nation which the arrogant Jews will never crush under their dirty feet.

EXERCISE: THE LAND ACT OF 1913

Background -

In 1913, the South African government made a law which divided the land between blacks and whites. The law said that no whites could own land in African (black) areas and no African could own land in white areas, except in the Cape. If Africans lived on white-owned land, they must work for the landowner. Otherwise they must live as farmers in the tribal lands, the Reserves.

Source:



(M. COMRIE)

" ... and now all this here is for you."

You are Andile Mazibuko, the black farmer shown in this cartoon. Describe your feelings about the Land Act (1913) and how it was going to affect your way of life.

JUDGING THE RELIABILITY OF SOURCES

An 'A B C' checklist of questions to ask of a source:

[A] is for **AUTHOR** and **AUTHENTICITY**

- who produced the source?
- was the author close to the events, possibly an eye-witness?
- was the information recorded at the time or later?
- what were the sources of the author's information?
- why was the source produced?
- is the author likely to be trustworthy?
- is the source authentic, genuine? has it been altered in any way?

[B] is for **BIAS**, i.e. does the source give a one-sided or subjective viewpoint?

NOTE that **BIAS** is a natural part of the human personality and may be unintentional; it may also be quite deliberate.

Aspects to consider:

language - the use of colourful words or phrases to make things sound good or bad;

balance - in the selection of facts: the omission of facts; a one-sided view-point.

background - of the author of the source; fact or opinion; some personal advantage.

[C] is for **CONSISTENCY** and **COMPARISONS**

EXAMPLE

The Effect of Stalin's Economic Policies

At each town along the way, we saw hundreds and thousands of starving peasants at the station - with their last ounce of strength they had come from their villages in search of a stale piece of bread. They sat against the station walls in long dreary rows, sleeping, dying, and every morning the station guard would have the corpses removed in wagons covered with canvas.

An actor on tour in the Urals, early 1930s.

QUESTION: explain if and why you consider this source to be reliable.

Possible mark scheme:

TARGET: RELIABILITY

LEVEL I Stock answer or simple statement. (generalisation)

'Yes, because eyewitnesses are always reliable' (*example of pupil response*)

LEVEL II Simple analysis of provenance.

'It is reliable because the actor saw it with his own eyes.'

LEVEL III Does not take the source at face value.

'If the actor was definitely there, this is probably reliable because we know of no reason why he should lie. The language in the source is quite emotive, so he could be exaggerating a bit.'

LEVEL IV Questions the provenance, the writer's motives and cross-checks with other sources.

'We do not have enough information about this actor, where he saw these sights, or his personal views, to know if he is a reliable witness. However what he says would be a likely result of the decrease in grain and the reduction in the number of animals available for food.'

STANDARD 6 - GENERAL HISTORY SYLLABUS

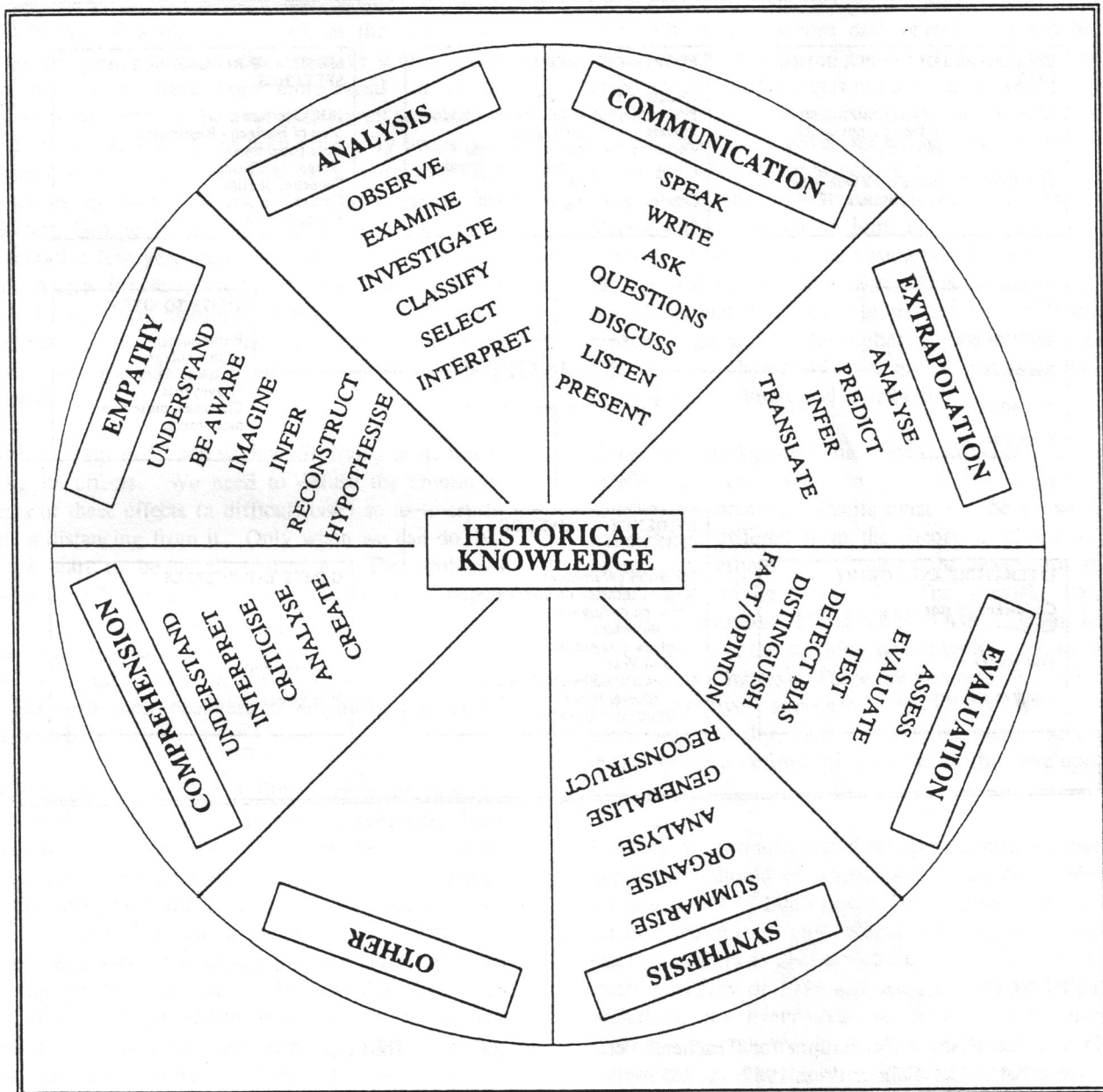
KNOWLEDGE/SKILLS/CONCEPTS MATRIX

CHAPTER	KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS/CONCEPTS	PARTICULAR KNOWLEDGE/SKILL/CONCEPT TO BE DEVELOPED
INTRODUCTION	Nature of history	Analysis of sources Time Causation and motivation	Types of sources: Material, oral, written, primary, secondary Analysis of sources; their incompleteness; bias. Time-lines Types of causes; differing viewpoints about significance.
RENAISSANCE	Literature: significant Art: developments Science: in each	Causations: Multiple, interacting Change through time Analysis of sources	Medieval characteristics contrasted with the Renaissance; causes of change; - role of individuals; results, significance
REFORMATION	The Catholic Church and Protestant Reformers The Catholic Reformation	Causation Individual motivation	Underlying and immediate causes; role of individuals; concept of a turning point; results and long-term significance
COLONISATION	Explanation, conquest, settlement An empire in North America	Differing motivations Source analysis Empathy; mapwork	Analysis of sources - bias and differing interpretations. Effects both short and long term. Life in the colonies
INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION IN BRITAIN	Industry, transport agriculture - changes Social, political effects	Interacting causes and individual motivation Empathy	The contribution of individual inventors; interpretations of economic and social changes and their significance. Life in the new conditions, slums etc.
FRENCH REVOLUTION	The Ancient Regime: Social classes, absolutism and democracy	Causation: significance Source analysis Empathy	Underlying and immediate causes. Effect of new ideas inside and outside France. Life for the nobles, clergy, peasants Nature of the revolution
BLACK PEOPLES OF SA	Iron-age people Zulu kingdom Mfecane	Use of sources Empathy Causation	Types of sources: differing interpretations Life style of different peoples Interacting causes
BATAVIAN PERIOD	Problems and solutions (1803-1806)	Evaluation Analysis of sources	Reforms of Janssens and De Mist
SECOND BRITISH OCCUPATION (from 1806)	British policies under Somerset, D'Urban Empathy Social life	Causation Source Analysis	Problems, changes, impact on inhabitants. Differing Viewpoints Interacting causes and significant results
THE GREAT TREK (up to 1854)	Boer treks to Natal, Transvaal and Free State	Causation Source analysis Mapwork	Interacting causes and significant results Differing interpretations

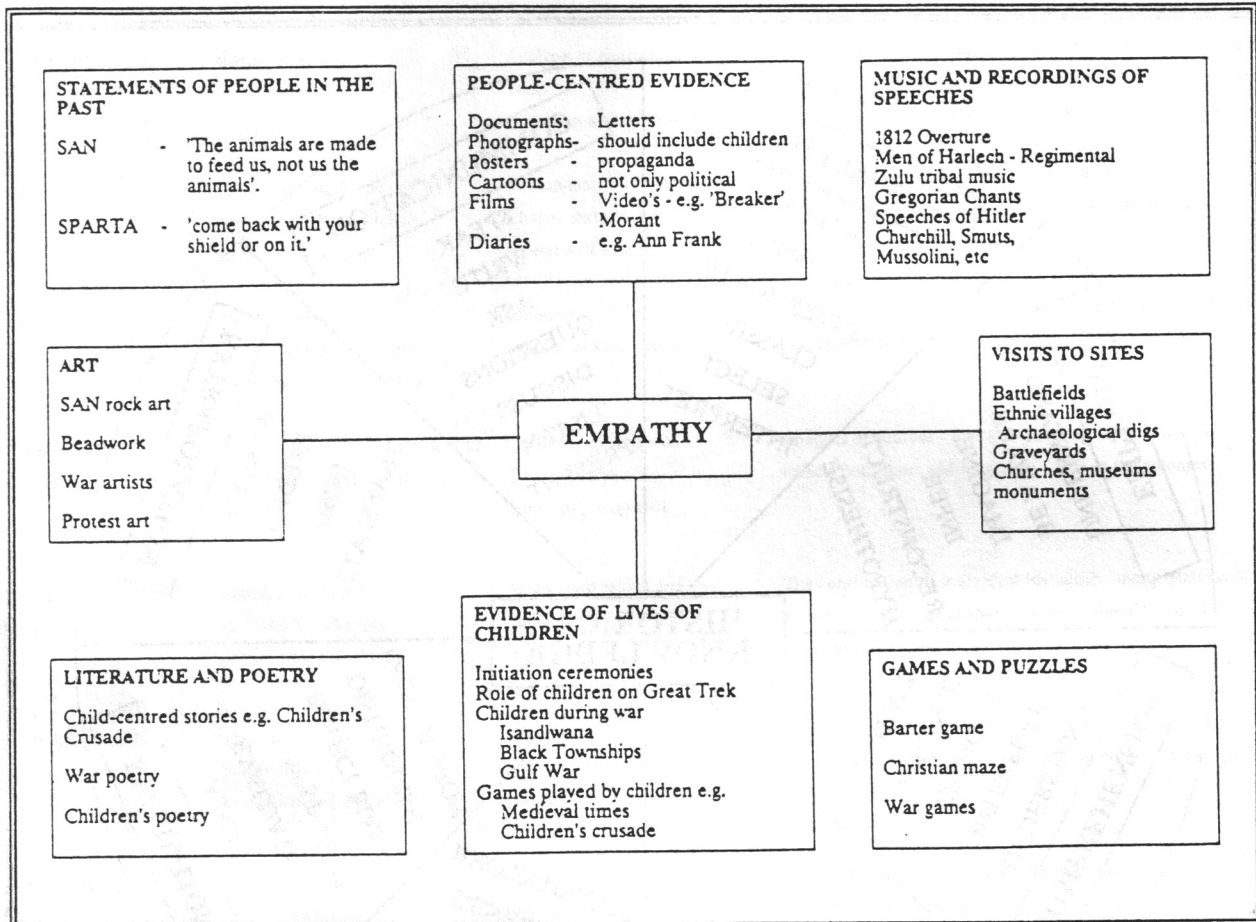
HISTORICAL SKILLS

APPENDIX 2

A SKILLS CIRCLE



SOURCES OF EMPATHY AVAILABLE TO THE TEACHER



REFERENCES:

1. The History Curriculum for Teachers: edit Portal C.; Falmer Press 1987: p. 189.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 42.