

Diversity & Inclusion *in History*

Case Study

2020

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1215

Head of History, Kathleen O'Hanlon shares the steps she and her school are taking to champion greater diversity in history and throughout the wider curriculum.



Kathleen O'Hanlon, Head of History, School in SE London

Kathleen O'Hanlon: Putting diversity at the heart of our school and its history curriculum

As teachers, we all want to be able to offer our students variety in their history curriculum, and of course, one that is inclusive. It can certainly be a challenge to provide variety and depth in the current restraints of the curriculum, but in our school we are continuously reviewing the content that we teach and trying to ensure it better reflects our students. We still have a long way to go, but here are some of the steps we've taken so far.

A whole-school mission

While we have made a lot of changes to the history we teach in our school, this has been part of a whole-school ambition to put diversity at the forefront of what we do.

Our school has created what we call 21c - a 21st century curriculum. It's like PSHE sessions, but with an increased focus on academia. We engage with students for their feedback on what groups and topics should be explored as part of 21c, and it has enabled a really student-led curriculum, where we explore themes and issues ranging from disability and London Transport accessibility to exploring diversity and inclusion and supporting the Stephen Lawrence Day Foundation.

Changing our approach to history

To match the changes taking place across the school, we've tried to personalise what we teach in history to our school community too. We have a large population of African and South Asian heritage and we want these students to feel represented in the lessons and history we teach.

I was really conscious that anything we introduced would need to be inclusive and not just an add on, or a one off, but a theme running throughout the curriculum. Where possible we now take a thematic approach to history, for example studying violence, protest or castles and exploring case studies in these areas from across the globe.

When I first came to teach at the school, the British Empire wasn't taught in much depth. I felt it was important to introduce a much more detailed look at this, exploring the more diverse groups who had a close relationship with Britain at this time. We then use this as a framework to look at more diverse groups across history. Through this approach I've been able to constantly expand on each area to widen our depth case studies.

The first depth case study we look at is India. Initially, we mainly focused on India in the context of the British Empire, but over the last couple of years we've really built on this.

I found that giving pupils more choice and a chance to personalise their learning has resulted in better engagement - particularly with tricky subjects. So I now issue my students with a timeline of Indian history, allowing them to research three things that are of interest to them. It goes way back to the Indus Valley Civilisation, where there's a host of events for students to explore. We've also developed lessons exploring the background of India, pre-colonial Britain and the developing relationship, Robert Clive, Gandhi and independence.

We use a similar format when exploring African history too. We want to make sure that black history does not focus on slavery alone, so we have worked really hard to introduce lessons on African kingdoms. We do look at slavery, but also at colonial Africa, The Scramble for Africa and African independence. I would like to cover more, and will be evolving this as we continue on our journey.

Delivering content sensitively and confidently

I think the worst thing we experience as teachers is when we go into the classroom and don't feel quite prepared. There may well be students in my class who know more on a subject than I do. So, when teaching new topics or more diverse histories, it's really important to do your research and preparation as it will put you in a much better position to deliver content with confidence.

However, the preparation that goes into teaching sensitive moments in history and checking pronunciations and the like can be challenging and time-consuming.

It would be hugely beneficial to have more teaching resources and support to help us navigate this. It would be particularly amazing for schools to be able to engage with historians or experts on more diverse topics, so that we can draw on their knowledge and deliver new themes and topics with greater support behind us.

There's still a long way to go

I'm proud of the work we've done so far in our school to champion greater diversity in history, but there is still a long way to go. We are far from experts on this, but we are excited to continue as a school and a department on this journey.

Katheleen O'Hanlon is head of history at a school in South East London.

Take a look at [Pearson's Diversity and Inclusion in History webpages](#) for more great content.