Disciplinary knowledge across the curriculum

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What is this?
Approaching evidence, interpretations and historical questions in a connected way.

What does the research say?
Foster and Goudie argue that interpretations and evidence have become siloised in both curriculum planning and the classroom and that they should be ‘put back together’.

Hammond taught Y9 about microhistory and cliometrics but theorised that they might be better able to understand the distinctness of these approaches if disciplinary knowledge had been more carefully planned across a curriculum.

Using this approach:
This diagram gives visual form to a way of connecting the questions historians ask, the sources they use as evidence and the interpretations that they form from evidence. It aims to make the process of historical knowledge construction more explicit to students.

This approach can make for a useful tool for curriculum planning. You can consider both the individual elements that appear across your curriculum (e.g. the types of question, evidence or interpretations) as well as how the elements relate to each other (e.g. exploring an example of evidence that a historian has used while adopting a microhistorical approach).

This approach can also be used at a unit level or an individual lesson level to structure student exploration of a topic. When asking students to generate questions about an area of study you might stress that different questions would require the use of different sources as evidence in order to answer them. When exploring the reasons that the interpretations of historians differ you might explore the role of both the evidence that they have selected as well as the question they have asked.

Do’s and Don’ts
Consider the guidance below when implementing this in your context.

- Approach this at a curricular level. Consider the questions, evidence and interpretations students encounter and what picture of the discipline this creates
- Include a range of historical approaches, evidential thinking and types of interpretation
- Don’t incorrectly conflate sources and evidence
- Don’t give the impression that usefulness is a fixed property of a source
- Don’t only approach interpretations in the often reductive way that GCSE/A-level exam questions do

In the History Classroom
Below are some examples of how you might use this in the classroom

Source Utility
You can help the students understand the idea of source utility by having the students select from a large bank of possible source material on a table at the front of the room after being given a question. You can then change the question and ask them to select again.

Resource structure
You can structure your resources in ways that make these connections explicit. Dan Warner-Meanwell’s Story, Sources, Scholarship template is a great example as is Hannah Cusworth’s simple but brilliant idea of always having sources on one side of a resource and interpretations on the other.

Further Reading
Hibbert, D and Patel, Z (2019), ‘Modelling the discipline: how can Yasmin Khan’s use of evidence enable us to teach a more global World War Two?’, Teaching History 177