

# **History Department's Supported Experiment**

## **Rationale and Process**

We decided to work on question and answer techniques because they are so integral to the teaching of History at A level. We welcomed the opportunity to focus on our strategies in a deliberately formalised manner so that it would enable us to evaluate the efficacy of existing practice and to analyse the impact of new ideas and approaches in questioning and answering.

All of us involved in the process agreed that we should not be looking to 'reinvent the wheel' but rather to highlight and reflect upon techniques that are already employed (successfully and unsuccessfully) in the vast majority of lessons at this level. While we initially concentrated on oral question and answers we quickly introduced strategies that required the students to produce written answers to different 'stages' of questioning, ranging from short factual recall to essay-style responses. A central feature of our approach throughout was to elicit the views of students (an example of one student questionnaire used is included separately), and they were fully apprised of the nature of the supported experiment.

The topic areas included for the supported experiment were, with the upper sixth, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Russian history and, with the lower sixth, 20<sup>th</sup> Century German history. A key factor influencing these choices was that fact that our colleagues at Barnet and CONEL colleges also taught either one or both of these subject areas. These external colleagues played a central role in the process, starting with their detailed reflections on the strategies employed by us in lessons on Tsar Alexander II of Russia (see separate materials). It was then agreed that they would look to build on and refine these approaches in their own lessons. The follow-up meetings saw us, among other things, discussing the work they had been doing with their own groups (see, for example, the separate sheet of materials on the rise of the Nazi Party).

## Question and Answer Supported Experiment

### **Focus -**

Allowing more think time for students.  
Staged questioning.  
Students will have been working on the topic for one/two weeks.  
Students will have prior warning of the lesson's activities.  
The purpose of the graded questioning is to prepare students to write an essay on Alexander II in the following lesson. The questions are designed to build up to the essay question.

### **Quick questions**

Students write down answers to a few short questions. Students are directed to answer each question within 5 seconds. Students work individually.

Once the questions are completed, students are chosen to read out their answers.

- Who preceded Alexander II?
- Which year was Emancipation?
- Which countries fought the Crimean war?
- Name the terrorist group that killed Alexander II?
- What were the zemstva?
- Name two other reforms apart from the zemstva reforms and the emancipation.
- What does narodnik mean?

### **Second stage**

Higher order questions, with longer think time.

Teacher directs questions and ensures 10-20 second think time for each student. All students think of the answer and then the teacher chooses a student to answer.

- Define an absolutist monarchy Russian style.
- To what extent was Alexander II solely responsible for reforms?
- Why were the 1860s more reforming than the 1870s?
- Give one political reason for emancipation.
- Give one social reason for emancipation
- Give one economic reason for emancipation.
- Give one political effect of emancipation.
- Give on social effect of emancipation.
- Give one economic effect of emancipation.
- Who were the revolutionaries?
- What changes did the revolutionaries want?

Possible harder questions:

- To what extent was emancipation successful?
- What are the implications for Russia as an absolutist monarchy?

### **Stage Three**

Highest order questions (assertive questioning).

Students will be put into groups and given a question to consider and discuss and note down an answer to. Then each group will be picked by the teacher to contribute to the answer. There will be 3 questions and each group will have 5 minutes to form an answer to each question.

### **Questions:**

- In what ways did Russia change in the period 1855-1881?
- What were the pros and cons of Alexander II's reign?
- Should Alexander II be remembered just for the Emancipation of the serfs?

### **Other possible higher order questions:**

- What appear to be the peculiar features of Russian history?
- Compare them with another country in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- How significant were the changes that were made 1855-1881?

### **Evaluation**

- Make a note of each student's mark from stage one.
- Make a map of the class and note down all the students who answer a question.
- Check the timing of think time.
- Consider the quality of the answer.
- Stage three - have a tick list of what we expect the answers to include and tick off what students have got in their answers and which groups have which elements of the answer.
- Could collect group answers in and compare them with the teacher's list.
- Target students - target 2 or 3 students of different abilities before the lesson and ask them to record their experience. Focus on their answers in stages 1,2,3 to compare and see whether their experience has improved.
- A questionnaire for the students.
- Peer observation.
- Essay on Alexander II in next lesson - checking learning and understanding.
- Use this lesson with two out of three U6 groups and compare results.

### **Questions on 'questions'.**

Please answer the following questionnaire, based on your experiences of the 'question and answer experiment.' Your answers will be kept confidential.

### **Stage One Questions.**

Did you find the first set of questions?  
(*tick all the following comments that apply*)

- useful
- good for revision
- stimulated your brain
- mechanical
- unhelpful

Did you find the time limit for answering the first set of questions?  
(*Tick one*)

- Too short
- Too long
- About right.

### **Stage two questions.**

Did you find the second set of questions: (*tick all the comments that apply*)

- Useful
- Tested how much knowledge you had
- Tested your ability to analyse information
- Good for revision.
- Too complicated - you didn't understand what was being asked
- Too complicated you didn't understand what answer was required.
- Too simplistic.
- Made you feel that you did not really know the topic.
- Made you feel that you did not understand the topic?
- Made you feel confident about the topic?

Did you find the time you had to answer them was:

- Too long
- Too short
- About right

If you answered that the time was 'too long' or 'too short' say why -  
i.e. **Tick only one**

- not enough thinking time,
- not enough time to actually write the answer,

- not enough time to decipher the question and answer
- Because you couldn't recall the information quickly enough.
- Other: *(please write a reason)*

### Stage Three questions

Did you find the third set of questions: (tick all the comments that apply)

- Useful
- Consolidated your knowledge
- Tested how much knowledge you had
- Tested your ability to analyse information
- Good for revision.
- Too complicated - you didn't understand what was being asked
- Too complicated you didn't understand what answer was required.
- Made you consider the overall picture.
- Made you feel confident about the topic.
- Made you feel that you did not know the topic?
- You felt that you had extended your analysis and information.

Did you have enough time to prepare an answer to the stage three questions?

Did you feel that the stages of questions helped you to build up to answering the questions in stage three?

Are there any comments you would like to make on questioning in class?

**To what extent was Hitler's appointment as chancellor in January 1933 considered a 'democratic solution' to the political crisis in Germany?**

<p><u>Nazi tactics - were they following legal means?</u></p>	<p>What was the German people's attitude towards democracy and why had this attitude developed?</p>
<p>Why did people vote NSDAP and was their support 'democratic'?</p>	<p>What was the attitude of the political elites - the army, the right wing politicians, towards democracy?</p>
<p>Nazi ideology and organisation - how democratic was it?</p>	<p>What was the experience of 'democracy' since 1919?</p>

### Follow up to Stage Three Questions

This exercise arose from discussions with external colleagues following the initial question and answer experiment at Woodhouse which was developed by David at Barnet College.

**Purpose:** To develop stage three questioning to create an essay plan.

**Process:**

- Students were all given an A3 handout with the question *“To what extent was Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor in January 1933 considered a ‘democratic solution’ to the political crisis in Germany?”*
- The handout was divided into boxes with a different factor relating to the question.
- Students were divided into mixed ability groups and given one factor to work on.
- Students were given 5 minutes to pool their ideas and note them in the box.
- Each group gave feedback on their assigned topic so that a consensus would be arrived at after discussion.
- Each individual student could then complete their own A3 sheet containing all the topics.

**Outcome**

The follow up to this exercise will be development of essay framing techniques to further clarify key concepts and obtain a more structured understanding of the overall question.