Teaching the very recent past: ‘Miriam’s Vision’ and the London bombings

‘Miriam’s Vision’ is an educational project developed by the Miriam Hyman Memorial Trust, an organisation set up in memory of Miriam Hyman, one of the 52 victims of the London bombings of 2005. The project has developed a number of subject-based modules, including history, which are provided free to schools through the website http://miriamsvision.org. Here, Alison Kitson and Sarah Thompson report and reflect on the challenges and opportunities they faced in developing a historical enquiry for the project. In particular, they address the potential evidential pitfalls they faced in teaching a topic well within living memory and describe practical strategies for helping students to manage this challenge. Through their evaluation of their practice, Kitson and Thompson add to the collective efforts of history teachers to theorise the value of teaching the very recent past.

Three years ago, a woman called Mavis Hyman emailed Alison asking if they could meet to discuss a project linked to the London bombings of 2005 (commonly referred to as ‘7/7’). Three years later, close to the tenth anniversary of 7/7, Alison and Sarah helped to launch ‘Miriam’s Vision’ to considerable local, national and international attention. In this article we focus on a series of challenges and opportunities that we encountered when writing and teaching an enquiry on such a recent and shocking event. In doing so we hope not only to provide suggestions about how to teach this or similar events, but also to make a modest contribution to some important debates in history education such as what ‘counts’ as good history teaching and learning, the extent to which history education can or should have a moral dimension, the arguments for teaching the very recent past and the distinctive contribution history education makes within the school curriculum. These debates are not new, but in the light of curriculum changes at all key stages, are as relevant as ever.

Our roles in this project were quite distinctive, at least initially. Alison wrote the first version of a history enquiry focusing on 7/7 and Sarah subsequently taught the enquiry to a Year 9 class. We therefore bring a ‘planning perspective’ and a ‘teaching perspective’ to the article, although inevitably this is a blurred distinction: the planning process involved many teaching considerations and the piloting phase led to modifications of the plans. Nevertheless, our perspectives are different and we have responded separately to a series of specific challenges in order to make this explicit.

What is ‘Miriam’s Vision’?

Miriam Hyman died when the number 30 bus was blown up in Tavistock Square on 7 July 2015. She was one of the 52 victims of 7/7. She was 32, a daughter to Mavis and John and sister to Esther, and she worked as a picture researcher for the BBC (Figure 1). On the morning of 7/7 she arrived at King’s Cross station after the first three bombs had already gone off, though at the time no one knew what was happening. Her father called her and suggested she go somewhere for a coffee until things returned to normal. However, anxious to get to her meeting in Canary Wharf, she must have decided to jump on the first bus she saw that might get her closer. She was sitting directly in front of the bomber on the number 30 bus. It was four days before the family received confirmation of her death.

Three years after Miriam’s death, her family established the Miriam Hyman Memorial Trust. Its first project was to set up and build capacity in a children’s eye care centre, a decision based partly on a need to establish a memorial, partly on Miriam’s heritage (her mother was born in Calcutta) and partly on Miriam’s interest in visual art and her own need for glasses. Later, the family began to search for ways to address the way Miriam lost her life and a meeting with the headteacher of Miriam’s old secondary school led to the development of ‘Miriam’s Vision’, an educational project based on ambitious, wide-ranging aims: ‘preparation for rational, independent thinking and action on personal, local, national and global levels and responsible citizenship recognising one’s own rights and those of others, irrespective of race, religion, tradition and culture’ (1). The aim was to create and pilot subject-based modules, find ways to evaluate their impact and ultimately to provide them free to schools via a website that would be launched on the tenth anniversary of 7/7. (2)

When Alison met the family, their passion, bravery and commitment were evident and modules in dance, art and business and enterprise had already been written.

Alison Kitson and Sarah Thompson

Alison Kitson is Senior Lecturer in History Education at UCL Institute of Education, London. Sarah Thompson teaches history at Norbury Manor Business and Enterprise College (11-18 girls’ comprehensive), Croydon.
and piloted with geography also in development. Most of the modules drew on Miriam’s Indian heritage and all were concerned to encourage highly collaborative ways of working in the classroom. There was, however, no immediate plan to include a history module, nor all that much on 7/7 specifically, despite the short film ‘Miriam’s Story’ (made by BBC colleagues) which would sit at the heart of the project. It seemed essential to have some way of addressing the very specific way that Miriam died. History, PSHE and citizenship were all possibilities, each offering a different lens through which to view the events of 7/7, and in the end, all three were included. Our chief interest was in the distinctive contribution that history might make: what could our approach to this event offer that other subjects could not? The outcome was a history enquiry based around the question ‘What happened after the London bombings?’ The enquiry comprises six or seven lessons and leads to an outcome in which students analyse the consequences of 7/7 through an essay, a documentary or a piece of art work (Figure 2).

**Why teach about 7/7?**

Perhaps the most compelling reason to teach a recent event such as 7/7 is because a little knowledge can sometimes be a dangerous thing. Research about British students’ understanding of 9/11 suggests that while they think they know a reasonable amount about the terrorist attack on the twin towers, much of it is incorrect and some of it is based on conspiracy theories. Anecdotal evidence from the piloting of ‘Miriam’s Vision’ suggests that students (mainly Key Stage 3) know less about 7/7 than about 9/11, despite it being both temporally and spatially closer to them. Sarah’s London-based students knew it was a terrorist attack and that public transport was involved, but that was the limit of their knowledge. This reflects a gap that can occur in students’ knowledge of the past. While we tackle plenty of twentieth-century events, usually in Year 9 and beyond, the more recent past – say the last 25 years – falls into the gap between ‘history’ and ‘current affairs’. Culpin has suggested that this may be a legacy from Kenneth Clarke’s ‘20 year rule’ in the early 1990s when he ruled that history at Key Stage 4 should end 20 years earlier. Other reasons probably include running out of time in Year 9, the dates of ‘Modern World’ GCSE modules and a lack of textbook resources. Some teachers may also be inclined to avoid controversial or potentially sensitive topics. Whatever the reason, this ‘knowledge gap’ has been around long enough to mean that Alison never learned about the Cold War at school and Sarah – 20 years younger – never learned about its end. We should not be teaching current affairs, but there is a strong case to teach those events from the very recent past which have a particularly direct effect on students’ lives today. Not knowing about 7/7 (and indeed 9/11) seems to us an impediment to understanding the modern world, even if the impact of both events is not yet truly fathomable. It cannot be history teachers’ job to tackle this lack of knowledge alone, but there are distinctive ways we can contribute, by providing historical context and perspective or by drawing on the principles of historical enquiry to impose some kind of methodological discipline to the handling of often highly emotive and sensitive issues and problematic sources of evidence. We suggest that a ‘modern world’ enquiry, focusing precisely on this knowledge ‘gap’, might be incorporated towards the end of Year 9. This would be helpful for those ending their study of history at Key Stage 3 and extremely useful for those moving on to the new history GCSE courses starting in September 2016, many of which have options which extend almost up to the present day.

**Challenge One: is this ‘good’ history?**

**Alison**

One of the biggest challenges when teaching the very recent past is the lack of historical perspective. It is impossible, in 2015, to fully appreciate the significance of 7/7 and to properly examine historical interpretations, especially if we apply McAleavy’s definition that these ought to be interpretations produced some time after the event in question. In that sense, the options in terms of a second-order conceptual focus are restricted and almost certainly subject to change as different concepts (such as change and continuity) become more appropriate over time. There are examples in this journal where the second-order conceptual focus of an enquiry has evolved quite organically (and often messily) from the historical topic and the questions that naturally arise from it. Foster has gone further in exploring how changes in historiographical debates might be reflected in the questions we ask. What has received less explicit attention is the way in which the choice of second-order concept might change in response to new evidence. The important point is that nothing is fixed about the way we interrogate the past because our understanding of that past – whether it’s ten years ago or 800 years ago – is constantly shifting. This process is magnified when we...
study the very recent past as the nature of evidence changes quickly, starkly contrasting interpretations emerge in quick succession and the longer-term nature of impact and change is revealed only by time passing. I have no doubt that while the main second-order concept I chose for the 7/7 module was 'consequences', over time it will be more appropriate to foreground significance or change and continuity or some kind of combination of the two.

So why choose 'consequence' without its usual partner, 'cause'? Certainly, my first instinct was to head towards cause and consequence and to explore the roots of the attack as well as its effects, but could I do justice to both in a single enquiry? Causation in many ways was the more obvious choice. A causal analysis of 7/7 would have placed a stronger emphasis on its wider historical context, a notable strength of the Schools History Project (SHP) GCSE Modern World Study module which takes a current problem or issue and explores its historical roots. Culpin has helpfully set out what this module, focusing on global terrorism, might look like, with questions about the motives of the 9/11 bombers, the aims of the 'War on Terror' and predictions about whether this war will succeed. Culpin defends the last question on the grounds that being able to speculate in a sensible, well-informed way demands historical perspective; it is not the (potential) accuracy of such a prediction that matters but the grounds on which such a prediction is made.

I have both admired and taught this module over many years. Placing a current – or even very recent – event in context offers the prospect of greater historical perspective and sets out to answer the big 'why' questions that have been missing in much of the educational responses to 9/11 in the USA. The advantage of doing so in the context of a GCSE module is the time you have available, probably a term or around 30 lessons. This was not an option for our 7/7 scheme of work, which focused on setting the events of 7/7 in a wider context of other terrorist groups across the world and throughout history (Figure 3). By introducing students to different groups who have been described as terrorists in the past, such as the Suffragettes or Nelson Mandela's ANC, students explored the varied reasons that people turn to terrorism as a course of action. This lesson worked well as a precursor to a deeper study of 7/7 by enabling students to locate the specific example of 7/7 in a broader context, not just of terrorism but also of their previous areas of study. Furthermore, it opened up a dialogue about why the label 'terrorist' is sometimes contested.

Although the enquiry created opportunities for different kinds of historical thinking about, for example, the nature of evidence and the causes of 7/7 (a discussion of which emerged quite naturally the first time we looked at the events themselves), the primary focus throughout the lessons was on the consequences of 7/7, a focus I would not normally have chosen. In early lessons, the consequences we explored were immediate, personal and very directly connected to 7/7 but as the lessons progressed, students started to understand the ripple effects of 7/7 and to differentiate between different types of consequences. Discussions about the extent to which a consequence was directly or indirectly connected to 7/7 were especially fruitful: were changes to MI5 procedures (such as the quality of photographic evidence) only the consequence of 7/7 or was the broader context of 9/11 and other terrorist threats significant here, too?

When it came to the outcome, most of the students chose the essay, producing work that was extremely thoughtful. All of the students grouped the consequences into different kinds of categories (e.g. personal and public, positive and negative, direct and indirect, short and medium term), and assessed the overall impact of 7/7 from the perspective of 2015. The final outcome encouraged students to probe the significance of these consequences and to explore – via the wide range of personal testimony they encountered – the highly personal nature of any judgements that have been made (see Figure 4). The students who chose to complete a piece of art work needed to decide which consequences they would include and how they would represent them, which encouraged them to analyse the types of consequences and the perspectives they were drawing on. One student chose to represent some of the consequences as items on a child’s toy shelf: a derailed train to represent the tubes hit, Bratz dolls to show Islamophobia and an injured teddy to represent the injured (Figure 5). Although the labels which accompanied the artwork sometimes lacked the sophistication of the longer essays, having the option for a visual response was hugely motivating for some students.

Sarah

When I was asked to pilot the history lessons I was concerned that I would be reinforcing the stereotype that all terrorists are Muslim, especially in an incredibly ethnically diverse school in Croydon. I decided to add a lesson at the beginning of the scheme of work, which focused on setting the events of 7/7 in a wider context of other terrorist groups across the world and throughout history (Figure 3). By introducing students to different groups who have been described as terrorists in the past, such as the Suffragettes or Nelson Mandela’s ANC, students explored the varied reasons that people turn to terrorism as a course of action. This lesson worked well as a precursor to a deeper study of 7/7 by enabling students to locate the specific example of 7/7 in a broader context, not just of terrorism but also of their previous areas of study. Furthermore, it opened up a dialogue about why the label ‘terrorist’ is sometimes contested.

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### Figure 2: Enquiry outline

**Enquiry question:** What happened after the London bombings?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson 1</th>
<th>Golden nugget</th>
<th>Lesson 4</th>
<th>Golden nugget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is terrorism?</strong> (optional)</td>
<td>That terrorism is a tool that has been used by many different groups across the world and for many different reasons.</td>
<td><strong>Personal consequences (2): Can negative events have positive consequences?</strong></td>
<td>In the face of the events of 7/7 some people have been able to respond positively, including Miriam Hyman’s family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities</strong></td>
<td>Establish a stereotype of a ‘typical’ terrorist from students’ own knowledge. Provide pairs with case studies of different terrorist groups and maps of the world. Share findings to create a world map of terrorist actions. End the lesson with a discussion about why the term ‘terrorist’ is a contested one.</td>
<td><strong>Activities</strong></td>
<td>(Access to IT is necessary for this activity). Start with students’ own research about Gill Hicks/Martine Wright and follow up with the short documentary Six Years On. How have people responded differently? Students use selected websites to research personal responses to 7/7, including the Miriam Hyman Memorial Trust’s website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lesson 2</strong></td>
<td><strong>Golden nugget</strong></td>
<td><strong>Lesson 5</strong></td>
<td><strong>Golden nugget</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What happened on 7 July 2005 (<strong>7/7</strong>)?</td>
<td>That 7/7 was a significant event with a heavy loss of life and widespread injuries. It was the first time that British citizens targeted their compatriots on their own soil without warning and completely randomly.</td>
<td>What were the wider, less personal consequences of 7/7?</td>
<td>A number of specific things have changed as a result of 7/7 regarding, for example, emergency procedures and the work of the security services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities</strong></td>
<td>Use memorial to 7/7 in Hyde Park as an ISM. Build up knowledge about what happened on that day, drawing on students’ own knowledge. Introduce the victims of 7/7 and in particular, Miriam. Play the first two clips of Miriam’s Story. Reveal the enquiry question and ensure students know what we mean by ‘consequences’. Possible homework: to ask friends/relatives what they remember about 7/7.</td>
<td><strong>Activities</strong></td>
<td>Start with a discussion of who was blamed for 7/7, including MI5. Students investigate and compare the Coroner’s verdict, the families’ recommendations and the Coroner’s recommendations. Establish that all recommendations were accepted in full. Students investigate whether any of these recommendations have actually been implemented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lesson 3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Golden nugget</strong></td>
<td><strong>Lesson 6</strong></td>
<td><strong>Golden nugget</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal consequences (1): Who was affected by 7/7?</td>
<td>There was a wide range of people affected by the bombings beyond the 52 victims and each was affected in different ways by the experience.</td>
<td>What happened after the London bombings? (1) Analysing the consequences of 7/7</td>
<td>The consequences of 7/7 were (and continue to be) diverse and complex. The job of the historian is to analyse what we know in order to make some tentative judgements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities</strong></td>
<td>Discuss outcomes from homework if applicable. Watch Dr Buckman interview (referred to in Alison’s text on page 32). Discuss usefulness of this eye-witness report and compare his testimony with other personal accounts and reports. Start to compile a record of the consequences of 7/7. Homework: students research either Gill Hicks or Martine Wright.</td>
<td><strong>Activities</strong></td>
<td>Students use consequence cards to find ways to analyse the consequences of 7/7, e.g. short and long term, type, direct/indirect, personal/public, positive/negative etc. They select the most relevant cards for different questions. Set outcome task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lesson 7</strong></td>
<td><strong>Golden nugget</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What happened after the London bombings? (2) (optional)</td>
<td>Students share outcomes and discuss what they believe are the most significant consequences of 7/7 and how our views about this may change over time. Return to Miriam’s Story at the end.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Challenge Two: the dominance of personal testimony and reportage as source material

**Alison**

In the summer of 2012, a group of PGCE students sat in my kitchen and debated possible lines of enquiry. One theme that kept recurring was the problematic nature of the evidence about 7/7 and how the nature of that evidence has changed over time. Specifically, we discussed the ways in which initially, sources of information about 7/7 consisted largely of reportage and how reports changed from the moment of the explosions (when a 'power surge' on the lines was blamed) onwards, with images of the injured and of course the bus ripped apart in Tavistock Square. Thereafter, sources of information broaden, with a heavy emphasis on personal testimony. There was a torrent of online material – some of it based around conspiracy theories – which makes 7/7 both hugely accessible and extremely challenging to research. Over time, there was greater analysis of why it had happened and of its impact, particularly in the wake of the Coroner’s Report. And of course each anniversary has brought and continues to bring further recollection and forms of memorialisation.

For a while, an evidential focus for the enquiry seemed ideal as a way to give the module historical rigour and criticality. However, I began to feel uncomfortable about the extent to which this underplayed the very human consequences of the event and I eventually rejected evidence as the primary focus. Nevertheless, it would be important to tackle the challenges of the source material quite explicitly. The enquiry is therefore based on a wide range of source material which can be compared and interrogated. For example, one of the sources is a filmed interview with Dr Laurence Buckman, who was one of the many doctors in the courtyard of the BMA (British Medical Association) desperately trying to keep survivors of the number 30 bus alive while London was in gridlock. His testimony is unique, matter-of-fact and informative but as with all eye-witnesses, he can only recount his own memories of the event and of course his experience was a very specific one. Within the enquiry we therefore sought to gently tease out what we can and cannot learn from his testimony. Some of the inaccuracies of news reports are also identified, for example about Miriam’s age and occupation.

**Sarah**

Using a broad range of source material widened the students’ perceptions of what counts as ‘evidence’. Indeed, many of the types of sources used throughout the enquiry were quite different to the source material that students encounter regularly in their history lessons whether in textbooks or elsewhere. Using films as evidence, such as the live interview with Dr Buckman, which was used in lesson 3, certainly engaged them but did pose some significant challenges. In particular students were reluctant to be critical when using filmed interviews as evidence because many of them believed that everything they watched was true and it took me some time to get students to move beyond the naïve assumption that, ‘he was there at the time so we can trust this source’.

Figure 3: The wider historical context – an overview of terrorism
Through careful questioning, students eventually began to see that this was one man’s testimony, coming from a particular angle, and that might affect how we use it as evidence. They shifted from a focus on ‘trust’ and started to consider the role of perspective and degrees of typicality and usefulness.

In lesson 4, when newspaper articles and media reports were used as source material, students found it much easier to be critical. They could point out factual inaccuracies in the reports and recognised that often newspapers have an angle when they report the news. Many of the students pointed out that the articles were produced immediately after 7/7 and that perhaps full reports hadn’t been produced or information not fully disclosed to the media, recognising the problems this created in using newspapers as sources of evidence. Using the internet as a source of information and evidence also engaged the students. They enjoyed having the freedom of independent research, albeit within the limits of websites I directed them towards. It would be possible to give students a freer rein but it would be important to explore the limitations of the internet and the conspiracy theories they might find there in even greater depth than I chose to do. Interestingly, it was websites such as these that the students referenced most directly and frequently in their final outcomes.

Although they drew on information gained from the newspaper articles and personal testimony, none of the students referenced these sources explicitly, perhaps because they didn’t understand how to reference them, or because they were still unsure how far these were ‘legitimate’ sources of evidence for historians.

Over the course of the enquiry there were many discussions about the possible problems of using information from the very recent past as a source of evidence, and many of the students showed an awareness that we are only some way along the continuum Culpin has described from ‘news bulletins’ to more ‘considered journalism’ to historians’ attempts to situate events in a wider context. Although they drew on information gained from the newspaper articles and personal testimony, none of the students referenced these sources explicitly, perhaps because they didn’t understand how to reference them, or because they were still unsure how far these were ‘legitimate’ sources of evidence for historians.

Inevitably, in an enquiry on 7/7, the personal angle makes an already highly emotive topic even more emotionally charged. Miriam’s story is not the only one featured in the enquiry; there are the stories of other victims, other bereaved families, others who were injured or traumatised by the events they witnessed. The proximity and horror of the event, and the personal stories attached to it, could potentially start to blur the boundaries between ‘history’ and ‘moral education’ but it is open to debate how far these boundaries are sometimes blurred anyway. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the aims of history education in any depth, but an earlier, well-documented debate in the pages of this journal provides a useful starting point. Nicholas Kinloch argued against an explicit ‘moral dimension’ when teaching the Holocaust and advocated that students can only ever really become better historians, and in history lessons that is what we should aim to achieve.

In one of the responses to Kinloch, McLaughlin replies that the reason why the Holocaust is historically significant is because of its moral and social significance, and without acknowledging this in the classroom we lose the meaning and human impact of the event. Paul Salmons, providing a later and immensely thoughtful contribution to the debate, urged a rigorously historical approach to teaching the Holocaust which rejects presentist aims and which does justice to the integrity and complexity of the subject matter, but he does so in ways that are enormously powerful and poignant, partly through the

Figure 4: A student’s analysis of significant consequences

There is no way to judge which consequence was the most significant, because different people who experienced the bombing differently, as a victim, eye witness, doctor or someone watching it years later. For example, a survivor who may have been inside of the trains would’ve said the most significant thing that happened after the bombings were the injuries that they received or the psychological damage they suffered from afterwards. On the other hand, a doctor, such as Doctor Buckman, who described 7/7 as ‘coincidences’ probably thought that the medical response to all the casualties was the most important thing that happened, as a lot of people who were deemed ‘saveable’ were tended to and received the attention they needed. A person who watched the news during the time may have thought that the serious thing that they experienced was the amount of coverage it got on the T.V.
use of personal stories. His aims are not moral ones, but the outcomes surely cannot fail to have a moral dimension.

When writing the enquiry, I wanted it to have an emotional impact; I wanted the students to feel sadness and outrage, especially in the first lesson. Nevertheless, it was important that the enquiry balanced its emotional impact with more subtle, critical dimensions and aims. In the USA, teaching resources about 9/11 have tended to either take a critical approach or have promoted American patriotism and an appreciation of American values and freedoms. Clearly, any whiff of the latter – or its equivalent in the context of 7/7 – would not do in this case. This enquiry was not designed to make us feel proud of our British values (and the fact that the four bombers were themselves British makes this complicated in any case). That is not to say that sympathy with the terrorists’ cause was anywhere near the agenda but the central purpose of the enquiry was not to make judgements about their actions but rather to analyse these actions and their consequences. In other words, the intended outcomes were historical: to understand a past event, to interrogate and evaluate sources of information about it and to analyse its consequences. This is a very different starting point to one in which the promotion of particular values takes centre stage and in many ways, historical enquiry is our way through these choppy waters. The asking and answering of big, significant questions, underpinned by a critical examination of source material, by an attempt to offer explanations of the past and by an inclination to caution, especially when communicating conclusions, provides a way through ‘difficult’, even controversial history. The ultimate aims of the enquiry are therefore historical, not moral. But Sarah’s students took more than just these aims away with them.

**Sarah**

The personal angle was particularly effective with my Year 9 class. As Miriam’s story was gradually revealed to them throughout the lessons (and I think this is important) they came to care about her and her family. They began to feel a connection with her and the situation she found herself in, and this drove them to want to understand the historical context in which she lost her life. This was perhaps why their final outcomes were so reflective and of such a high quality. Most of them wanted to do justice to Miriam, as well as the other victims, when they produced their outcomes.

For many of my students in Year 9, the impact of the enquiry had a personal dimension for them, too. Although they were too young to remember the event itself, they began to recognise the impact it had had on their own lives, realising that 7/7 was the catalyst for some of what has happened since only while taking part in the lessons. The ethnic make-up of my school is predominantly Asian. Many of the girls in the class opened up about their own or their families’ experiences of Islamophobia and stereotyping. They felt, in the safe classroom environment, that they could discuss their personal stories in relation to the historical event. Regardless of whether they had a personal experience to share, all students began to show an understanding that the impact of an historical event can spread far beyond the immediate aftermath. In these discussions, I also saw how many students started to break down their own stereotypes and prejudices by referencing examples of terrorism they had encountered in the first lesson. This helped to set one of the consequences of 7/7 – increased antipathy towards Muslims – in a broader context.

**Challenge 4: responding to someone else’s agenda**

**Alison**

One of the questions that one might reasonably ask – and indeed was asked by some of my PGCE students this year when they were introduced to this enquiry – is the extent to which my freedom in writing it was restricted by the broader aims of the Trust who after all would ‘own’ the materials in the long term. Would I have focused mainly on the consequences of 7/7 if the Trust’s own vision for the education programme had been different? The main message the Trust was keen to see embedded in the history enquiry was one of optimism – that it is possible to choose an unexpected path after a difficult event and that it is possible to respond positively. This was certainly one factor in my decision to focus mainly on consequences. So does this in turn limit the enquiry’s integrity?

First, once we all agreed that a focus on consequences would be productive and historically valid I was at no point told what to include in the enquiry. On one occasion, the Trust suggested a final activity at the end of the last lesson which would encourage the students to apply their learning to their own lives but they were entirely happy with my request that this be clearly designated as a possible non-history extension.
Second, a degree (albeit sometimes flimsy in classrooms) of protection against manipulation in this case surely lies in historical enquiry. Any pre-determined view on the past in ways that take us beyond story and chronicle, myth and propaganda? Citizenship won’t get disconnected with the family, my own sense of the different historical integrity but it is the result of my intentions, my endorsement by an awarding body. I believe that my enquiry has connections in Dawson, I. (2015) ‘Cunning Plan for putting the people into the classroom, are the result of particular, human influences and decisions of some kind or another and the challenge is to be able to critique them for what they are, rather than for what you fear they will be. Teachers must critique (and adapt) resources, ideas, enquiries and lesson plans, whether they are downloaded from the web, shared among the department or endorsed by an awarding body. I believe that my enquiry has historical integrity but it is the result of my intentions, my connections with the family, my own sense of the different purposes and functions of history. Ultimately, therefore, it is for others to judge!

Is there a place for this kind of history?

We have written about the emotional, personal impact of this enquiry on students and we ought to emphasise that it is not only a connection to 7/7 that could make this a sensitive and even uncomfortable experience for some students. Other related experiences of trauma, either in this country or elsewhere, could be rekindled and if this was likely, it could be prudent to tone down the emotive content, especially of the first lesson. Sarah was very conscious of the predominantly Muslim population within her class and has outlined the steps she took to ensure that these students did not feel singled out or uncomfortable. The strong relationship she had with the class by the end of Year 9 was certainly a factor in the openness with which she was able to manage potentially difficult discussions, for example about the impact that 7/7 had on their own lives.

This all reminds us of how recent events, or events that are in some ways ‘difficult’ to teach for personal or emotional reasons, can present us with challenges. But this should not deter us from exploring them in history classrooms for where else will students be encouraged to analyse events and their impact, to use a range of source material critically and comparatively and to examine different perspectives and interpretations of the past in ways that take us beyond story and chronicle, myth and propaganda? Citizenship won’t get you there, nor PSHE, geography or business education. Each of these has its own unique and helpful contribution to make, including in ‘Miriam’s Vision’. But the very rules of historical enquiry, the fact that no answer can be predetermined, no claim can be validated without a suitable weight of supporting evidence and no analysis can be fully realised without some kind of broad, explanatory framework, means that our contribution is an important one.

REFERENCES

1 www.miriamsvision.org. Subjects included are history, citizenship, PSHE, geography, art, dance and business and enterprise.
2 The website has now been launched and anyone can access the materials for history and other subjects free of charge.
3 You can access the film ‘Miriam’s Story via the ‘Miriam’s Vision’ website.
5 Culpin, C. (2005) ‘Breaking the 20-year rule: very modern history at GCSE’ in Teaching History, 120, Diversity and Divisions Edition, pp. 14-17. In fact this ruling turned out to be unnecessary because the National Curriculum was revised before any student had reached Key Stage 4 in history and we never saw the fruits of the promise to make history compulsory to 16.
8 By second-order concepts we are referring to the concepts of cause and consequence, change and continuity, similarity and difference, historical interpretations, significance and evidence. These are not to be confused with first order or substantive concepts which are more closely tied to specific knowledge and include, for example, empire, peasantry, church and revolution.
11 At the time of writing, OCR continues to offer a Modern World Study as part of their SHP GCSE course but this will not be a feature of their new GCSE course from September 2016.
12 Culpin, op. cit.
14 www.since911.com
15 Of course, a particular focus on ‘consequence’ does not preclude the possibility of exploring ‘cause’. Consider how often we include work around the concept of ‘evidence’ regardless of the main conceptual focus of an enquiry, or how often we consider issues of similarity and difference alongside change and continuity, or introduce different interpretations when analysing cause. The question is not therefore ‘which concepts are we ignoring’ but rather ‘which concept are we privileging in particular?’ The focus on ‘consequences’ was therefore not intended to exclude any consideration of ‘cause’ but was intended to direct attention away from a particular focus on causation.
16 See Culpin, op. cit. for other examples of terrorism you might use.
17 Gill Hicks and Martine Wright were both severely injured in the 7/7 bombings. Martine Wright now plays sitting volleyball for Great Britain and Gill Hicks is the founder of M.A.D. for Peace.
18 The film Six Years On was made by the Guardian newspaper. The film can be accessed at www.theguardian.com/uk/video/2011/may/06/7-7-bombings-victims-survivors-request-video
19 For example miriam-hymanc.com, gilltalks.com, paralympics.org.uk/3athletes/martine-wright, theguardian.com, recent coverage of the tenth anniversary and miriamsvision.org where the students can see that this enquiry is itself a consequence of 7/7.
20 Culpin, op. cit.
22 For example, see www.holocausteducation.org.uk
26 Hess & Stoddard, op. cit.