

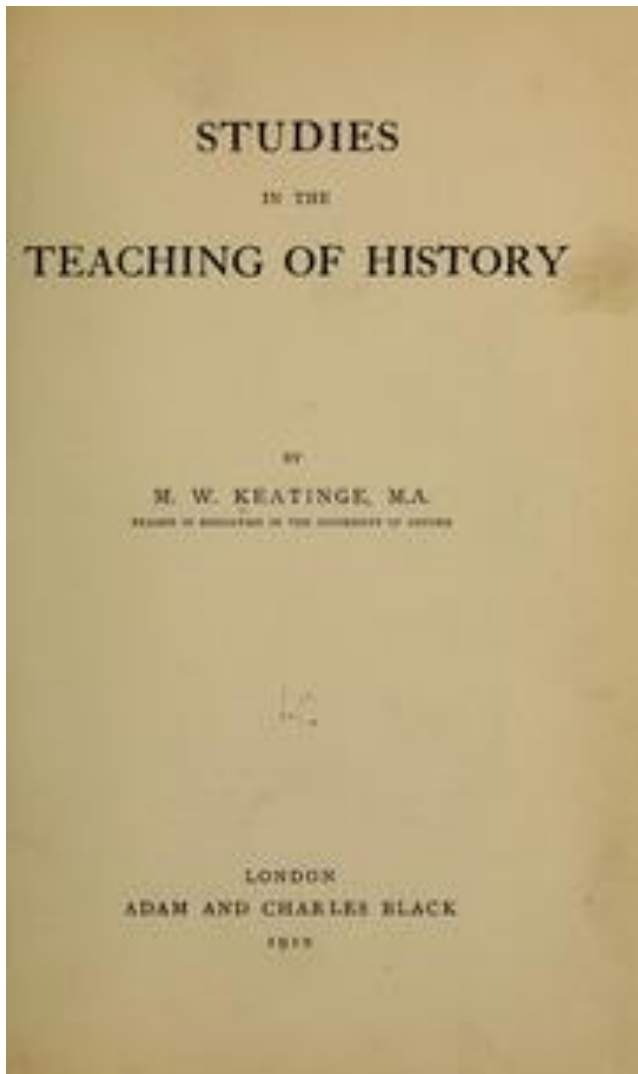
# What does it mean to build powerful historical knowledge? Critical reflections on the aims and nature of school history

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# Part 1. Why is History Difficult?

# Why is History Difficult?



- Hereward the Wake was a good ruler over a country. He was ruler over the English people. He was born in the year 1076. He died in the year 1381.
- Thomas à Becket was quite a little boy when he became king. He was a good little king. He was born in the year 1080, and he died in the year 1400.
- Jack Cade was a good ruler and a good man. He was born in the year 1090, and he fought a great rebellion which was called Jack Cade's rebellion. He died in the year 1100 after many happy years.
- Muriel Howrad, 14 years old (Maurice Keatinge *Studies in the Teaching of History*, 1913, pages 108–109)

# Muriel's history problems

- Factual inaccuracy
- Chronological misunderstanding
- Weak knowledge and understanding of anthropology and political concepts
- Modelling history as chronicle and as fairy tale

## Part 2. What is History for?

# What is History for?

- Cultural and national ‘heritage’ and identity management (Lowenthal, 1998; Wertsch, 2002); or
- Competencies and orientations that help citizens manage time and change (Tosh, 2008).
- Establishing and managing ‘relations’ with the past of material, aesthetic and cognitive kinds (Paul, 2015).
- Disciplined understanding and “Powerful Knowledge” - provide tools that enable those who have mastery of them to “understand and interpret the world” and to “understand cooperate and shape the world together” (Young and Muller, 2016, p.150).

## Part 3. Powerful Historical Knowledge?

# Powerful Historical Knowledge?

- What forms must historical knowledge take if it is to be capable of empowering students to think and act on the world in effective ways?



**Generic skills**

How to learn, grammar,  
note-taking, etc.

Meta-history

**First-Order**

***Knowledge and Understanding about the past*** – singular factual propositions, period concepts, colligations, periodizations, narrative templates.... etc.

**Second-order**

***Knowledge and Understanding about our knowledge of the past*** – about what this knowledge is (and isn't); about how this knowledge is created, structured and evaluated; about how histories are used and abused, etc.

History

# Dimensions of Historical Knowledge and Understanding:

## First-Order Knowledge and Understanding

- Singular factual propositions or collections of such propositions about aspects of the past;
- Knowledge and understanding of historical conceptualisation (e.g. 'the Feudal system');
- General substantive concepts (e.g. 'assassination')
- Specific substantive historical concepts (e.g. 'The Austro-Hungarian Empire')

# Dimensions of Historical Knowledge and Understanding:

## Second-Order Knowledge and Understanding

- Domain specific procedural concepts (e.g. historical causation);
- Historical 'colligation' – organizing particulars into larger wholes (e.g. 'the First World War').

# Part 4. Preconditions for Powerful Knowledge in History

# Preconditions for Powerful Knowledge in History

- Without an understanding of the concepts of time and chronology and change and continuity, it is difficult and probably impossible to develop narrative understanding of events.
- Without an understanding of cause and effect, it is impossible to develop a coherent understanding of what makes events and developments events and developments in a narrative.

# Preconditions for Powerful Knowledge in History

- Without some understanding of what is an historical account, and of the range of different genres of historical writing and representation it is unlikely that students will develop competence and confidence in writing history;
- Without some understanding of historical epistemology, students will be unlikely to be able to deal confidently with historical uncertainty or develop a coherent sense of what it is that they are learning.

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