GETTING TO GRIPS WITH BOUDICCA:
PREPARING TO TEACH THE ROMAN ENGLAND STUDY UNIT OF THE ENGLISH NATIONAL CURRICULUM FOR HISTORY
— Robert Guyver

Introduction
Boudicca is a central topic to one, if not the most popular, of the KS2 [7-11 year olds] History Units, Unit 6A Why have people invaded and settled in Britain in the past? A Roman case study. The QCA gives Boudicca pride of place in their Scheme of Work on Roman Britain, a SOW that is universally adopted. Teaching about Boudicca, her rising or rebellion and its causes and consequences raises essential concerns and issues about both the pedagogy and learning involved. It also relates to the wider education of 7-11 year old children and a range of current concerns for primary school heads, in particular Citizenship, Assessment for Learning, KS2 Strategies with an emphasis on creativity, the Gifted and Talented agenda and Every Child Matters. Effective teaching will address the OFSTED concern that ‘primary history continues to disappoint, with lower achievement and weaker teaching than in most other subjects’. The QCA History annual report for 2004/05 concludes that a crucial problem is that of initial and continuing professional development ‘opportunities for primary teachers, most of whom are non-specialists’ (QCA, 2005, p.5). In teaching topics like Boudicca a crucial element is to equip teachers with the teaching subject knowledge that is essential for effective teaching and learning. Teaching subject knowledge is academic subject knowledge transformed into a suitable medium for pupils to access and work upon. So, how can you do the necessary groundwork in acquiring teaching subject knowledge in order to teach topics like Boudicca effectively?

Skills, processes, procedures, concepts and facts
A key idea in preparing your teaching of the Boudicca Unit 6A is to work on four sources, historians’ accounts of her rebellion, including artist’s pictures. This will hopefully enable you to develop an understanding of the processes, skills and procedures central to learning history [syntactic knowledge] and the characters, events, situations and concepts involved in Boudicca’s story [substantive knowledge] (Rogers, 1979, Wineburg, 1994). Syntactic and substantive knowledge develops in tandem, the Siamese twins of Clio, history’s muse. Syntactic knowledge is reflected in children’s understanding of the craft of the historian, i.e. the skills, processes, procedures and concepts needed to carry out any historical enquiry. As such, the teaching protocol you develop should address the question of how historians draw upon the raw material of history, i.e. its sources for the evidence needed to construct narratives; knowledge of people, places, events and situations and conceptual understanding, both syntactic and substantive. But syntactic, procedural knowledge is a means to the end of pupils acquiring an understanding of the story; the flesh and blood, the personalities and dramas of the history involved, i.e. its substantive dimension: its facts and concepts (Turner-Bisset, 2001).

The spiral curriculum
Relevant here is Bruner’s theory of the spiral curriculum – the revisiting of the essential principles on which enquiry in any subject is based. To do this children need the support of teachers, support which will be the outcome of them having worked upon the sources before using them with their classes. How can we turn these underlying principles, our theory, into practical preparation for teaching?

Preparation
Teaching subject knowledge depends upon a range of sources, both contemporary and subsequent historians’ accounts and related materials. In relation to Boudicca, you can download four vital sources to refer to as you read this article from www.ex.ac.uk/historyresource. Two sources are
Two Roman Historians, Tacitus and Cassius Dio wrote the first two sources, accounts of Boudicca’s rebellion. Uniquely Tacitus had access to eyewitnesses. Dio Cassius wrote over 150 years after the rebellion. Our other two sources are from two twentieth century historians, Henrietta Marshall and Robert Unstead who penned two classic children’s texts: Henrietta Marshall’s romanticised story of Boudicca is in the recently re-published *Our Island Story* (1905, 2005) and Robert Unstead’s concise chapter on the Warrior Queen is in his *People in History* (1957). Both Marshall and Unstead reflect the zeitgeist, the spirit of their time. Accordingly their narratives are embedded in their cultural milieus with their values, attitudes and beliefs. Marshall was writing at the high tide of Empire, basking in the triumph of the Boer War. Unstead lived in more sobering times, the Suez debacle emphasised the end of the Imperial Age and Britain’s declining role in the era of the Cold War. These factors are reflected in the changing views of Boudicca they present. I chose the four sources so the teaching can reflect Key Element 3 of the National Curriculum, Interpretations.

To teach Boudicca it is also essential that teachers read a *contemporary academically respectable text* that incorporates recent scholarship on the topic and informs upon what the text is based, i.e. its evidential foundations. Up to date knowledge enables you to create a teaching protocol whose pedagogy not only challenges and engages pupils in stimulating and rewarding teaching activities but is also intellectually sound. Easily accessible are three works, the first two of which have accompanied successful television programmes: Michael Wood’s *In Search of the Dark Ages* (originally 1981, and 2005) and *Battlefield Britain* (2004) by the father and son team Peter and Dan Snow are companions to TV series. If the teacher is interested in a more solid but quite accessible academic tome, I can recommend Malcolm Todd’s *Roman Britain* (1999).

**Bringing Boudicca to life**

How can we use the four accounts of Boudicca to prepare a protocol of teaching and learning activities that brings Boudicca to life and develops pupils’ historical knowledge and understanding plus a wider range of thinking, problem solving, ICT, social learning and verbal and communicative skills?

**Preparation**

Before a planning meeting, give colleagues

- the four sources and a modern historian’s account for them to read before the session.
- the National Curriculum’s Key Elements,
- relevant extracts from the QCA Schemes of Work
- the Nuffield Primary History Project’s principles for teaching, namely to:
  1. **Challenge**, i.e. challenge the children, keep them on their toes at all times.
  2. **Questions**, i.e. ask questions or get children to ask questions to frame and drive on the historical enquiry.
  3. **Sources**, i.e. use genuine sources where possible, as they literally bring you face to face with people in the past.
  4. **Economy of sources**, i.e. use as few sources in your teaching as are needed.
  5. **Study in depth**, i.e. real knowledge is knowledge resulting from detail, in depth study.
  6. **Accessibility**, i.e. the teacher makes the past accessible to children.
  7. **Communication**, i.e. enabling the pupils to communicate what they know.

Discuss the issues that the National Curriculum, QCA and Nuffield documentation suggest about the form the teaching should take.

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*The Romans treat us like slaves!*
**PRESENTATIONS**

Some teachers prefer to do this after the work on analysing the texts. Others may prefer to do an activity such as this first. This session is also invaluable as a training activity with teachers in order to explore both historical and pedagogic issues.

**Teacher Preparation:** Background information – Peter & Dan Snow, *Battlefield Britain*, ‘Boudicca’s Battle with Rome’, and, if available, Malcolm Todd’s chapter on Roman conquest and settlement in his book *Roman Britain*.

**Sources:** Read the four sources.

Work through the sources for each group, bearing in mind how pupils might work upon them and present their conclusions.

Presentations should use the Roman sources where possible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group focus</th>
<th>Part of story</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Form of presentation to be chosen from:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>Background to the rebellion: the death of Prasutagus</td>
<td>Tacitus part 1 Dio part 1 Unstead part 1 Marshall part 1</td>
<td>News report; News from the front; Newsnight; interview and discussion; Interview with or report from ‘United Nations’ style observer; ‘This is your Life’ Boudicca; ‘Military-style lecture showing tactics in Final Battle’ use of ICT with backdrops on IWB white screen against which shadows of actors can be placed, static or moving use of puppets. Drama Plays using extracts from the documents Improvised scenes from the events Particular moments in the story, with the pupils creating a freeze frame or series of freeze frames Pupils give titles to each freeze frame Role play in groups taking on particular characters or invented, realistic characters at specific points in the story</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>The Romans confiscate the lands and the rebellion begins; the attack on Colchester</td>
<td>Tacitus part 2 Dio part 2 Unstead part 2 Marshall part 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>The attacks on London and Verulanium (St Albans)</td>
<td>Tacitus part 3 Dio part 3 Unstead part 3 Marshall part 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>The Final Battle</td>
<td>Tacitus part 4 Dio part 4 Unstead part 4 Marshall part 4</td>
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The planning meeting

I have divided each text into four sections with the intention that pupils will work upon them, either as they are or in an edited form. In your planning meeting discuss and decide on the best way to engage pupils with the chosen text. Having engaged with the sources and a contemporary account from the perspectives of historians and pupils, you and your colleagues will be better equipped to lead and guide an enquiry. You will be empowered to ask more challenging questions such as these that course members have raised when I have used the Boudicca materials:

1. How can we relate the Boudicca materials to history’s organising concepts: causes and consequences, change and continuity, historical evidence, chronology, similarity and difference?
2. What caused the revolt?
   - Was it the death of Boudicca’s husband, the Iceni king, Prasutagus?
   - Was it his will, giving half his lands to his family and the other half to the emperor Nero? Or was it the fact that the Iceni owed the Romans money?
3. Did he owe money, in the form of a loan or was it unpaid tax?
4. Who helped money, in the form of a loan or was it unpaid tax?
5. Why did the temple dedicated to the previous emperor Claudius make the local tribes so angry?
6. Who was the Iceni or Celtic god invoked by Boudicca in her speeches?
7. What were the roles of various Romans mentioned in the story? Who were Suetonius Paulinus, Catus, and Cerialis?
8. Why were the Roman towns (Camuldonum, Londinium, and Verulamium) left undefended?
9. Where was Suetonius when Boudicca’s armies attacked these towns?

Discuss and debate the interpretation of characters and events and the evidential basis for the text or texts. Creativity is encouraged in adapting any appropriate genre as the chosen mode or form of communication. Those in figure 1 are only a tiny proportion of potential approaches. The next phase is to develop a range of high level teaching approaches and activities that provide the spine of the teaching protocol, the subject of a subsequent article.

Conclusion

Research for my doctorate indicated that this approach to developing trainee history teachers’ substantive and syntactic historical knowledge is very successful. The bigger question is whether this approach can be used to prepare all teachers to teach other History Units successfully and thus bridge the yawning gap that OFSTED has revealed in history teaching. This reflects the almost total absence of in-service education and support to equip teachers with the knowledge they need to teach a subject.

References

Dio Cassius (c150-200) Roman History. (Various Editions)
QCA (2005) History 2004/05 annual report on curriculum and assessment. QCA/05/2169
Snow, P. and Snow, D. (2004) Battlefield Britain. London: BBC Books (This is also available as a series of DVDs)
Tacitus, C. (c100) Annals of Imperial Rome. (Various Editions)

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