Timewise

Improving pupils' understanding of historical time in primary school

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Chapter 2

THE UNDERSTANDING OF HISTORICAL TIME IN THE PRIMARY HISTORY CURRICULUM IN ENGLAND AND THE NETHERLANDS

This study focuses on the comparison of the English and the Dutch primary history curriculum regarding the understanding of historical time. We compare different aspects of both curricula that can apply to other subjects as well, for example the question 'what age would be appropriate to start a subject in primary school?' Here, we emphasise that exposure to different learning processes is more important than pupils' age and maturity. Drawing on analyses of curriculum documents, surveys (n=128) and interviews (n=25), we explored how the understanding of historical time is addressed in the intended and the implemented primary curricula for history. The analysis of the data indicates that teachers in both countries do not teach all objectives of the understanding of historical time. Although in England the history curriculum starts earlier, the episodic structure of the curriculum is not very helpful to support pupils understanding of historical time. In the Netherlands the framework of ten eras is mostly taught chronologically; however, neither the sequence nor the dates of historical periods are explicitly taught. Apparently the teaching and learning of historical time in both countries needs improvement and we conclude with some suggestions to accomplish this.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this study we compare curricula for primary history in two different countries with the model of 'the curricular spider web' (Van den Akker, 2003). This model can also be used to analyse differences between curricula for other subjects. Within the history curriculum we focus on the understanding of historical time, which is a complicated and contested concept that we will elaborate on in a separate paragraph.

Understanding historical time is an important aspect of learning history, not only because it enables pupils to place historical events, people and changes in time but also because it helps them to orientate themselves in time in general. Understanding historical time is essential to understand that today's phenomena are historically determined and time-bound (Angvik & Borries, 1997; Seixas, 2006; Grever, 2009). The understanding of historical time is an indispensable part of history education and helps pupils to form their identity and to function as citizens in a democratic society (Barton & Levstik, 2004). Furthermore, the understanding of historical time is related to other subjects especially within social studies (Sands, 2011) and the teaching of language and stories (Hoodless, 2011).

The teaching and learning of historical time in many countries starts in primary education, but in a variety of ways. In this contribution, we focus on the curriculum in England and the Netherlands, two countries where curriculum objectives and contents vary from a rather detailed prescription in England to a more decentralized curriculum in the

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Netherlands (Kuiper, Van den Akker, Hooghoff, & Letschert, 2006). In both countries, the teaching and learning of historical time is part of the history curriculum, but the countries differ in how they structure the teaching and learning of historical time and the age at which they start: the English history curriculum starts at the age of 5 or even in the Foundation Stage at the age of 3, while in the Netherlands most primary schools start their history curriculum at the age of about 8 or 9. Although in both countries the understanding of historical time is acknowledged, evaluations show that many pupils fail to acquire an understanding of historical time (Wagenaar, Van der Schoot, & Hemker, 2010; Ofsted, 2011).

This raises the question how children learn about historical time: How do English and Dutch primary curricula address the development of the understanding of historical time? From comparing the English and Dutch curricula, we want to learn about differences and similarities and about potential success factors and bottlenecks.

We will start with a description of the different forms and components in a curriculum. Next we will elaborate on the concept of the understanding of historical time, on theories about the development of children's understanding of historical time and on pedagogical approaches on the teaching and learning of historical time in primary school. Subsequently we present the design and the results of our empirical study. We finish this study with conclusions, discussion and suggestions for further research.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.2.1 Curriculum theory

We make a distinction between three forms in which curricula can be represented (Thijs & Van den Akker, 2009):

- the intended curriculum, consisting of a rationale which is the basic philosophy underlying a curriculum and the formal documents and/or materials;
- the implemented curriculum: the actual process of teaching and learning and the curriculum as interpreted by its users;
- the attained curriculum: the learning experiences as perceived by learners and the resulting learning outcomes of learners.

In this study we will discuss the intended and the implemented curriculum and therefore we will use the framework of the curricular spider web (Van den Akker, 2003). This spider web clarifies visually the relationship between the various aspects of the curriculum. The core (the rationale) and the nine threads of the spider web refer to the ten parts of a curriculum, each concerning an aspect of learning and the learning programme for pupils. We have listed the threads of the curricular spider web in Table 2.1.

The relevance of these components varies across curriculum levels and representations. In the intended curriculum, the curriculum documents at the macro level will usually focus on the first three components ('rationale', 'aims and objectives', and 'content'). When one takes the operational curriculum in schools and especially classrooms in mind, all ten components together play a role in the practice of teaching and learning in the implemented curriculum. The components 'learning activities', 'teacher role' and 'materials and resources' are at the core of the micro-curriculum (Van den Akker, 2003). In our research we focus on all components, except for 'grouping' and 'location' because these are too dependent on specific variations in schools.
Table 2.1. Curriculum components in question form (Van den Akker, 2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Core question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.  Rationale</td>
<td>Why are they learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.  Aims and objectives</td>
<td>Towards which goals are they learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.  Content</td>
<td>What are they learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.  Learning activities</td>
<td>How are they learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.  Teacher role</td>
<td>How is the teacher facilitating their learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.  Materials and resources</td>
<td>With what are they learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.  Grouping</td>
<td>With whom are they learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.  Location</td>
<td>Where are they learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.  Time</td>
<td>When are they learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Assessment</td>
<td>How is their learning assessed?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2.2 Understanding of historical time: the concept

In literature on children's understanding of historical time different terminologies are used, like 'time', 'historical time', 'historical consciousness', 'historical understanding', 'chronology' and 'chronological understanding'. In this paragraph we shed some light on the meanings of these concepts and on the aims and objectives of the 'understanding of historical time'.

Time has a dual nature: the objectively measurable time (mathematical time) and subjectively experienced time (experience of temporality, duration and intensity) (Grever, 2009; Jansen, 2001, 2010). Rüsen (2007) speaks in this respect of 'natural' and 'human' time. In the study of history the objectively measurable time is also called 'chronology' and is needed to date events, to determine a beginning and an end in time and to portray the course of time. In England the concept of 'chronology' or 'chronological understanding' is often widened to historical understanding which includes knowledge and understanding of events, people and changes in the past, but also understanding concepts like causes and effects of changes, similarities and differences within and between periods, the key events and the ethos of these periods and concurrent changes in different societies (Cooper, 2011; Hoodless, 2011). This understanding of historical periods is often referred to as 'a sense of period' (Dawson, 2004; Wilkinson, 2011). According to Ricoeur historical time is the mediator between the subjective and objective time, through narrative, in which time becomes concrete in plots or intrigues that give coherence to the individual events from the past (Grever, 2001; Jansen 2001). Rüsen (2007, 2012) distinguishes four different types of historical narration: traditional, exemplary, critical and genetic. Each type conceptualizes time differently, for example critical history gives time the feature of discontinuity.

By learning to understand historical time children develop historical consciousness, which implies the coherence between interpreting the past, understanding the present and the perspective on the future. (Seixas, 2006; Grever, 2009; Rüsen, 2012). Wilschut (2012, p.70) combines six concepts of objective and subjective time in his characterization of 'historical time consciousness':

- chronology and periodisation: the way in which we design images of the past on a linear timescale and differentiate these according to the features of diverse compartments of time;
- generations and relics: the means we employ to create a bridge between various time periods, particularly the present and periods in the past;
- anachronism and contingency: the attitudes and perceptions affecting the interrelationships between the compartments of time.
Another definition on the understanding of historical time can be found in a much cited study on the teaching of chronology by Stow and Haydn (2000). They refer to Oakden and Sturt (1922) for a definition with three objectives:

- The understanding of the words and symbols to define time;
- The ability to use a time scheme and the dates by which such a scheme is symbolized;
- The knowledge of the characteristics of definite epochs in the time scheme and the ability to place these epochs roughly in the correct order.

In 'the knowledge about characteristics' the understanding of 'a sense of period' is included and Stow and Haydn (2000, p. 87) define this as “an understanding of those events or of what those ‘periods’ refer to and what their characteristic features are”.

In our view the aims and objectives for the teaching and learning of the understanding of historical time should combine the objective time of understanding chronology and the subjective time of understanding of experienced time. It should also refer to key historical concepts like change and continuity and similarities and differences (Cooper, 2011; Blow et al. 2012). Drawing on Oakden and Sturt (1922), Stow and Haydn (2000) and Wilschut (2012) we designed an operational definition to use in conversations with teachers and experts about the understanding of historical time. We chose a pedagogical approach with a description of aims and objectives in pupils' behaviour as seen in Table 2.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.2</th>
<th>Operational definition on the understanding of historical time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>For the understanding of historical time pupils in primary school should be able to:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Use the vocabulary relating to time and periods of time, such as old - new - long ago - before - now - past - present - future - dates - decade - century - BC - AD, ...;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sequence historical periods in a chronological order.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Use the timeline to place events, people and changes in the correct periods of time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Recognize and name characteristic features of historical periods in texts and images.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Use characteristic features of historical periods to place events, people and changes in the correct periods of time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Use characteristic features of historical periods to understand how people lived in these times.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Compare different historical periods with each other and with the present and draw conclusions about change and continuity between different periods.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2.3 Theories on the development of children's understanding of historical time

An important question is how the understanding of historical time develops within children and to what extent this development is tied to maturation or to cognitive skills that can be developed by teaching.

In educational research the development of the understanding of historical time in children has been a controversial area of research. For a long time empirical studies were based on the assumption that the understanding of clock and calendar time is a prerequisite for the understanding of historical time and concluded that children cannot understand historical time until they are at least 11 years old (Oakden & Sturt, 1922; Friedman, 1944; Bradley, 1947). In 1946 Piaget concluded that children go through several stages in developing their concept of time (Piaget, 1969) and although his research does not include the understanding of historical time, the Piagetian stage theory for a long time was influential on
educational literature about children’s abilities on understanding time (Jahoda, 1963; Hallam, 1970; Thornton & Vukelich, 1988). More recent research on children’s understanding of time tends to move away from the idea of age-related models such as Piaget and the interconnectedness of the development of clock and calendar time with the development of historical time. From the late 1970s and the early 1980s a number of researchers in England and the USA, initially often ignorant of each other’s results, investigated the ability of students to understand historical time. Empirical studies in England show that children’s concepts of historical time can be trained from the age of 7 (Blyth, 1978; West, 1981a; Harnett, 1993; Wood & Holden, 1997; Hoodless, 2002; Hodkinson, 2003a). In the USA, Levstik and Pappas (1987) and Brophy et al., (1993) found similar results. Building on insights of previous studies Barton and Levstik (1996) reported that pupils aged 5-12 could correctly sequence pictures from everyday life in the USA in chronological order. They could distinguish changes over time based on visible physical factors such as transport, clothing and architecture (Barton & Levstik 1996). Furthermore students from all ages were able to group the pictures in broader categories using names of historical periods. These and other studies all show that the understanding historical time is a learning process rather than a developmental process and that children can start this from an early age (Hoge & Foster 2002; Hoodless, 2002, 2004; Barton & Levstik, 2004; Hodkinson, 2009a; Solé, 2009).

2.2.4 Pedagogical approaches to develop the understanding of historical time

If the understanding of historical time is a learning process that can be enhanced by teaching, it is important to know about effective ways that are indicated in research and publications on classroom practice.

Reflecting on the content of the curriculum for the teaching and learning of historical time, we see different approaches such as a focus on the teaching of facts vs. understanding historical periods, teaching history as a discrete subject or embedded in a cross-curricular approach and different approaches on the order in which historical periods are taught. One example is the teaching of an issue, event or society in depth in a particular period of time alongside the ‘connecting threads’ of a chronological framework, also called ‘patch’ history (Reeves, 1980). Another approach is the teaching of diachronic themes such as clothing, or transport, which provides children with an evolutionary sense of developments over a longer period of time. This however may have drawbacks as it presents a view of history that progress is inevitable and straightforward, neglecting alternative approaches and events and the contexts in which particular developments occurred (Barton, 1996, 2002; Stow & Haydn, 2000; Wilschut, 2010). A further approach is the integration of history within a topic or thematic approach alongside other curriculum subjects. In this cross-curricular approach, children learn about a range of historical events and developments but might get little support in helping to organize them within a chronological framework (Harnett, 2004, 2007). A strict chronological approach to organise the history curriculum is often applied by educational publishers in England and the Netherlands. There is however no research evidence to suggest that this is a more effective way than teaching historical periods in reverse or in no particular order at all.

For the pedagogy of historical time according to our definition there are two important elements that need to be emphasised: the understanding of chronology and the understanding of a ‘sense of period’. A specific tool for the teaching of chronology are time charts and time lines that can be used in the classroom from creating children’s own personal
and family timelines to longer scale time lines with an increasing complexity (Hoodless, 1996; Dawson, 2004; Pickford, 2011; Cooper 2012). However, there exists only limited empirical evidence for the effectiveness of these time charts and time lines. West (1981a) researched pupils' use of time lines and developed teaching methods to support pupils' skills in sequencing, which included frequent discussion and construction of time lines. He also demonstrated that pupils can successfully sequence cues from the past if these are presented as a set of strongly contrasted artefacts or pictures rather than as a series of dates. Hodkinson (2003a, 2004) worked with a special teaching method that consisted of a chronologically presented curriculum in which time lines were used consistently in every lesson. His research findings offer evidence that the usage of timelines and time cards are advantageous in the development of chronology, duration and dating conventions. Masterman and Rogers (2002) successfully used ICT resources to facilitate pupils' understanding and reasoning about chronology, but on the other hand Foreman, Boyd Davis, Moar, Korallo, & Chappel (2008) concluded that pupils age 7-9 learned more about historical sequence after studying a series of paper images, compared with electronic resources.

For the understanding of a 'sense of period' it is important that pupils can imagine life in historical periods. Various publications on empirical research and classroom practice indicate that visual clues and stories can be helpful to achieve this (Harnett, 1993; Wood and Holden, 1997; Hoodless, 2002; Van Boxtel & Van Drie 2012).

2.3 RESEARCH AIMS AND DESIGN

The main question of our study is: 'How do English and Dutch primary school curricula address the development of the understanding of historical time?'

Through our analysis of the curricula we want to find answers to the following sub questions:

1. How is the understanding of historical time conceptualised in the intended curricula for primary history?
2. How does the understanding of historical time feature in the implemented curricula in primary schools?

In our analysis of the curricula we focus on the teaching and learning of the understanding of historical time in relation to the components of the curricular spider web. Table 2.3 gives an overview of the instruments we used to analyse the curricula.

To answer the first question we analysed the formal, written documents of the English National Curriculum and the Dutch Core objectives. Next to these statutory documents we also analysed the English Schemes of Work³ and the Dutch Learning Trajectories⁴. These documents have been offered to teachers and textbook publishers as guidance for the implementation of the intended curricula, but they neither belong to the formal documents, nor to the implemented curriculum. We will therefore use the term 'suggested' curriculum.'

To answer the second question we used surveys, interviews and three additional documents: the report of Her Majesty's Inspector (Ofsted, 2011) and the Primary Survey from


⁴ http://tule.slo.nl/
the Historical Association (Harnett & Nichol, 2011) for England and the publications of the Periodic Survey of Educational Level (PPON) for the Netherlands (Wagenaar et al., 2010).

### Table 2.3 Instrumets used for curriculum analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum components</th>
<th>Instruments</th>
<th>Intended</th>
<th>Suggested</th>
<th>Implemented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aims and objectives / Curriculum content</td>
<td>Document analysis of the formal curriculum</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Document analysis of schemes of work and learning trajectories</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All components of the curriculum</td>
<td>Surveys (n=128)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews (n=25)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Document analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ofsted, Primary Survey, PPON</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We decided to have different groups of respondents in the surveys and the interviews, because teachers’ espoused beliefs often contradict their pedagogical strategies when in action, (VanSledright, Kelly, & Meuwissen, 2006). Additional to the data collected from teachers we asked similar questions to teacher trainers as they have a professional knowledge of classroom practice in multiple primary schools based on school visits and conversations with primary teachers and students. We also interviewed some experts on history curriculum and pedagogy from the Inspectorate, Curriculum Development Institutes and Assessment Institutes about their professional opinions on the implemented curriculum (see Table 2.4). Finally we compared our results from the survey and the interviews with the results from Ofsted (2011), the Primary Survey (Harnett & Nichol, 2011) and PPON (Wagenaar et al., 2010).

For the comparison we add here some explanation on the structure of primary education in England and the Netherlands. In England the Key Stages 1 and 2 form the Primary Curriculum for pupils aged 5-11 years. Key Stage 1 covers the ages 5-7, in years 1 and 2. Key Stage 2 covers the ages 8-11, in years 3-6. In the Netherlands primary education is aimed at children ages 4 to 12 in 8 grades. We will look into grade 3-8, ages 6-12.

### 2.3.1 Participants

#### 2.3.1.1 Survey

The teacher participants in the survey form a representative group from different regions in both countries and have at least five years of work experience. For technical reasons, the survey was administered to primary schools via head teachers; as such it is not possible to judge exactly how many teachers received the survey. For the teacher trainers in England the survey was placed on the website of the Historical Association; in the Netherlands we used the email addresses of teacher trainers through the network of the Dutch History Teachers Association. We got responses from approximately 25% of the higher education institutes in England and from 70% in the Netherlands. The sample in the Netherlands is probably higher because of the large network of the authors.

#### 2.3.1.2 Interviews

The interviewed teachers work in different years/grades in four English and four Dutch primary schools in smaller and larger cities. They were interviewed in their classrooms. The interviewed
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English and Dutch teacher trainers are lecturers for history and work in different institutes for initial teacher training in various regions. The experts are representatives from Her Majesty’s Inspectors (Ofsted) and The Dutch Inspectorate of Education, the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QDCA), the Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO) and from the Centre for British Teachers (CfBT) Education Trust and the Dutch institute for testing and assessment (Cito). Table 2.4 gives an overview of the number of participants in the survey and the interviews.

Table 2.4. Overview number of participants in the surveys and interviews in England and the Netherlands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruments</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>England</th>
<th>Netherlands</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary teachers</td>
<td>Key Stage 1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Key Stage 2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher trainers</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary teachers</td>
<td>Key Stage 1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Key Stage 2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher trainers</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3.2 Instruments

In the surveys we asked the participants to respond on a four-point scale to a number of statements about the teaching of historical time in relation to the components of the curricular spider web. The first set of statements was about the importance of the aims and objectives of our definition on the understanding of historical time, the second and the third set were about opinions and about practices regarding the components ‘content’, ‘materials’, ‘time’ and ‘assessment’ in relation to our operational definition in Table 2.2.

The interviews were semi-structured based on the components of the curriculum in relation to the seven objectives of our definition, which the participants received on paper before the interview started. All interviews were conducted by the first author, they were audio recorded and lasted 45 - 65 minutes. The transcripts were sent to the interviewees to check if the transcriptions were correct reproductions of their answers.

2.3.3 Data analysis

In the analysis of the statutory documents and the documents of the suggested curriculum we compared the aims and objectives for the understanding of historical time in these documents with the objectives of our operational definition in Table 2.2. We analysed the presence or absence of the objectives of our operational definition and whether the objectives were just mentioned or elaborated on further in the documents.

For the implemented curriculum we labelled the statements in our surveys to the components of the curriculum: ‘aims and objectives’, ‘content’, ‘materials and resources’, ‘time’ and ‘assessment’. For each statement the percentage of respondents per response category was calculated. For a clear presentation of the results, the percentages of the
highest categories (somewhat and totally agree and regularly and always) were added together.
The interview questions were also matched to the curriculum components and for each component we made an overview of the teachers', teacher trainers' and experts' answers. In the interviews we added the component 'teacher role'. Since we asked similar questions to each group of respondents in the interviews in both countries we were able to compare the answers that were labelled to the same curriculum components. This labelling also enabled us to compare the results of the surveys with the answers that were given in the interviews. We selected representative quotes to illustrate the explanations that were given in the interviews. Finally we checked our results for the components 'content', 'time' and 'assessment' with results from Ofsted (2011), the Primary Survey (Harnett & Nichol, 2011) and PPON (Wagenaar et al., 2010).

2.4 RESULTS

2.4.1 Results on the intended and suggested curricula for historical time in England and the Netherlands

In English primary schools history has always been a subject within the National Curriculum since its inception in 1988. The National Curriculum has been reviewed twice and the current version dates from 1999. Programs of study set out what pupils should be taught and attainment target level descriptions set out the expected standards of pupils' performance. Programmes of study consist of two sorts of requirements:

- Knowledge, skills and understanding: what has to be taught in the subject.
- Breath of study: the contexts, activities, areas of study and range of experiences through which the knowledge, skills and understanding should be taught.

The section about 'knowledge, skills and understanding' contains two requirements that are important for the understanding of historical time: chronological understanding and knowledge and understanding of events, people and changes in the past. Furthermore the other three sections (historical interpretation, historical enquiry, organisation and communication) also give indications on how pupils should acquire a 'sense of period'. In the breath of study the content of the curriculum is described in several mandatory topics.

The Netherlands have no 'state curriculum', therefore schools have considerable autonomy concerning content. Since 1993 output aims are fixed through Core Objectives that have been reviewed twice: the current set dates from 2006, with 58 objectives for all subjects. The core objectives define what students should achieve at the end of primary school, without level descriptors or specifications for content in different grades. History for primary education is included under the heading 'Time' with three core objectives. The first

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5 http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20131202172639/http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/primary
The National Curriculum was under consultation at the time of writing. The new curriculum was implemented in September 2014.
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objective mentions the vocabulary that is important for the understanding of historical time and the second and third mention the content about which children should learn. The content consists of ‘ten eras’ that were created in 2001 to be used as a common frame of reference throughout Dutch history education for pupils from the ages 8-18 (Commission on History and Social Sciences, 2001). The ‘characteristic features’ of these eras (which are mostly political or economic features) are elaborated in the suggested curriculum.

From analysing the intended curriculum for England and the Netherlands we see a remarkable difference. The Dutch core objectives are formulated in broad and global terms, whereas the English National Curriculum gives much more detailed descriptions of aims and content in Key Stage 1 and 2 and of the levels that pupils are expected to achieve. In both countries the use of timelines is not mentioned in the intended curriculum (see Table 2.5).

Table 2.5  English National Curriculum and Dutch core objectives compared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aims and objectives</th>
<th>National Curriculum (EN)</th>
<th>Core Objectives (NL)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Vocabulary</td>
<td>Elaborated for all years, 'ancient' and 'modern' are (added)</td>
<td>The use of vocabulary is mentioned but not elaborated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sequence historical periods in a chronological order</td>
<td>Mentioned in Key Stage (KS) 1 although only for events and objects; it is not explicitly mentioned in KS2</td>
<td>Not explicitly mentioned;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Use the timeline</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Not mentioned;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Recognize characteristic features in texts and images</td>
<td>Characteristic features are mentioned in KS 2 and partly elaborated as 'including ideas, beliefs, attitudes and experiences'; texts and images are mentioned as resources;</td>
<td>Characteristic features aspects are mentioned, but not elaborated;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Use characteristic features to place events, people and changes in the correct periods of time;</td>
<td>Placing events, people and changes in the correct periods of time is mentioned in KS 2, but missing in KS 1;</td>
<td>Not explicitly mentioned;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Use characteristic features to understand how people lived in the past</td>
<td>Understanding how people lived in the past is mentioned in KS 1 and 2;</td>
<td>Not explicitly mentioned;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Compare historical periods and draw conclusions about change and continuity</td>
<td>Comparing historical periods is mentioned in KS 1 and 2; Drawing conclusions about change and continuity is mentioned in KS 2.</td>
<td>Not explicitly mentioned;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In England and the Netherlands guidance has been provided to translate the formal curriculum into more operational objectives and methods that are used by publishers. In England the schemes of work consist of 20 Units for Key Stage 1 and 2 with detailed teaching plans. In the Netherlands the website http://tule.slo.nl/ contains intermediate objectives and learning trajectories for all eight grades.

Both suggested curricula include all objectives of our definition on the understanding of historical time, except the sequencing of historical periods, which is missing in both countries, and timelines that are missing in grade 3 and 4 in the Netherlands.
2.4.2 Results on the implemented curriculum for historical time in England and the Netherlands

2.4.2.1 Aims and objectives
About 90% of the respondent teachers in both countries regard the aims and objectives in our operational definition important for the development of the understanding of historical time in primary education. In the interviews the teachers expressed that these objectives should be achievable for most children. English teachers claim to cover all objectives in their own year, whereas Dutch teachers do not: the teachers from the lower grades work on the vocabulary and sometimes also on characteristic features (objectives 4, 5 and 6). The teachers from the higher grades do not all work explicitly on the vocabulary (objective 1) but claim to cover most other objectives. One of the Dutch experts explains that teachers are not aware that they have to explicitly teach the understanding of historical time, they expect that: “the understanding of historical time is something that grows naturally”.

The interviewed teacher trainers and the experts in both countries also agree on the importance of the aims and objectives and most of them think they are achievable in primary school. As elements that could be added some English experts mention interval and duration. Jack, an English curriculum expert, remarked:

The one I feel probably most strongly about and that is often ignored, is the idea of duration, how long ago something was. They do of course use terms like long ago and yesterday. Pupils have no idea how long periods lasted, like the Tudors: they spend a term on that, and that is how long they think the Tudors lasted . . .

2.4.2.2 Content
In the survey we asked several questions on how events, people and changes through history are taught in connection to the understanding of historical time. Here we report the results on the first two objectives in our operational definition: the use of the vocabulary of time and the sequencing of historical periods in chronological order (Table 2.6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice of teaching historical time: percentages of respondents who responded ‘regularly’ and ‘always’</th>
<th>England Teachers (%)</th>
<th>England Trainers (%)</th>
<th>The Netherlands Teachers (%)</th>
<th>The Netherlands Trainers (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In each lesson about historical periods the vocabulary relating to time and periods of time, such as dates and century, is used.</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the history lessons the chronological order of historical periods is consistently paid attention to.</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In both countries a majority of the teachers claim that they use the vocabulary of historical time in every history lesson. There is a remarkable difference in the percentage of teachers that constantly pays attention to the chronological order: in England this is half of that in the Netherlands. The English schools where we interviewed teachers differ in the way the historical periods are taught. Some teachers work with history as a discrete subject, whereas others had started to teach through a cross-curricular approach with alternating historical
and geographical topics. In most schools the content for the historical topics is chosen from the schemes of work from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), which corresponds with the results from the Primary Survey (Harnett & Nichol, 2011). None of the English teachers that were interviewed teach the topics in chronological order, although some of them think that this would make sense. Others however, argued that it was best not to teach in chronological order, because they thought some topics more suitable, appropriate or interesting to certain ages. Andrew (EN year 4) explains:

We don't do chronological order, we tend to pick the interesting bits of history . . . Ideal would not have to be the chronological way - I think you have to think of the maturity of your children (for example World War II and the Holocaust), what they're interested in, what's going to excite them and stimulate their learning.

In the Netherlands the interviewed grade 4 teachers do not teach history as a discrete subject. The Dutch teachers who were interviewed from the higher grades (5-8) all teach history as a discrete subject and follow the textbooks, which are all based on a chronological sequence. All interviewed teachers prefer the chronological sequence, which also can involve going backwards in time, as Janet in grade 5 explained:

. . . Chronologically by going back in time from the present. I show this all the time . . . They do not have to learn it by heart. Revisiting at the end would be good. Then it sticks better.

Almost all interviewed Dutch and English teachers use dates in their lessons, but most of them told us that pupils do not have to learn the dates. All English and most Dutch teachers think it is important to compare historical periods with the present, for example by comparing Anglo-Saxon houses with modern ones or making links between the industrial revolution and the era of computers.

Several teacher trainers and experts in England believe that the content in primary schools is episodic and not supportive for the development of the understanding of historical time. Lily (Teacher trainer EN) explained this as follows:

. . . what happened is that in some schemes of work of the QCA they tend to pick out certain periods, like Romans, Tudors and Victorians; it is as if nothing happened in between.

The interviewed Dutch trainers and experts felt the ten-era framework supported the development of understanding historical time more than learning about traditional periods such as the Middle Ages and Modern Times. All trainers and experts affirm that the chronological sequence should be taught and practised. Robert, a Dutch teacher trainer states:

I really like the idea of the ten eras with titles by which children can imagine something . . . . Yes it helps for the understanding of historical time, because therefore you need to build a structure first, you need that. It's a basis that you must learn and practice, like in languages where you have to master the spelling and have to memorize it.

Furthermore Dutch experts and trainers explain that the characteristic features that are mentioned in the core objectives could serve as a support and structure for teachers, although they do not see this happening. They are not sure if these characteristics are helpful for the pupils. The teachers in both countries mentioned elements from daily life as helpful features like clothes, buildings, food, toys, the differences between rich and poor people, the religion, environment, occupations and visual clues in paintings and buildings. As less helpful they mentioned political and economic events and structures.
2.4.2.3 Learning activities

In regard to the learning activities, we asked questions in our survey about particular activities that contribute to an understanding how people lived in the past. This is linked to objective number 6 of our operational definition in Table 2.2: use characteristic features of historical periods to understand how people lived in historical periods. A large majority of all respondents agree this is an important objective for the understanding of historical time (Table 2.7).

Also here we see a discrepancy between what teachers think is necessary and what they practice, particularly in the Netherlands, where about half of the teachers indicate they give their pupils activities to identify themselves with the lifestyle of people in a historical period.

Table 2.7. Statements on learning activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>England Teachers (%)</th>
<th>England Trainers (%)</th>
<th>The Netherlands Teachers (%)</th>
<th>The Netherlands Trainers (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To understand a historical period, students must learn about daily life in those times.</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are given activities to identify themselves with the lifestyle of people in a historical period.</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the interviews we asked questions about what kind of learning activities teachers use to improve the understanding of historical time. English teachers of Key Stage 1 and 2 mention they use going on trips, doing drama and role play, creative writing (diary entries), creative tasks like making artefacts, exhibitions, reading and sequencing. Also visiting museums and questioning visitors are mentioned. They indicate sequencing images, creative activities and visits most successful strategies for the development of understanding historical time since they are more practical and hands-on and as one teacher said: “it sticks so much more”. As less successful they mention working with (text) books and writing. Jessy (year 2) especially mentions role play as a successful activity:

It absolutely helps the development of understanding of historical time. You see it in their role play and you can tell a child understands historical time, because the way they're acting in the role play area; what they do and say. Even in year 2.

Dutch teachers mention the learning activities that are part of the textbooks they use, like reading and writing, answering questions, sequencing activities, making timelines, but also writing projects, making (power point) presentations, listening to stories, looking at video clips on the interactive whiteboard. As difficult they mention giving presentations, reading textbooks and answering questions from texts.

The interviewed teacher trainers and experts recognise mainly that the whole variety of activities can contribute to the understanding of historical time. English experts and trainers add the importance of stories to build up a sense of a period “because the story can
take you through the lives of people and the changes”. They also mention the importance of little activities - at the beginning, middle or end of lessons like simple little quizzes, tests and placing pictures on a washing line. Some Dutch teacher trainers and experts doubt to what extent creative activities and the working on project tasks in topic work really contribute to the understanding of historical time. As more useful strategies they mention activities with timelines and visual materials, interviews with eye witnesses, identification activities and sequencing pictures and artefacts. Furthermore they argue that learning activities should not stick to just reading, because children need more than that to visualise the past. As more difficult for children English trainers and experts mention reading and comparing texts, but also writing activities and activities with dates that require mathematical skills to do calculations with big numbers, like 'how long between' or 'how long did it last'. Also Dutch trainers and experts mention that it's difficult for children to visualise duration and to correctly place events and people in time, as Max, a Dutch curriculum expert explained:

To place things in time and in the eras is really the most difficult, also because they don't have much knowledge - and when they don't know they will use logic and imagination and you cannot do that with the eras - it's 18th or 17th century and generally they don't have that overview.

### 2.4.2.4 Materials and resources

In this paragraph we will report on the use of timelines and textbooks in lessons about the understanding of historical time (Table 2.8).

#### Table 2.8  Statements on materials and resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>England</th>
<th>The Netherlands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers (%)</td>
<td>Trainers (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=27</td>
<td>n=20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Opinions on teaching historical time: percentages of respondents who 'somewhat' and 'totally' agree**

- In each classroom there should be a large class time line.
  - 78
  - 90
  - 90
  - 94

**Practices of teaching historical time: percentages of respondents who responded 'regularly' and 'always'**

- In each classroom there is a large class time line on which events, people and changes are placed in the correct historical period.
  - 45
  - 25
  - 49
  - 47

- For lessons about the understanding of historical time we only follow textbooks.
  - 7
  - 0
  - 66
  - 61

- For the development of the understanding of historical time we develop lessons and/or materials ourselves.
  - 77
  - 55
  - 32
  - 19

A majority of the respondents in our survey agrees that in each classroom there should be a large class time line, however less than half of the teachers indicate that their classrooms actually have a class timeline. Furthermore there is a large difference in the provision of learning materials between the Netherlands, where most teachers follow textbooks and England where most teachers develop materials themselves. In the survey English teachers

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7 Wagenaar et al. (2010) indicates that 80% of the Dutch teachers in grade 6, 7 and 8 follows textbooks almost completely. In the lower grades (3 and 4) textbooks are used less frequently.
mention artefacts, photographs, films, stories, videos, DVDs, visitors, visits to museums, castles, computer research, skills sheets, activity ideas from published schemes, online support material, resource packs from museums, BBC Primary History Website, iPads, dressing up costumes, big books, oral history through local residents. In the interviews the English teachers explain that timelines support the understanding of historical time and some of them tell us that they refer to the timeline in their lessons, use it as a starting point or let children sequence events on the class time line. Some teachers also let their pupils make individual timelines, because they think this helps them “to understand how one event leads to another”.

The Dutch teachers tell us they mainly use the textbooks and next to that most of them show video clips, that sometimes come with the textbooks but that also are found on specific educational websites. Only one of the interviewed Dutch teachers had a large class time line. In most textbooks that are used in the Netherlands in the higher grades, every era starts with a timeline and some textbooks have a timeline at the bottom of every page. Several experts remark that there is hardly any connection between the timelines at the bottom of every page and the text in the books, they argue this could be made more explicit. All teacher trainers and experts that were interviewed agree that timelines support the development of the understanding of historical time, because they are visual and create a big picture, put things in order, and are also useful for making links and connections. Most experts think timelines are the key to developing the understanding of historical time. Both interviewed English and Dutch trainers and experts judge the quality of the timelines used very poor because “all periods have the same amount of space and often there are too many pictures on them”.

2.4.2.5 Teacher role
In our interviews we asked the teachers how they perceive their role in supporting pupils’ development of the understanding of historical time. The English teachers told us that they try to support the children by using the correct vocabulary and making links to the timeline and to maths. Two of them mentioned that they help their pupils to “take control of their own learning” by asking questions to “encourage them towards deeper thinking”. The Dutch interviewed teachers mention that in their educational dialogue with pupils about the topics in the textbooks they ask questions about differences between past and present. One Dutch teacher and two English teachers doubt if they have sufficient knowledge to support students properly in their development to understand historical time, as Colin (EN, year 2) explains:

Probably not as much as some actually - As a student I didn't do any history from the age of 14. From 14 till 24 I had no history teaching at all. And even during my teacher training at college we had very, very little input on history.

As one of the success factors of their history teaching most English teachers mention that children “definitely enjoy history”. Dutch teacher trainers and experts argue that teachers should use timelines more and that they should show their own enthusiasm for history and evoke historical periods with images and stories, instead of relying solely on pupils reading the textbooks. Several Dutch trainers and experts explain that most pupils find history lessons tiresome and monotonous, because of the reading in textbooks. Teacher trainer Oscar (NL) explains:

We need teachers who are well trained, who have a clear idea of the objectives of historical time and that can develop lessons, around the topics in the textbooks. They should know more than just what is in the textbooks.
The English teacher trainers and experts add that teachers should also have knowledge about “how pupils develop their understanding” and about “the type of questions and tasks to elicit the understanding of time” and that teachers should know about likely misconceptions and how they can correct those.

2.4.2.6 Time

For the curriculum component 'time' we asked several questions about opinions and practice concerning the age at which the teaching of historical time starts and about the time that is spent on the teaching of historical time (Table 2.9).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements on time</th>
<th>England</th>
<th>The Netherlands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers (%)</td>
<td>Trainers (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinions on teaching historical time: percentages of respondents who 'somewhat' and 'totally' agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History should start to be taught in the curriculum when students are about 9 years old.</td>
<td>8 5</td>
<td>73 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning the vocabulary of daily time (clock and calendar time) is conditional for learning of the vocabulary of historical time (past, long ago, dates, etc.).</td>
<td>71 60</td>
<td>100 79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the Key Stages 1 and 2/primary school enough time is spent on the development of the understanding of historical time.</td>
<td>48 30</td>
<td>77 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practices of teaching historical time: percentages of respondents who responded 'regularly' and 'always'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the start of Key Stage 1, grade 3, students are taught about events, people and changes in different historical periods.</td>
<td>93 65</td>
<td>30 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Key Stage 1, grade 3, clock and calendar time are the most important elements in the development of the understanding of time.</td>
<td>67 30</td>
<td>75 77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The understanding of historical time is paid attention to during lessons other than the history lessons (e.g. language lessons in which historical events are placed on the timeline).</td>
<td>33 15</td>
<td>32 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We see a remarkable difference in English and Dutch teachers' opinions and practice concerning when history teaching should begin. In England most teachers start the teaching of historical time from the start of Key Stage one, at the age of 5, whereas in the Netherlands a majority thinks that the teaching of history should start at the age of 9 and only a small minority actually starts the teaching of historical time in grade 3, at the age of 6. Furthermore all Dutch teacher respondents think that learning the vocabulary of daily time is conditional for the learning of the vocabulary of historical time. According to a majority of the respondents in the Netherlands and in England as well, clock and calendar time are the most important elements in the development of the understanding of time for pupils aged 5-7, with the exception of English teacher trainers, of whom only one third agrees on this statement.

A majority of Dutch teacher respondents and about half of the English teachers think that in primary school enough time is spent on the development of the understanding of historical
time. Teacher trainers in both countries however, are less optimistic about this and also about the attention given to historical time in lessons other than history.

In the interviews the English teachers agree with their National Curriculum that the development of the understanding of historical time should start at the age of 5. They base this on their experience. All interviewed English trainers and experts indicate that the teaching of historical time usually starts in the Early Years Foundation Stage\(^8\) at the age of 3-4: “from nursery/reception, with topics like houses and toys, old and new, baby and now”, and that “they do a little bit of history in the early years in Knowledge and Understanding of the World”. Most Dutch teachers who were interviewed indicated that from their own experience, starting to teach historical time is possible at the age of 4/5 with the vocabulary, stories and old and new artefacts. Only one teacher advocates starting at the age of 9, because “children in earlier grades need more time to understand it and sometimes it’s too difficult for them”.

The interviewed Dutch teacher trainers and experts differ in their opinions on the age that the teaching of historical time should start. About half of them indicates the age of 4, when children go to primary school, because children “ask all kind of questions about the past”. Others suggest the age of 7, grades 3/4 when children can learn about the history of their family and the environment; one expert advocates grades 5/6, because then children get “a more realistic view on the world”.

The respondent teachers cannot give an exact indication how much time they spend on the understanding of historical time. According to the Primary Survey in England (Harnett & Nichol, 2011) history is taught from 1 to 2 h per week at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. For the Netherlands the research of Wagenaar et al. (2010) indicates that in grades 6, 7 and 8 in 2008 about one hour a week was spent on history.

### 2.4.2.7 Assessment

We finished our survey with some questions about how teachers assess the understanding of historical time (Table 2.10). The teacher respondents in England indicate that they base their assessments on the QCA schemes of work, whereas in the Netherlands textbooks are used for this purpose. A minority of the teachers in the survey develops their own assessments. A little more than one third of the English and Dutch teacher respondents indicate that they systematically monitor and record the development of their pupils’ understanding of historical time. Teacher trainers in both countries are far less positive about this.

In the interviews most English teachers told us that they do not formally assess history, because “it is not statutory in the same way that we would for literacy and numeracy”. One teacher added that “from a workload point of view it’s tricky, so my assessments are made in my head”. Most teachers stated that they write comments in the pupils’ topic books and make informal ‘assessment for learning’ (formative assessment) notes in their planning. This corresponds with the results from the Primary Survey from the Historical Association (Harnett & Nichol, 2011) that indicates that 63.5% of the responding teachers in 2010 and 2011 did not assess history formally.

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In the Netherlands all interviewed teachers use the tests that come with the textbooks, but they do not explicitly record or monitor results for the understanding of historical time. Teachers in both countries find it hard to give an indication on their pupils' progress in the development of the understanding of historical time. In the interviews English teacher trainers and experts agree that without regular formal assessment, it is difficult to monitor children’s progress in the understanding of historical time.

Table 2.10 Statements on assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice of teaching historical time</th>
<th>England Teachers (%)</th>
<th>England Trainers (%)</th>
<th>The Netherlands Teachers (%)</th>
<th>The Netherlands Trainers (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The understanding of historical time is assessed through external assessments found in textbooks</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The understanding of historical time is assessed through external assessments based on the schemes of work (EN)/a monitoring system (NL)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The understanding of historical time is assessed through teachers' own assessments</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The development of students understanding of historical time is monitored and recorded systematically</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Ofsted report (2011) states that by the end of Key Stage 2 “many pupils ended up with an episodic knowledge of history and their sense of time was unclear”. The PPON survey (2010) shows that with the new timeline of the 10 eras there was some improvement in pupils' placing of events in the correct time compared to the traditional timeline that was used in previous surveys. There are, however, no indications that it can “simply be concluded that the new frame of the ten eras leads to a better understanding of historical time” (Wagenaar et al., 2010).

2.5 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The understanding of historical time is a very important part of history teaching in primary education. This research focuses on how this element is addressed in the curricula of England and the Netherlands. Although in both countries the learning results concerning the understanding of time are insufficient according to national reports, we see some remarkable differences. Our analysis of the official curriculum documents shows that in England most of the objectives of our operational definition on historical time (Table 2.2) are mentioned and elaborated, whereas in the Netherlands the vocabulary, the content and characteristic features are only mentioned, but not elaborated. On the other hand in the suggested curriculum (the schemes of work and the learning trajectories) almost all objectives are included. Only the sequencing of historical periods in chronological order is missing in both countries and the use of timelines in grade 3 and 4 in the Netherlands. As the English National Curriculum and the Dutch learning trajectories for grade 5-8 however mention the placing of events, people and changes in time, one could argue that sequencing of historical periods is implicitly included.
in the intended and suggested curricula. But then the question remains if and how this is put into practice in the implemented curricula?

The data from the surveys and the interviews indicate that in both countries there are differences between the intended and the implemented curricula. Although almost all teachers in the survey agree that all seven objectives of our operational definition are important, they do not teach all objectives in their history lessons. Only a quarter of the English teachers pays attention to the chronological order of historical periods consistently in each history lesson and the majority of teachers in both countries does not use timelines. Besides teacher trainers and experts in both countries are critical about the quality of the timelines that are used.

In both countries the historical periods are mentioned in the official curriculum, but there are differences in the way that these periods are taught. In English schools historical topics are taught within integrated programmes, project-based work, or within a discrete subject and not in chronological order (Harnett & Nichol, 2011), whereas in the Netherlands history in most schools is a discrete subject in which the ten eras are taught in chronological order (Wagenaar et al., 2010). In both countries however neither the sequence, nor the dates of historical periods are explicitly taught. From the surveys and interviews we can conclude that in both countries pupils are taught to make comparisons of historical periods with the present and draw conclusions about change and continuity. Making links between different historical periods in the past however is hardly mentioned: topics are taught in isolation. Furthermore there is a remarkable difference in the age that the teaching of historical time starts: in English schools historical time is taught from Key Stage 1 at the age of 5, which matches the intended curriculum. In the Netherlands most schools start the teaching of historical time in grade 5 when children are about 8-9 years old, whereas the learning trajectories suggest a start in grade 3 at the age of 6. Asked for their opinions a majority of the Dutch teachers agree on starting history teaching at the age of 9. In this respect Dutch teachers seem to rely on older theories based on Piagetian stages which indicate that the development of the understanding of historical time cannot start before the age of 9. Remarkably most Dutch teacher trainers in our survey do not agree with this.

A majority of all respondents in both countries, adheres to the assumption that learning the vocabulary of daily time is conditional for the learning of the vocabulary of historical time. Research from the last 20 years however indicates that there is no proof for this assumption and that the development of the understanding of historical time is a learning process rather than dependent on age and maturation (Barton & Levstik, 1996; Hoodless, 2002, 2004; Hodkinson 2003a, 2009a). From this, it would seem logical to start earlier with the teaching of historical time with the advantage that children can work longer and deeper on their understanding of historical time, as happens in England. Starting earlier however seems to be no guarantee that pupils acquire an understanding of historical time, as the Ofsted report (2011) shows. Teachers in both countries find it hard to give an indication on their pupils' results and progress in the development of the understanding of historical time, which is not surprising, since there are hardly any formal assessments nor any systematic monitoring or recording specifically for the understanding of historical time.

This study has its limitations as we did not look into all components that constitute a curriculum and the surveys and the interviews only give some indications about the implemented curriculum on the understanding of historical time. These indications mainly consist of statements about the teaching and learning of the first three objectives of our definition (Table 2.2): the vocabulary, the sequencing of periods in chronological order and
the use of timelines. The teaching of the other objectives that focus on pupils acquiring a 'sense of period' gets less attention in this study. Although teachers in both countries in the interviews claim that they teach about characteristic features from daily life that could contribute to the development of a 'sense of period', it is difficult to estimate to what extent this really happens, as we do not have enough data to support this. This would require more in-depth research through observations of lessons, for which a valid instrument would need to be developed. Furthermore it would be interesting to look into the attained curriculum to pupils' results on the micro level and to the progress that they make through primary school. Therefore we would need descriptions of different levels of attainment.

Although research from the last decades seems to indicate that the understanding historical time is a learning process rather than a developmental process, there is hardly any empirical research on how this learning process works and how the development of understanding historical time can be monitored or measured.

As a follow-up to this study we want to develop an instrument to measure pupils' levels of understanding of historical time. Furthermore we have planned to do an intervention study with pupils aged 6-12 in which we want to focus on the effects of a methodology on the development of pupils' understanding of historical time. We expect these studies will give some insight in how pupils learn to understand historical time, which is a very complex concept. Based on curricula and research literature however it should be possible to define the development of the understanding of historical time in the school context. With these studies we hope to contribute to the view that the development of understanding historical time is a learning process rather than dependent on age and maturation.

In spite of the limitations of this study we can conclude that in both in England and the Netherlands the teaching and learning of historical time is not very well implemented in the curriculum. Although in England the history curriculum starts earlier than in the Netherlands, the structure of the curriculum is episodic, which is not very helpful for supporting pupils in learning the chronological sequence, even more so, if teachers do not specifically make links to a meaningful historical overview. In the Netherlands the curriculum starts later, but it contains a meaningful framework of ten eras, that are mostly taught chronologically. This implicitly suggests that children learn to sequence these periods in chronological order. However this does not develop naturally. Just teaching periods in chronological order, as is suggested in the newly proposed English National Curriculum does not guarantee that pupils will develop their understanding of historical time. For both countries we can conclude that teachers should pay attention to the chronological sequence and the dates of historical periods more explicitly and that the use of timelines can be intensified and improved. The development of pupils' understanding of historical time requires a thoughtful teaching of the objectives, with regular assessments, good timelines and good planning through all years of primary school. Above all teachers should be well trained and aware of the concept of historical time and how this develops within children.

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9 The National Curriculum includes level descriptions, but according to the Primary Survey one-third of the teachers find these unhelpful and Hodkinson (2003a) concludes that these level descriptions are of little use in the assessment of children's temporal development.