

Curriculum Making and using ‘curriculum artefacts’

Theory

1. Background and introduction

One of the most rewarding and enjoyable aspects of teaching geography is the potential for being creative, topical and inventive. The world is always changing before our very eyes: new countries are born, cities grow, trade relations between countries develop – and of course floods occur, volcanoes erupt and landslips happen both large and small. Thus the task of geography, to ‘write the world’, is never done.

Furthermore, the discipline of geography has taught us that to investigate phenomena as if through a transparent ‘window’ on the world is inadequate. In geography we take the Earth as an object of our thought, but we now understand that what we see and study depends on who we are and what we think we are looking for. Our gaze is not neutral. Geographers have a perspectival and relational understanding of the world and this is exciting to develop with young people, and it sometimes requires ingenious teaching.

With these thoughts in mind, we can reflect critically on the standard, rational procedures and practices of lesson planning. So, if we always start with our lesson objectives; if we always adopt a predictable lesson structure (such as the ‘three-part lesson’); if we always provide ‘formative assessment’ moments to identify targets or ‘progress’; – then we risk reducing the geography. Geography lessons can become either

- a set of isolated ‘given’ facts or skills (what we have called a Future 1 experience) or
- a set of learning processes in which geography is just the arbitrary stuff (what we have called a Future 2 experience)

Developing ‘curriculum artefacts’ represents an alternative way to thinking about preparing sequences of geography lessons. It may help us enact a Future 3 curriculum.

2. What is a curriculum artefact?

Our thinking starts with an artefact of some description. This could be: a picture or collection of pictures, a poem, a map, a graphic, a selected excerpt of literature or film or music, a video clip, an animation – anything that can be studied and is a source of geographical information or data.

In the above list, we are pointing out the obvious: that the teaching and learning resources in geography are (should be) highly varied. However, we are also making a distinction between a teaching and learning ‘resource’ and what we are calling a ‘curriculum artefact’. Really good artefacts are textured and multi-layered: in other words, they can stand scrutiny and repeated examination. *We make them into curriculum artefacts by*

investing them with special significance.

The final point in the previous paragraph is important. The curriculum artefact becomes yours! You give it special meaning. You do this as a geography specialist who can see the potential wrapped up in the artefact. You understand it as a source of data and inspiration to think deeply about a topic or geographical idea. It is highly unlikely that the artefact will be *the only* resource used in a sequence of lessons, but it will be the key or signature material. It may become a kind of memorable reference point for the topic.

3. How do you use a curriculum artefact?

Margaret Roberts has conceptualized the enquiry approach to teaching and learning geography in Figure 00. Using this diagram, we can imagine a curriculum artefact fulfilling several functions. It could, for example, contain mystery that stimulates a 'need to know'. It may also be rich in data that can be identified, recorded and analysed by the students. A pedagogic technique needs to be devised to help pupils engage mentally with the artefact. Further information may need to be provided to ensure that the students can use the artefact to its full potential.

The international migration example illustrates all this. You can find other examples here. The important thing is to make your own.

4. Why 'curriculum artefact'?

There are two reasons why we use the term 'curriculum artefact'

1 The teacher needs to invest 'special significance' to the map, video clip, song, story (or whatever material has been selected to become the curriculum artefact). This is impossible without *curriculum thinking*. By this we mean thinking that is guided by a clear sense of educational goals and purposes. The selected artefact is not simply stuff to be learnt or copied. Neither is it simply illustrative of an event or occurrence or feature. It has been selected because you can see its potential for deepening understanding of a geographical idea or theme.

2 The intention of the 'curriculum artefact' is curriculum making as shown in Figure 01. Thus, you are working within the broad context of your subject discipline. You need to hold in balance the competing priorities of subject content, student experience and pedagogic technique. Developing a curriculum artefact is curriculum making in practice. It is curriculum enactment.

5. Why don't we call it lesson planning?

A good artefact has far more potential than just a lesson. We are not advocating that

every lesson you teach should be – or even can be – based on a new curriculum artefact. Curriculum artefacts take time to develop.

But think: if you develop just two or three curriculum artefacts per term or semester, you may have a dozen in two years. If they are good, they will be usable across age-groups and you will constantly want to refine and develop their use. If you work as part of a geography team, you will be exchanging your artefacts with your colleagues – and have really good conversations about the goals and purposes of the geography you teach.

Into Practice (Topic: international migration)

1. What is the chosen artefact?

This curriculum artefact is an Irish folk song, composed of a series of letters. It tells the story of nineteenth-century Irish migration to the UK and the USA as a consequence of the potato famine. For geographers, we can map the story of one family's experiences of the mass migration at that time.

Pupils will require some contextual information such as a base map of the north Atlantic, an atlas, information on the causes and consequences of the nineteenth century Irish potato famine, and also additional data such as population change data (of Ireland and the USA).

(Source: Geographical Association website. Song, lyrics and ideas available at: <http://www.geography.org.uk/cpdevents/curriculum/curriculummaking/artefact>)

2. What is the teaching process?

- a. Set the scene – using atlases, students need to find Ireland, the UK and the USA. They need to establish some sense of distance and perhaps have a conversation about how we travel between these places today – time, mode of transport and so on.
- b. Play the song to the students (showing the accompanying video).
- c. Gather some first impressions about the content of the song – ask students to devise a set of their own questions, stimulated by the song.
- d. Give students some materials (eg images and text) that tells the story of the potato famine (focus on causes and consequences).
- e. Working in pairs, pupils will now need a simple outline map of the north Atlantic Ocean showing the British Isles and North America. On the map, and with the song playing again (this time showing the lyrics as well), pupils use the lyrics to 'plot' the song. They should do this using symbols only (it may be helpful to discuss appropriate symbols with the group before they start).
- f. Having completed their map, the students have a record of the story. They will need plenty of time to discuss what the story reveals.

For example, the story shows:

- the potato famine was a main 'push' factor.
- employment opportunities elsewhere (USA and UK) were major 'pull' factors.
- much of the work for migrants was dangerous – e.g. building the US railways. This was known. In other words, information flows as well as people.
- relationships were maintained, but only through letters (compare this with communication opportunities today).

- family members who stayed at home benefited from financial remittances sent home. This was important –it enabled mother and father to stay living at home (compare this with remittances today).
- some migrants (Michael in the song) did make money and did/do return home.
- Michael also got into trouble with the law, but we do not know what kind of trouble (compare this with today – migrants are often poor and homeless and subject to prejudice).
- family fragmentation is part of the migrant experience, then and now. It is often painful.
- there is a gender and age dimension in the song – the sister/parents did not leave. (Is this true today?)

Of course, all the above can be adjusted depending on the age and experience of the students.

Teachers usually ask students to produce their own work. This is because it requires students to think and it provides evidence of what they have learned. In the above sequence students have listened, read, drawn maps and discussed what their maps show. There is already a lot of ‘production’!

Individually students could be asked to write a fictitious nineteenth century newspaper report under the headline “Irish Migration Show No Sign Of Stopping”. Or, they could construct a fully labelled diagram to show the Push-Pull model to explain international migration.

3. Discussion

Having considered a historical case study of international migration, it would be possible to develop pupils conceptual understanding by studying a more contemporary example such as Eastern European migration to the UK (economic migration) or forced migration such as from Syria as a consequence of war or political oppression.

We can see from this example that the curriculum artefact is more than a teaching resource – it can be used as an articulation of set of ideas and thus become a continual reference point for further teaching. For example, when studying a more contemporary example of migration, pupils can be reminded of Michael’s story or the experiences of parents left behind – the artefact threads through the sequence of lessons, and the map can be the basis for building new and different migration stories.

4. Making your own curriculum artefact

- a. Identify the topic or theme on your curriculum which you think would benefit from curriculum making
- b. Select a resource that you think you could make into a curriculum artefact

- c. Think how the artefact will be used
 - i. How does it fit into a sequence of lessons?
 - ii. What additional information do you need to provide?
 - iii. How will the students use the artefact?
 - iv. What materials do the students need?
 - v. What will the students produce?