

Emoting with maps!

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How do you find yourself responding to Nigel Forde's challenge, 'Poets have a problem with geographers who teach about places without meaning'? Nigel is the author of **Conventional Signs**, a love poem written with reference to the Ordnance Survey conventional map symbols. He was speaking to a group of English and geography teachers when he made this statement. It made many of us sit up and think about how we teach about places, particularly about how we use maps to engage pupils with their 'sense of place' or their 'geographical imaginations'. This article is concerned with opening up the debate about how emotional learning can be released through cartography. It attempts to explore why we are interested in, and what we mean by, emotional learning. It then goes on to suggest how harnessing the emotions can be used to raise standards. The article also includes some activities that can be used in the classroom to explore maps and emotional interpretations.

Why are we interested in emotional learning?

In the Geographical Association's (GA's) forthcoming New Secondary Teacher's handbook Doreen Massey explores the 'Geographical Mind'. She suggests that 'It is probably now well accepted, though it is still important to argue, that a lot of our geography is in the mind. That is to say we carry around with us mental images, of the world, of the country in which we live (all those images of the north/south divide), of the street next door. The New Yorker's mental map of the USA and Ronald Reagan's imagination of the world became popular posters. All of us carry such images; they may sometimes be in conflict or even be the cause of conflict, and digging these things up and talking about them is one good way into beginning to examine what it means to think "geographically".'

If this geography remains in the head of the learner, it is an educational opportunity lost. If pupils' geographical imaginations do not find a forum within which they can be shared, developed, refined, critiqued and reviewed, misconceptions may go unchallenged and pupils' learning become restricted in certain ways. The task of the geography teacher is to create the space and time in geography classrooms for the geography in children's heads to be revealed. Using maps and cartography is one medium into which emotions can be poured. Annotating conventional maps or creating the pupils' own maps are purposeful activities. Through these activities the geography in our heads, our emotional geography, is revealed. Once revealed it can be used, analysed, and reviewed. A very simple example, has come through the GA's Valuing Places project (for more information visit www.geography.org.uk/vp). A number of schools have been using affective mapping (Roberts, pp 171-4 and www.geography.org.uk/vp/valuing5c.html). The children in a south-west special school identified a part of the playground that they felt unhappy in. By exposing their emotion of fear on a map they effected change. It turned that the fear was caused because the fence was broken there and people could get in from outside. As a result their maps and annotations were put to the governors and the fencing was repaired and parts of the playground landscaped. In another, an East Anglian primary

Conventional signs



The line of dots, here on the map,
Is a way of saying 'footpath'.
The smouldering bull, when you
get there,
Is a way of rubbing them out.

The battleground 
Is grave-grey tarmac; the church
With a tower  is a tower
With no church; the well
(When you get there)
Is choked, soppo with autumns.

When you get there,
The windmill 
You'll find pure bone: the last
sails spilled the air
And went to make a chicken house,
A wagon, long ago.

The folly, when you get there,
Is bruised and cracked
Like a mason's fingernail.
It stirs the leaves
With the four winds it can no
longer afford.

Forgive me (when you speak
That significant word 'love')
If I tremble at the desecrations
I will find, the legendary falsehood,
When we get there.

school, a teacher new to the school found out about a tree planted to commemorate the millennium and a time capsule that had been buried underneath the seat surrounding it. The use of conventional signs alone would not have facilitated these rich and diverse learning experiences.

Of course, not all the geography in your head is reasonable and rational. Unchallenged misconceptions, some of which can be damaging, remain unchecked. The group of teachers that Nigel Forde addressed were part of the *Why Argue?* project, jointly offered by the Geographical Association and the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE). This project was funded by the DfES Innovations Unit and aimed to create time and space for busy teachers to explore different pedagogic approaches connected with developing pupil identity(ies). (For more about the project, visit www.geography.org.uk/local_solutions/ls_2.asp.) As a part of this work, teachers were asked to explore a sense of place with their pupils in Key Stage 3. One Oxfordshire school considered the issue of asylum seekers, since a reception centre was to be built nearby. The use of emotional mapping engaged the pupils with not only exploring misconceptions such as 'I didn't know that was there/near here/by here', but also of releasing some misconceptions that could be construed as racist. Through calling on appropriate pedagogies, using geographical information and informed dialogue, the teacher was able to challenge some irrational geography. Here the task of the geography teacher was to supportively explore and to interrupt irrational geography with informed and rational geography. For the learner there was a narrowing of the gap between imagination and information. Nigel Forde's poem provides an insight into his image and reality gap, the thoughts, imaginations in his mind and the difference that he finds on the ground. 'The battleground (crossed swords)/is grave-grey tarmac; the church/with a tower is a tower/with no church; the well (when you get there)/is choked, soppo with autumns'. In Nigel's case it was through the medium of poetry, through *Valuing Places* and the *Why Argue?* project we are suggesting that this can also be achieved graphically through map creation or annotation.



There is also a contribution that this approach can make beyond geography and geography classrooms per se. Since the revised National Curriculum was introduced in 2000, two overarching aims were highlighted, the second of which states that 'The School Curriculum should aim to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and prepare all pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life' (DfEE/QCA, 1999. Opening page). Getting emotional with maps is a way in which geographers can contribute to the wider aims of education and indeed some of the more specific requirements of the citizenship curriculum. Getting emotional with maps is also a way of developing inclusion. It

is some time ago now that Howard Gardner (1983) alerted us to the different types of learners that we may have in our classroom. Although research now suggests that too-heavy an emphasis on defining and pigeonholing learners into different types can be unhelpful (Researching Learning Styles, Teaching Thinking, 2004), the awareness that pupils have different needs is helpful. Of course, some of your learners will be natural spatial thinkers. For many of these thinkers emotional maps will be the context through which they achieve their best literacy and numeracy. They will lap up the opportunity to share their thoughts spatially. For others the challenge and interruption of having to think spatially about emotions may be counter-intuitive. This too can be helpful in stimulating new thinking.

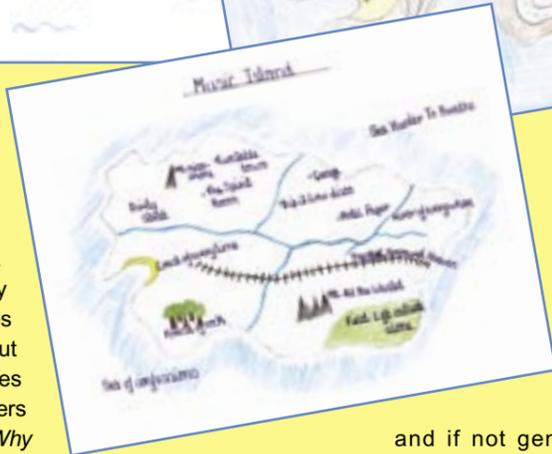
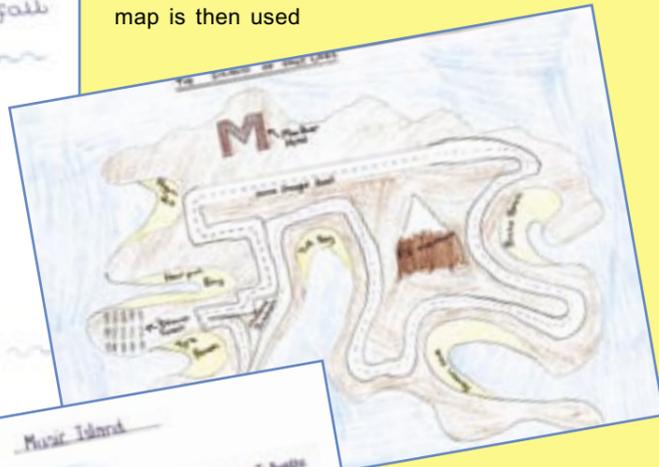
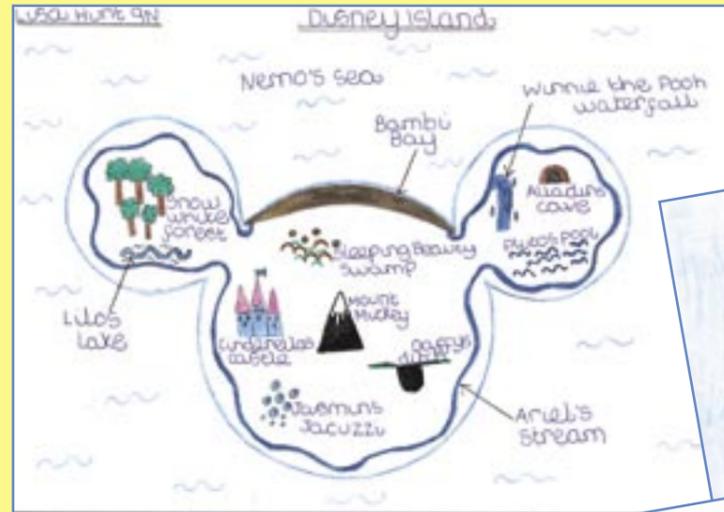
What do we mean by getting emotional with maps?

Those persuaded by the arguments above will be sympathetic to some recent work that has been undertaken in Northern Ireland. Here the Key Stage 3 National Curriculum has been reviewed to take account of research findings about how we learn. 'Recently, neuroscience has established a number of factors which are critical to learning and to motivation, about how our brains process information. We now know that the human brain creates meaning through perceiving patterns and making connections and that thought is filtered through the emotional part of the brain first. The likelihood of understanding taking place is therefore increased significantly if the experience has some kind of emotional meaning, since the emotional engagement of the brain on some level is critical to seeing patterns and making connections'. (CEA, 2003).

Statements such as this encourage us to develop the way that we teach and learn about maps. A map, well interpreted, demonstrates to us the physical location of a place, often through the use of grid references or, for example, by reference to a sheetline map. Upon the map itself the layout and distribution pattern of features, both human and physical, are represented through the use of colour, symbols and text. These are conventional symbols, with a key to aid interpretation. What is not revealed by a map alone are the conversations, negotiations, power struggles that occurred to create that place. The power relationships relevant to explaining that place may be human, physical, environmental or any combination of these. What is also not evident is the layer of meaning attached to place by individuals and by groups. It is these two dimensions of map

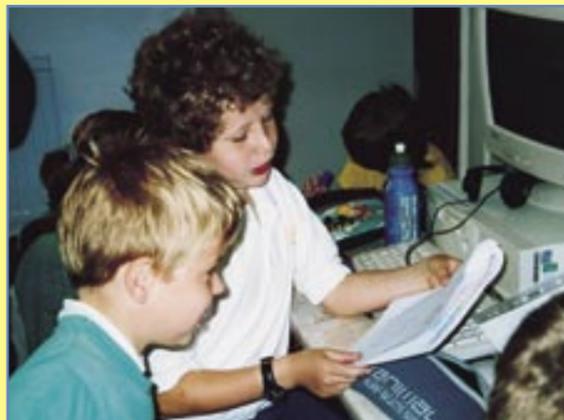
interpretation that getting emotional with maps help us to reveal. This critical form of map reading can be utilised purposefully in our geography classrooms. By engaging learners with activities that support them in annotating, creating or completing maps by drawing on the geography in their head as well as the geography that they see, we start to reveal their geographical imaginations. These geographies, interesting and varied as they often are, should not be an end point. Once learners have mapped their interpretations, we have a starting point. These maps are a resource to be explored, questioned, challenged and then, in the light of all these learning experiences, reconstructed.

that getting emotional with maps facilitates. Passive acceptance is superficial, examining a perspective, exploring a representation, constructing an argument using cartography is challenging and yet accessible to all. My own children in their reception and pre-reception classes are well used to the happy and sad face in their classroom. Their names are places on the face that best shares the teacher's view of their behaviour. They can then transfer these familiar symbols, with relative ease, to a simple map or photograph to explain their geographical imagination of a place. Happy is, of course, used to symbolise the treasured places. This map is then used



Simon Catling (2003) argued convincingly that '...the geography curriculum remains fundamentally a reflection of the adult geography of places and the environment.' Such a curriculum construction ensures that much geographical investigation is being misled. Critically thinking about rather than passively accepting a learner's views about places creates opportunities to really think geographically about the places themselves, the people in those places and the issues that connect those places with others in other localities. A Bristol school involved in the *Why Argue?* project was stimulated to use this thinking in planning some teaching and learning activities for Year 9 pupils in geography and English lessons. Music and the teachers' own personal experiences of places were used to encourage the pupils to consider how they feel about their immediate surroundings – the school. The Atlas of Experience was a key source in providing a model of how to map personal experiences and pupils used poetry to describe their feelings about the school environment. This atlas has been produced by two Dutch cartographers and uses conventional signs to map emotions. The value of this resource was explored in an earlier edition of *Mapping news* (pp 7–10, summer 2003).

as a resource to support an informed conversation as to why they hold that view of that place, and to see if that view is shared. From there we explore if that view is reasonable, and if not gently challenge the perspective with reasoned alternatives, using geographical information. Through conversation geographical thinking is being refined and the quality of this thinking is raised.

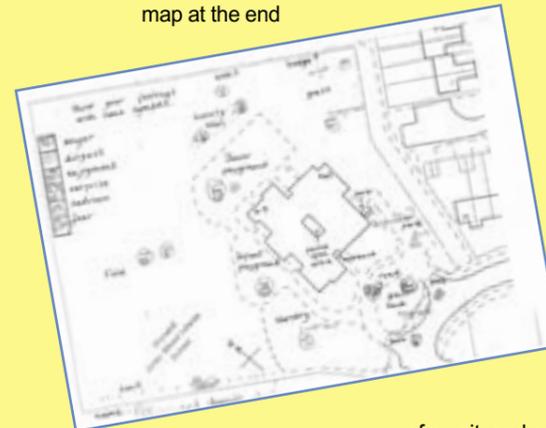


Let us return to the poem that stimulated much of this thinking for a moment. Nigel was kind enough to suggest that he felt privileged sharing the final verse of his poem with a community of geography teachers, who would understand the significance of 'legendary falsehoods'. (I must admit I only got the double meaning once he'd pointed it out to us all!) It is this depth of understanding, of the drawing upon and then the refining of a geographical imagination,

What activities can be used to develop emotional learning and cartography?

The most popular activities that schools have engaged with to date have been described above and are exemplified further on the *Valuing Places* website. These include affective mapping and the use of the Atlas of Experience. However, you may wish to consider using some of these ideas.

1. Presenting pupils with a partially completed map of an area with which they are familiar and ask them to complete it. In this way they will reveal the features that are significant to them and may omit those that they perceive as being less relevant. A class comparison and analysis of the maps could provide a rich exchange on the significance of different local features and amenities.
2. Use the Free maps for schools and ask pupils to select an area that they then annotate, either using text or symbols, with their feelings about that area. On a wall display map collect the different views and explore any patterns. What can be done about any areas that excite negative emotions, and what can be done to treasure areas that present positive emotions?
3. Provide the pupils with an outline map of a locality to be studied. Ask them to annotate this with their knowledge of this place and their expectations. Use the same blank map at the end



of a unit, and ask the pupils to annotate it with what they now know. Ask the pupils to critically comment on the differences between their two maps.

4. Ask the pupils to work in pairs. Ask them to sit back to back. One is to describe to the other a familiar route and their feelings about that familiar route. The other is to map the description. They then review this map against a conventional map of the route and explore and explain any omissions and additions. They may also look for the reasons for the emotions.

5. Provide your pupils with a map of a familiar area with features selectively removed. Ask them to correct the map. Explore with them which features they noticed were missing first and why.

There are of course many more similar activities, most of which are fun and all of which are challenging.

How can emotional mapping help us to raise standards?

It is easy to be careless in our use of maps. It is easy to assume that they are telling us something that should be uncritically accepted. Maps are of course cartographic interpretations and as such tell us a great deal about the map maker and their society as well as our own preconceptions. All this requires learners to think about maps as sources.



Present a conventional map to a group of pupils and emotions are released. For some it may be fear. Fear because they can't translate the mass of lines and words into anything meaningful. For others it might be excitement; it is exciting (still for me!) to find your house, your friend's house, the place that you have been/are about to go on holiday, on a map. The geography teacher has a role to build upon both these and other reactions. Through skilful teaching the fear can be reduced, and through different teaching and learning activities the excitement can be harnessed and used to promote enjoyable and relevant geographical thinking. This article has argued that these teaching and learning activities should provide opportunities for pupils to annotate conventional maps and create maps of their own that reveal their geographical imaginations. Whatever the scale or type of map that is being used with a class, a map often presents a different way of seeing a place or feature, and for a moment or two there is a buzz stimulated by the surprise that this different view creates. Lay a map out on a table, gather a group of pupils around it and stand back and watch and enjoy. Yes, both we and our pupils are allowed to enjoy maps and geography.

As a young teacher I was so focussed on supporting my pupils in developing a confidence about symbols, scale, layout, contour lines and labels, essential that these are, that I forgot to make space for their geographical imaginations, or even trying to learn about their sense of place. In a busy, pressurised curriculum it is seductive to think that coverage unequivocally raises standards. It is more challenging to accept that dialogue and conversations about meanings, both literal and imagined, support pupils in digging deep and thinking purposefully about places their representation and misrepresentation.

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