

Situating learning in History teaching online

Maps in History teaching

Maps have long played an important role in History teaching at all educational levels, from primary to higher education (H. Chacea, 1960, 'Using Maps In Teaching History', *Journal of Geography* 59.8, pp. 380-385: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00221346008982313>). They enable students to locate their historical learning in space and thus to better understand how historical processes worked themselves out on the ground (for examples of incorporating 'historical place' in the classroom see: Teaching with Historic Places, by the Heritage Education Services Program: <http://www.nps.gov/NR/twhp/about.htm>). But the historical significance of maps extends beyond the 'objective' information that they represent about historical spaces. Maps also tell stories: they are texts that are created by individuals and groups who decide the subject of a map, the purpose, the point of view, what is included, and what is left out (<http://www.teachinghistory.org/nhec-blog/23617>).

Although geographical literacy and historical knowledge and understanding are closely interconnected and, potentially, mutually reinforcing, History lecturers' are often surprised by their students' lack of knowledge about the geographies of past periods: e.g. that the borders and even the names of countries (and places) have changed over time, and even where modern cities and countries are located. Likewise, some students struggle to decode the historical and cultural meanings of maps. Fortunately, online platforms nowadays provide spaces for the hosting of repositories of scanned and digitised historical maps, where interactive technologies allow teachers to make maps to present historical data to their students and where students can be engaged in activities that require them to design their own maps.

Teaching using historical maps

Historical maps often contain information that is held in no other sources, e.g. place-names, boundaries, and physical features that have been modified or erased over the course of time. Apart from this historical information, such maps can be analysed to see what they reveal about the attitudes and worldviews of peoples and cultures of earlier times (Researching the Role of the Map in History Teaching: <http://teachinghistory.org/teaching-materials/ask-a-master-teacher/24974>). Studying historic maps can help students

- to examine the place and time that the maps portray;
- to compare the worldviews of peoples of the past and present;
- to consider why the map is presented in its particular form;
- to think about how perspectives have changed over time;
- to interact with a map (especially interactive maps) and its story in a non-linear fashion (C. M. Bolick, 2006, 'Teaching and Learning with Online Historical Maps', *Social Education* 70.3, pp. 133-137).

Lists of historical maps

- Tales from the Vault: Historical Maps Online (*Coordinates* B.3): <http://www.stonybrook.edu/libmap/coordinates/seriesb/no3/b3.htm>
- Maps: Scanned collections online (British Library): <http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/webres/scanned/>
- Hipkiss's Scanned Old Maps: <http://www.hipkiss.org/data/links.html>

[Note: there are many historical map collections online: a Google search will likely bring up a large number of results, which can be refined by place/ period as required)

Interactive maps

Numerous bespoke interactive maps have been developed by organisations, such as the British Library, or as outputs of specific research projects, while a number of historical maps are readily available on Google Maps and Google Earth (e.g. <http://www.google.co.uk/earth/explore/showcase/historical.html>). These maps can also draw on (through linkages or embedding) external resources, such as letters, diaries, photographs, and newspapers. Such maps have all the benefits outlined above, of enabling students to access information that allows them to make sense of the varied significances of historical maps.

A further use of interactive maps is that which enables students and teachers to manipulate maps actively and even to construct their own historical maps online. Lecturer can use services such as Google Maps to construct their own historical maps to expand and illustrate material in lectures or seminars.

Another example is the use of Google Maps to construct a resource bank for a module or a seminar. The process that could be followed is as follows:

- For homework students research a historical theme relating to a series of different locations
- They write up the results of their independent work
- Create a Google Map:
 - Assign a title and establish 'Privacy and sharing settings' (I suggest 'Public')
 - Tag the different locations in Google Maps with a placemark: 
 - Add a title to the placemark (e.g. with place name)
- The written-up student work is uploaded as separate documents to Google docs (possibly collated in a folder):
 - In the relevant Google doc click the 'File' tab, then 'Share'
 - In the 'Sharing settings' pop out box, under 'Who has access' choose the relevant setting (I suggest 'Public on the web'), then click 'Save'
 - Then copy the 'Link to share' web address
- Go back to the Google Map and click 'edit'
- Click on each placemark
 - Under 'Description' add some text that describes the topic within the corresponding Google doc
 - The description can only contain a limited amount of text, so you need to insert a link to the Google doc (make sure that you are within the 'Rich Text' link)
 - To do this, highlight some text (e.g. 'Notes') and then click on the link icon 
 - Copy the 'Link to share' of the Google doc into the 'Enter a URL' box
 - Click 'OK'
 - You can also add other links and images here if necessary
- Click 'Save', then 'Done' above the title of the Google Map
- To reedit the Google Map, click 'Edit' again.

For more advice on making Google Maps see:

- How to Make a Customized Google Map (excellent step-by-step guide to making a map, with images; note that you don't have to follow all of these stages): <http://mashable.com/2013/06/28/custom-google-map/>

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- Creating Maps Using Custom Maps for Google Maps (clear, step-by-step instructions from Google Maps, with images):
<http://www.google.co.uk/earth/outreach/tutorials/custommaps.html>

For more on the approach see:

- J. Wood, 2012, 'wikis, Wikipedia and Google Maps':
<http://trsllookingoutwards.wordpress.com/2012/03/14/wikis-wikipedia-and-google-maps-18/>
- For an example map see: <http://bit.ly/MWrjS3>

Resources for making interactive maps:

- Timeliner (<http://timeliner.okfnlabs.org/>): online tool that enables the construction of timelines and 'timemaps' (maps that show how geographical spaces are transformed or otherwise through time), or a combination of the two, and can be used instead of Google Maps.
- Scribble Maps (<http://scribblemaps.com/>): another online tool that enables users to draw and write on Google Maps. They can map history, create timelines, annotate historic sites, and work can be emailed or embedded in a blog or website.

What is GIS (geographic information system)?

You will find that mapping websites, especially those of a more advanced nature, often make reference to 'GIS' (geographic information system). This is a system designed to capture, store, manipulate, analyze, manage, and present geographical data. GIS applications are tools that allow users to generate searches, analyze spatial information, edit data in maps, and present the results of such operations (<http://www.gisforhistory.org/info/whatisgis.php>). GIS thus underpins many of the tools that are used for teaching history with maps, especially the more interactive resources, although at present it is used more widely in historical research than teaching (for one example see here: Richard Byrne, 2011, 'Using GIS to Teach History', Free Technology for Teachers: <http://www.freotech4teachers.com/2011/10/using-gis-to-teach-history.html#.UeKZZKzJJsg>).