

Choosing Modules: Risks and Rewards

Activity

Nicki Kindersley

This is a plan for a reflective exercise that students can undertake alone or in small groups. It could also be adapted as a 50-minute introductory seminar. If so, the tutor should introduce and conclude the session with material relevant to that module, allocate equal time to the three parts and build in some time in each part for students to discuss their findings and previous experiences in small groups.

Context and aim

This exercise is designed to support individual students or groups of students in reflecting on their own journeys through history education and identifying new possibilities and directions for study. It may be especially helpful to undertake it when making module choices for the next academic year.

Preparation

You are not required to undertake any reading or other preparation for the session. The activity involves a creative mapping, which could include craft materials or could be done simply with pen and paper. You will also need a basic Mercator projection of the world map – print or sketch one out yourself.

Description of activity

Part 1: Timeline your history education

What histories have you been taught? Scribble down the different topics you've covered in your history classes as far back as you can remember. If you have covered a particular topic more than once, note that too (I remember being taught the British industrial revolution three times at different points!). Try to remember as many topics as you can, even if you can't remember any details. Then draw a line on your page and place the topics you've studied into a chronological line. This might help you to remember a few more topics you've covered. When you have done this, consider the following questions:

- Which periods has your history education focused on?
- Which time periods were *not* explored in your school history classes?

Part 2: Map your history education

Take your printed or sketched world map. Now start to transfer your school history topics onto the map, maybe by colouring in the locations of each topic you studied or covering them with Post-It notes. You could colour-code different regions according to how often your classes focused on this area – so, for example, green for geographical areas that were covered in several classes, orange for areas you looked at two or more times, and red for those only covered once. When you have done this, consider the following questions:

- Which geographical areas has your history education focused on?
- Are there any regions that are completely blank?

Remember that this timeline and map are not representative of all your history knowledge. You have learned histories from much wider sources – from your family, your surroundings and your own explorations. But this exercise can show you where your formal education has taken you – and where it has not.

Part 3: Final reflection

Take your timeline and map, and write or draw over them to highlight the periods, regions and themes that you are most interested in. For example, maybe you will colour in the Atlantic, to highlight your interests in oceanic

and Atlantic world histories. To guide you in this part of the exercise, consider:

- What histories have you found compelling, inside and outside of the classroom?
- What themes, questions and protagonists motivate you to study?