

A MOVING PROVOCATION

CHRIS MOON WITH JON CANNELL

In this article written with Jon, Chris reflects on an experiential, enquiry-based approach to investigating migration.

In September 2018, I became the founding Grade 4 (year 5) class teacher at the brand-new 3–18 Nord Anglia International School in Dublin. The school's curriculum follows the International Baccalaureate (IB) pathway, with younger pupils engaging in the enquiry-based Primary Years Programme (PYP). The curriculum is delivered through what the IB refer to as Units of Inquiry (UoI), with each year group or grade completing six UoI each academic year.

Having finished my first half term, the Head of Primary School asked to join the class for a lesson. I faced the same dilemma that we all do when the Head teacher wants to 'drop in': whether to play it safe or take a risk and go beyond my comfort zone. I chose the latter, modelling what I advocate to my pupils on a daily basis.

I had an ambitious lesson on migration planned, in which the pupils would be tasked (in role) to make a series of group (or community) decisions as they moved between 'countries', gathering the resources necessary for survival. If all went to plan, the impact on the pupils' learning would be immense, allowing the class to explore migration in depth over the following weeks.

The purpose

One of the principle strengths, yet inherent challenges, of the PYP is its focus on concept over content. After only one term delivering the Primary arm of the IB programme, it became apparent that the success of enquiry-based learning hinged on pupils understanding their learning at a personal and conceptual level before expanding into local and global contexts, either past or present. To this end, I was keen to begin our new UoI with an experiential activity that would immerse the pupils conceptually.

I wanted to start the migration theme with a 'provocation' that would elicit assessment information and inspire pupil-led enquiry. The central idea that 'People migrate for many reasons, which has an impact on themselves and others' offers many lines of enquiry. Potentially, these can be animal or human, historic or contemporary, economic or social – all depend on a conceptual understanding of migration and its potential impacts as a prerequisite.

My goal for the first lesson was to use an authentic experience that generated pupil discussion on the central idea without explicitly introducing the concept of (or even the term) 'migration'.

The stimulus, or provocation

To create this unconscious engagement, groups ('communities') of four or five pupils, were to move between 'countries' based on a need to gather resources. Each 'country' was simply a coloured hoop placed on the floor of the Early Years learning area. We filled each hoop with items representing key resources for survival: food, water, oil, clothing and animals. Each country's hoop had a different range of resources, for example: the purple country was rich in oil and animals, while the blue country (Figure 1) had a wealth of clothes and water. To create a sense of resource competition



Figure 1: The countries were represented by coloured hoops containing resources key to survival. Photo © Chris Moon.

each one was worth a given number of points, with the value of each resource based on its importance to survival.

Equipped with the rules and scoring system (see Figure 2), each community was allocated a starting country. To ensure that the decision-making process was realistic, a number of barriers were put in place.

For your community to survive you need different resources:

Resource	Value (points)
Food	5
Water	5
Oil	3
Animals	2
Clothes	1

There are rules for how much your community can move between countries, what you can bring and how much you can take...

- You can only move countries three times.

- You can only take eight items between countries.
- If another community arrives in the same country as yours, they can take three of your items.

Final scoring

- Your points will be the total of what your community has gathered at the country you finish on.
- If more than one community finishes at the same country, the points are divided equally between the groups.
- Your community will be awarded 10 bonus points if it has at least one of each resource.

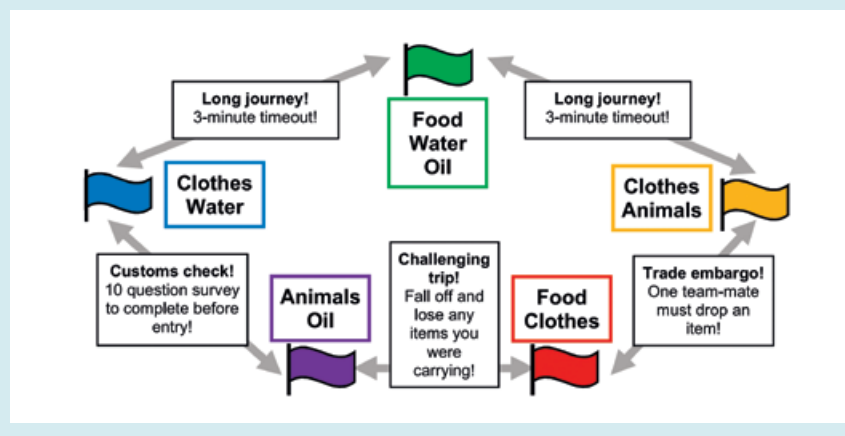


Figure 2: The rules of the provocation: groups had to overcome obstacles on their travels and experience other communities needing the same resources from the countries.

Linked to the different countries, these customs checks, timeouts and trade embargos, for example, helped to generate a continuous dialogue among the pupils. They used justification and reasoning to weigh up the pros and cons of any prospective movement. Figure 3 shows the resources collected by the community that finished on the purple country.

Reflections

The discussion generated by this activity was incredibly rich. Pupils made connections and listened to an array of perspectives ahead of each collaborative decision. The green country created the most debate between communities: it was intentionally the most resource-rich country, had the harshest climate (the only country based outside on a wet and windy November day) and involved communities experiencing a three-minute timeout before and after visits to replicate a relatively long journey. One of the main considerations for the future will be how to better capture and record the rich and varied pupil discussions that occurred during the activity.

Collectively, we reflected on the activity immediately afterwards, summarising pupils' thoughts and considerations under four question headings. The communities adopted different strategies depending on what they considered more important – be it protecting what they had gathered, collecting the full range of resources available or exploring new territories. Clearly, communities were frustrated by the amount of paperwork and the length of travel (waiting) necessary to 'access' some countries – both aspects that mirror real-life migration. During the activity, pupils discussed barriers to migration, potential competition for resources, their community's goals and much more. The communities were in a constant state of flux as pupils grappled with the pros and cons of migrating between countries, which showed their maturity of thinking – all of which developed with no content-centred discussion on migration beforehand.

The pupils loved the interactive, experiential nature of the activity. They appreciated the independent sense of collective responsibility and the opportunity to discuss their community's options to make decisions that were key to its success (Figure 4). Reflecting on the activity, one of the pupils concluded: 'It was really fun because our group had to make difficult decisions about which way to go, and why. If someone fell off any of the challenges, we lost all the items they were carrying, so we had to make difficult decisions about who was carrying what and how much'.

The points system certainly created a buzz and engendered the fervour I was hoping for. However, one drawback with



Figure 3: This community overcame the obstacles and fulfilled their resource needs reasonably well, ending their journey at the purple country. Photo © Chris Moon.

the competitive element was that, at times, it funnelled many pupils' thinking into a protectionist mindset. Success in the activity relied on collecting as many resources as possible, thus some pupils became aggrieved when other communities landed on the same country and resources had to be shared. We explored how any ensuing conflict might mirror migrants' emotional responses in the real world. It also demonstrated to pupils how an increase in population with a finite set of resources can lead to resentment, anger and even spark negative actions.

Future adaptations could include a form of trade, so that communities can see how everyone can benefit from collaborating and sharing resources, or to allow more freedom of movement between the countries (we played it so that the communities were limited each time to just two possible moves). In the real world many countries share multiple borders. However, to keep the feel of inaccessibility and challenging decision making, it may be advisable to ensure the resource-rich green country is accessed from only one or two neighbouring countries.

Final thoughts

Starting this UoI with a concept-centred provocation in the form of a truth statement (rather than a question) was as useful for framing my own thinking as it was for engaging and immersing the pupils in the new unit.



Figure 4: Pupils embraced the opportunity to discuss plans within their community and make difficult decisions for themselves. Photo © Chris Moon.

I will use this type of provocation again in the Grade 4 curriculum, because of the impact in terms of the questions it raises and the connections that have already been made. Using provocations in this way means my pupils are now prepared to try any line of enquiry that relates to the movement of people, because they have been able to mirror and reflect on this initial experience at a personal level.

Chris Moon is Grade 4 teacher at Nord Anglia International School, Dublin, Ireland. Jon Cannell is Primary Curriculum Leader at the Geographical Association.