

From the archive: Changing landscapes

Mel Norman

As I set about looking through our archive for this article, a different article emerged to the one I anticipated writing. I had planned to investigate how we had taught about 'landscapes' in the classroom, but I found myself reflecting on how the landscape of *Teaching Geography* itself had changed over the years. In this short article I shall try to cover both.

One of the first things I noticed was how few women contributed to the journal in its early years. In the first five volumes only 18% of the articles were written by women, however in the last ten years contributions have been roughly equally from men and women.

I'm very pleased to say that Eleanor Rawling, who has an article in this issue of *Teaching Geography*, was also one of the early female contributors to the journal. In 'Village in the Green Belt – an introduction to planning for second year pupils' (April 1976) Eleanor discusses a unit of work carried out with a group of 12–13 year olds aimed at dispelling the myth that planning issues are too complex to be studied other than in the upper school.

Many of the articles from the 1970s and 1980s refer to 'the Third World'; other articles refer to 'remedial pupils' and there is a lot of gendered language: 'Man's perception of his natural environment' (October 1983); 'The Man-Land Relationship (January 1984) and 'Man's Acceleration of Coastal Zone Erosion Processes' (April 1985). Attitudes and approaches have certainly changed in the last 40 years.

A short piece in the August 1976 journal caught my eye: 'The Poetry of Place' by John A. Williams:

To give greater insight into reality, to know what an area or place 'feels' like, a poem can be most useful, if not the best starting point.

He also talks about using passages from novels to evoke a sense of place for students. This article was written at a time when 'quantitative geography' was key, and John asks whether geography teachers should make greater use of qualitative material. This is still an issue and whilst I encourage my trainee teachers to use art

and literature in their geography lessons, it is not always well received in schools!

A small selection of articles with similar approaches to landscape studies included:

- 'Picture, Slide, Poem and Sketch: How Do 14-Year-Old Pupils "See" Desert Landscapes?' (July 1982): students' appreciation of landscapes varies according to the way the landscape is presented.
- 'Sugar caves and sandy mountains' (October 1997) was about students making models from sugar cubes to replicate karst scenery and using damp sand to simulate a destructive plate margin.
- 'Think inside the box: miniature landscapes' (Autumn 2009) described students constructing a landscape in a box. One of my all-time favourites!
- "'The Severn was brown, and the Severn was blue" – a place for poetry in school geography?' (Autumn 2010) suggests how poetry can enable young people to engage with landscapes.

There is a wealth of material available to those of you interested in exploring the changing landscape of teaching geography, as well as the changing landscape of *Teaching Geography*. The journal printed colour photos of various landscapes on the inside covers between 1990 and 1994, when the rest of the content was in black and white. The 'My Places' articles, from 2007, had people talking about the places and landscapes that have influenced them. The archive also highlights recurring themes across the 40 years, including managing curriculum change, assessment issues, discrete or integrated subject teaching.

In October 1991 Jeff Serf wrote a letter to the Editor saying:

I find it difficult to keep abreast of recent developments in educational thinking as I struggle to read this DES publication or skim that HMI report.

Plus ça change! | **TG**

References

- Ellis, P. (1997) 'Sugar caves and sandy mountains', *Teaching Geography*, 22, 4, p. 185.
- Parkinson, A. (2009) 'Think inside the box: Miniature landscapes', *Teaching Geography*, 34, 3, pp. 120–121.
- Rawling, E. (2010) "'The Severn was brown, and the Severn was blue" – a place for poetry in school geography?' *Teaching Geography*, 35, 3, pp. 93–95.
- Rawling, E. (1976) 'Village in the Green Belt – an introduction to planning for second year pupils', *Teaching Geography*, 1, 4, pp. 151–156.
- Serf, J. (1991) 'Letter to the Editor', *Teaching Geography*, 16, 4, p. 180.
- Williams, J.A. (1976) 'The Poetry of Place', *Teaching Geography*, 2, 1, p. 19.
- Wilson, P. and Widt, L. (1982) 'Picture, Slide, Poem And Sketch: How Do 14-Year Old Pupils "See" Desert Landscapes?', *Teaching Geography*, 8, 1, pp. 9–12.

Mel looks back at the Teaching Geography archive to see how teaching about landscapes has changed and how the landscape of the journal has also changed.

Dr Melanie Norman
is the Editor of *Teaching Geography*.

Email: M.J.Norman@brighton.ac.uk