

Peer Reviewed Articles

Joseph, a Year 2 teacher, joins each of the four groups of students working together exploring historical knowledge and understandings around the impact of changing technology on people's lives. Over several weeks, the class is exploring the three suggested inquiry questions from the Australian Curriculum: History. One of the many teaching and learning strategies the teacher has organised with the students is to explore various artefacts that have been brought into the school by Joseph, the children and their families, and other staff. The four student groups represent the shared interest of the children in each group – toys, kitchen/cooking, communication, and ways to get to school and work. The classroom environment supports the process of inquiry. One of the four groups burst with chatter as they discover that the pull-along car was made in France – how did John's dad get it as a toy for his fourth Christmas? Another group ponders the materials the 'old' grater is made from before making plans to time the grating of a block of cheese with this tool and the electric device brought in by Charlotte's chef Aunty. There are giggles from a group who imagine arriving to school on a horse just like in the photos some grandparents have provided of themselves. Joseph reminds the children in another group to use delicate hands as they touch the end of the old pen nibs and smell the ink in the bottle.

As von Heyking (2004) noted, history is an interpretative discipline that requires learners to analyse narratives about people, events, and ideas of the past. An understanding of the interpretative nature of history helps students explore their own families' connections with the past, and "empower them to imagine possible futures. Based on the learnings uncovered from the exploration of the artefacts, students in Joseph's Year 2 class can also be guided to wonder about different points of view and perspectives, and use the evidence and their imagination to explore empathy. History of this kind is powerful and exciting" (von Heyking, 2004, p.5). Wineburg (2001) argues that it is critical to give children opportunities to explore primary and secondary sources in depth to determine the "truth" of the different accounts. It is at this stage that they are engaged both cognitively and emotionally and indeed developing their skills of historical inquiry (Australian Curriculum: History version 4.1). Primary sources may include, for example, portraits, written texts made at the time, and artefacts.

Seeing, touching, feeling, and smelling: Using artefacts in primary classrooms

Paul Reitano, School of Education and Professional Studies, Griffith University

Nicole C. Green, School of Teacher Education and Early Childhood, University of Southern Queensland

The history teaching and learning described in the anecdote above, one of numerous approaches Joseph implements across a topic of inquiry, has personal meaning for the Year 2 students in their daily lives. Engaging learners in history, Levstik (1993) argues, requires a shift from an emphasis on a "story well told to sources well scrutinized, pose questions, collect and analyse sources, struggle with issues of significance, and ultimately build their own historical interpretations" (p.394). Joseph's Year 2 students are inquiring into the past in relation to their understandings of the present through the historical concepts of continuity and change, perspectives and empathy. The question of 'how have changes in technology shaped our daily life?' lends itself to inquiry, imagination and interpretation. The students in Joseph's class, as part of many learning experiences over the weeks of the inquiry, were asked to look for differences and similarities between the 'old' and 'new' artefacts collected and brought together, giving focus to the student's explorations. Having children compare and contrast items is an effective way of working with the historical concept of change and continuity (Turner-Bisset, 2005). With more than two items available, the children sequenced items from the oldest to the most recent through asking questions and examining every observable aspect of the artefacts (including touch, smell, sound, and emotions). "Understanding change over time is central to historical thinking" (von Heyking, 2004, p.7).

The value of artefacts in the classroom

Artefacts are things made by people rather than natural objects. Cleveland, Craven and Danfelter (1992/1993) categorise artefacts into three kinds: material, educational, and cultural. Material artefacts include clothing, tools, weapons, housing, household items, personal possessions, and food; educational artefacts refer to items used in the classroom; and artistic artefacts may include items such as folk and fine arts, recreation, and everyday objects. Artefacts can promote a better understanding of the role of objects in our lives. They help us collect, prepare and cook food, as well as provide water, heating and shelter (Durbin, Morris & Wilkinson, 1990). Indeed, artefacts are a central part of our lives – life, work, religion, family, communication, leisure, sport, music, and entertainment (Turner-Bisset, 2005).

School students of all ages can understand a great deal about artefacts. Table 1 offers an activity which can be adapted to guide students with varying abilities in knowing the different materials and what they were used for; the physical effects of time; the way people viewed the world; the social, historic and economic contexts within which items featured; and techniques and vocabulary of construction and decoration. In addition, artefacts help us understand all cultures, including those that have left little or no written records. As Durbin (1991) rightly points

out, "Studying history without looking at material remains of the past creates a very unbalanced view. If you only consider the written record then millions of people are excluded from the record" (p.9).

There is the kinaesthetic value of artefacts to the learning experiences for those students who enjoy learning from concrete and visual experiences. Learners can feel the texture and weight of the artefact, consider its warmth and coldness, and even smell it (Hoodless, 2008)¹¹. They "are real rather than abstract, and thus they aide the memory: physical sensations...may remain longer in the mind than word-gained facts or ideas" (Durbin et al p.5). Research by Hawkes (1996) and Vella (2001) show that those students who handled artefacts were clearly motivated and excited by the experience, which had a strong influence on their learning. For example, Turner-Bisset (2005) used artefacts as a stimulus with her students to promote creative writing through fantasies and stories. Imagination and play, especially in the early years of primary school, are critical in making sense of objects (von Heyking, 2004). Indeed, the "younger the children are, the more important is play with objects" (Turner-Bisset, 2005, p.35). Even though fantasy may be the focus of play, it is the historical setting that is important because children are in the early stages of trying to understand and reconstruct the past (Cooper, 1995). Furthermore, students like the ones in Joseph's Year 2 class are, in an embryonic way, establishing a framework for inquiry into artefacts that promote what Martinello and Cook (1994) refer to as habits of the mind, such as a mental set for learning – thinking flexibly, following hunches, taking risks, working collaboratively, and finding solutions.

Inquiring with artefacts in the classroom helps learners develop historical concepts and skills. In terms of concepts, learners have an opportunity to develop a broad understanding of continuity and change, cause and effect, significance, perspectives, and empathy and contestability (Australian Curriculum: History Version 4.1). Apart from these, Durbin, et al (1990) identify concepts that are specific to artefacts, such as, original, fake, copy; typicality, bias, survival; fashion, style, taste; aesthetic quality, heritage, collection, preservation, conservation; and, design as a function of use, availability of materials and appearance. In the process of inquiry into artefacts, students have the opportunity to develop the stated skills of the Australian Curriculum: History, which are chronology, terms and concepts, historical questions and research, analysis and use of sources, perspective and interpretation, explanation and communication.

Artefacts are especially useful for those children whose reading and writing are continuing to develop. Research by Davies and Redmond (1998) shows that all students, "whatever their levels of literacy skills, can become historians when confronted by an object" (p.122). These findings are sustained by the research of Durbin et al (1990) regarding the positive effects of object-based learning. "Everyone can use objects. Whereas the range of reading and writing ability within a class can divide it across a wide spectrum, the range of ability in dealing with objects will divide them much less" (p.5). Students in Joseph's Year 2 class are scaffolded to use the skills of historians by examining and interpreting the range of artefacts associated with their four areas of genuine interest. Open-ended explorations provide students with varying past experiences, skills and understandings to participate alongside one another and to learn together.

A number of learning experiences promoted by Turner-Bisset (2005) and Lile (1999) offer inquiry approaches to deconstructing artefacts that range from observation tasks to higher order

thinking skills, while at the same time, encouraging students to develop their skills in literacy and numeracy. For example, the learning experiences outlined in the Tables invite students to create stories from the artefacts, respond to the artefacts through drawing and writing, and measure length, weight, height, and age of each artefact. Such interpretative and analytical skills, and critical and creative thinking are developed through engagement in the activities as students respond to the questions in the activities. As students journey through the process of deconstructing the artefact and reflecting upon this process, they are developing their historical skills.

There are some important considerations when using artefacts in the classroom. Once learners know the name of the object they are often tempted to dismiss it and assume they know everything about it when in fact they may have overlooked information behind it (Turner-Bisset, 2005). Teachers also should consider the type of questions they want to ask students. Questions like, "What is it?" and "How old is it?", are likely to close down the discussion (Durbin et al 1990). It is important to point out to those students who may feel disappointed at failing to correctly conclude what the object is, that history does not always provide one correct final response but a range of possible explanations. Questions, then, should be open and promote divergent thinking and discussion (The Historical Association, 2010). Learning history should also be fun. So, other suggested strategies include wrapping an artefact in numerous layers of paper making it harder to get at the artefact and therefore making it more special or, keeping objects in one's hand or pocket for a time to generate excitement (Fines & Nichol, 1997).

The appropriateness of artefacts should also be a consideration for the teacher. Researchers such as Turner-Bisset (2005) suggest learners initially work with the familiar artefacts from their own community before introducing them to old objects. She cites her own experience working with children who became confused when confronted with an unfamiliar artefact. Harnett (2005), likewise, draws on her own teaching experience to argue that before children are exposed to artefacts that were used in the past, children must first know how similar objects are used in contemporary times. They experience many events in books, film, television, and in family stories.

Learners will not just look at artefacts because we want them to. We need to find ways to deal with inattention and build concentration and application. Drawing is an excellent way of slowing down the pace so children can study what is front of them (Fines, 2010). In Table 1, for example, students answer preliminary questions about the size of the artefact, the materials it is made from, and the age, before they draw the artefact. The drawing and labelling are evidence of children's understanding of the artefact, and can also be used for assessment. All children, including those with literacy difficulties, can participate in this activity.

The questions in "Looking at an object" (Table 2), however, require learners to not only consider age, size, materials the artefact is made of, but its functionality, aesthetics, and value also. "Storytelling through objects" (Table 3) invites learners to demonstrate their power of emotion, assumption, and association in the interpretation of artefacts. Indeed, the questions in Tables 1, 2, and 3 help children come to know about the past by examining the available evidence, and the reliability of that evidence (Field et al., 1996; Wallace, 2003; Vella, 2010 (in *Primary History*); von Heyking, 2004). Most importantly, children who engage in historical inquiries around artefacts begin to appreciate the interpretative nature of history. As von Heyking(2004)

correctly points out, "History is not the story of the past. It is not a record of events that happened long ago. It is a form of inquiry that helps us construct an understanding of our own lives (individually and collectively) in time" (p.6).

While research by Levstik (1993) indicates that students use their considerable prior knowledge when confronted with something new, von Heyking (2004) suggests that learners should begin by examining artefacts from their own childhood. Other research shows that teachers who engage their students in inquiries of family and community history, build on their prior knowledge and help address misconceptions, and assist children to develop historical understanding (Barton, 1997).

Conclusion

Dewey (1916/2009) was one of the first proponents of hands-on learning. He argued that "if knowledge comes from the impression made upon us by objects, it is impossible to procure knowledge without the use of objects which impress the mind" (pp.217-218). When teachers make the past real, students begin building insights into their own lives and current events. They will see their own relationship to history and realize that their actions and lives contribute to a history not yet written (Hickey, 2010). In the words of von Heyking (2004), "Understanding that the actions of people in the past have an impact on us today, and appreciating that our actions will have consequences for future generations is history teaching's essential contribution to citizen education" (p.7)⁴³. This article proposes that the inclusion of artefacts is one approach of many that support teaching and learning for historical understanding.

References

- Australian Curriculum Assessment Reporting Authority. Australian Curriculum History Version 4.1.
- Barton, K.C. (1997b) "I just kinda know": Elementary students' ideas about historical evidence. *Theory and Research in Social Education*, 25(4): 407-430.
- Cleveland, A., Craven, J., Danfelter, M. (1992/1993) *Universals of culture*, New York: Perspectives on Education.
- Cooper, H. (1995) *History in the Early Years*. London: Routledge.
- Davies, J., Redmond, J. (1998) *Coordinating history across the primary school*, Falmer Press.
- Dewey, J. (1916/2009) *Democracy and Education*, MacMillan.
- Durbin, G., Morris, S., Wilkinson, S (1990) *Learning from objects: A teachers guide*, English Heritage.
- Durbin, G. (1991) History from objects, pp.9-14 in G.R. Batho (Ed.) *Primary History Today*, The Historical Association.
- Field, S., Labbo, L., Wilhelm, R., Garrett, A. (1996). To touch, to feel, to see: Artefact inquiry in the social studies classroom, *Social Education*, 60(3): 141-143.
- Fines, J. (2010) 'Doing history' with objects, *Primary History*, 54: 6-7.
- Fines, J., Nichol, J (1997) *Teaching primary history*, Heineman Educational.
- Harnett, P. (2005) Polly put the kettle on: Using nursery rhyme to develop children's knowledge and understanding of the past, *Primary History*, 47:32-34.

- Hawkes, A. (1996). Objects or pictures in the infant classroom, *Teaching History* 85, The Historical Association.
- Hickey, M.G.(2010) *Personalising social studies for young children*. <http://www.ednebula.com/index.php/earticles/452-earticle-personalizing-social-studies-for-young-children.html>. Downloaded 12/1/2013.
- Hoodless, P. (2008) *Teaching history in primary schools*, Exeter: Learning Matters.
- Levstik, L.S. (1993) Building a sense of history in first grade classrooms. *Advances in Research on Teaching, Vol.4: Research in Elementary Social Studies*. Brophy, J. (ed). Greenwich, CN: JAI Press, Inc., 1-31.
- Lile, S. (1999) *Teaching with objects*, Washington State Historical Society, History Lab Summer Institute.
- Martinello, M., Cook, G. (1994) *Interdisciplinary inquiry in teaching and learning*, New York: MacMillan.
- The Historical Association. *Primary History* (2010), 54.
- Turner-Bisset, R. (2005) *Creative-teaching: History-in the primary classroom*, David Fulton Publishers.
- Vella, Y. (2001). Extending primary children's thinking through artefacts, *International Journal of Historical Learning Teaching and Research*, University Of Exeter.
- Vella, Y. (2010) Artefacts in history education, *Primary History*, 54.
- von Heyking, A. (2004) Historical thinking in elementary years: A review of the current research, *Canadian Social Studies*, 39 (1) http://www2.education.ualberta.ca/css/Css_39_1/ARheyking_historical_thinking_current_research.html
- Wallace, B (Ed.) (2003) *Using history to develop thinking skills at Key Stage 2*, David Fulton Publishers.
- Wineburg, S. (Ed.)(2001) *Historical thinking and other unnatural acts: Charting the future of teaching the past*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Table 1

Close

1. What

2. What

3. How

4. Draw

5. Whe

6. Whe

7. Wha

ant classroom,
ation.

young children.
cles/452-earth-
children.html.

chools, Exeter:

st grade class-
l.4: Research in
reenwich, CN:

ate Historical

quiry in teach-

), 54.

in the primary

king through
earning Teach-

ry History, 54.

entary years:
Social Studies,
css/Css_39_1/
rch.html

inking skills at

her unnatural
Philadelphia:

Table 1: Artefact Record Sheet

Closely inspect the artefact your group has been allocated	
1. What is the size of your object? (consider: <i>height, weight, circumference, length, width</i>)	
2. What materials is it made from? (Use colour, shape and texture of the artefact to help you identify your materials)	
3. How old do you think the artefact is? Why?	
4. Draw your artefact and descriptively label its features	
5. When and where do you think it was made? Evidence your claim	
6. Where could you use this artefact? Evidence your claim	
7. What do you think this artefact was used for?	

Source: *Primary History*, Issue 54, Spring 2010

Table 2: Looking at Objects

The main things to think about	Some further questions
Physical features What does it look like and feel like?	What colour is it? What does it smell like? What does it sound like? What is it made of? Is it a natural or manufactured material? Is the object complete? Has it been altered, adapted, mended? Is it worn?
Construction How was it made?	Is it handmade or machine made? Was it made in a mould or in pieces? How has it been fixed together?
Function	How has the object been used? Has the use changed?
Design Is it well designed?	Does it do the job it was intended to do well? Were the best materials used? Is it decorated? How is it decorated? Do you like the way it looks? Would other people like it?
Value What is it worth?	To the people who made it? To the people who used it? To the people who keep it? To you? To a bank? To a museum?

Source: Turner-Bisset, R. (2005). Creative Teaching: History in the primary classroom. David Fulton Publishers

Table 3: 1

Activity Assemble gr assign objec group
Immediate Impressions
Second sigh
Constructing Sentences
Building sto
Adding Movement Dimension
Presentatio

Table 3: Storytelling through objects

Activity	Time	Materials	Description
Assemble groups, assign objects to each group	10 min.	Selection of 10 artefacts, some that relate directly or indirectly to others	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Place artefacts on tables or chairs in various locations throughout the room. 2. Divide students into groups of four or five. 3. Assign each group an object and have them assemble near the object. Students may not yet handle the object.
Immediate Impressions	10 mins	As above	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. While sitting in a circle, each member of each group will hold the artefact and without saying anything else, use one adjective to describe the object. In addition to feeling the object, you may like to smell it, listen to it. No adjective can be spoken twice within a single group. 2. Group members pass the artefact from person to person, saying nothing but their chosen adjectives until all have spoken.
Second sights	10 mins	As above	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Using the same technique as before, groups pass the object from person to person, this time each member uttering a single verb that they feel applies to the object
Constructing Sentences	15 mins	As above	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Now each group member constructs a sentence that uses both the verb and the adjective to either describe the object or the feelings/thoughts it provokes.
Building stories	15 mins	As above	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The objects once again are placed on their tables or min. chairs for safe keeping. 2. Each group works together to create a story about the object using, where possible, the sentences or adjectives and verbs to tell a story about the object. 3. Each group member must prepare to share one sentence of the story as part of a group presentation.
Adding Movement and Dimension	20 mins	As above	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Each group must identify a way to use their bodies to kinaesthetically support the telling of the story. All members must participate. This may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • still poses • movement that suggests the use or function of the object • movement or shape that suggests how the group feels about the object.
Presentation	30 mins	Space for group presentations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Each group places their object on a chair in front of the class so that it is clearly visible during the presentation. 2. Each group presents their story, with the format being the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning "shape" is assumed by the group • Each member speaks a sentence of the story in turn • Movement is incorporated as necessary to support the story • Presentation is not to exceed 5 min per group

Source: Lile, S. (1999). Teaching with objects. Washington State Historical Society, History Lab Summer Institute.