

Making the importance of geography come alive!

Introduction

Planning for the new Key Stage 3 geography curriculum is taking place now and will continue throughout 2008 to 2010 as most teachers adapt their curriculum in a staged process e.g. Year 7 during 2007-2008, Year 8 in 2008-2009 and Year 9 in 2009-2010. In this piece a suggestion for greater involvement of students with the curriculum making process is presented. One strategy is through making opportunities in geography lessons for students to interact with aspects of the curriculum document itself.

Why involve students in exploring the curriculum document?

There is a need to identify as a starting point what students think and feel about the geography as presented to them through teachers and other adults' interpretation of the new curriculum documentation. One approach is to plan for joint exploration of the document as a starting point to your geography course. Here are two KS3 classroom scenarios to think about in relation to your own practice to date.

In scenario 1- the geography team of teachers has thoroughly examined the new documentation. They have attended 'curriculum-making' courses, regional conferences and have set about adapting their current schemes of work so that they reflect the new curriculum, including its emphasis on key concepts. This re-presentation of geography is then delivered to students. Students however, may have played only a passive role in the curriculum making process.

In scenario 2- the geography team has thought about their shared interpretation of the new curriculum and invited students of all ages to interact with the document as well. A shared sense of ownership will hopefully engage students and allow them to see the significance of geography in their everyday and future lives. Here the co-construction of a meaningful geography for all is the goal of the department.

Suggested activities for working with the geography document.

The Importance Statement:

This describes important aspects of the subject, why it is necessary for learners to study the subject and what they can expect to gain from it.

Activity one	Description	Resources
Students carry out a DARTs activity with the Importance Statement.	<p>In pairs, students annotate an A3 version of the 'Importance of geography' statement.</p> <p>They can choose to focus on aspects which they :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree/disagree with Like/dislike Want to question Want to know more about Don't understand Think is missing Feel are not represented in the geography as presented to them currently at school. 	A 3 Statement. Highlighters.

Here are some initial comments from a range of students who have carried out this activity. Some of the annotations of students highlighted the following:

- Does geography inspire pupils if we are force-fed from text books?
- What stimulates older people may be different to what stimulates younger people.
- A good curriculum will be centred on student interest.
- What does stimulate students? Geography in the media.
- Issues change rapidly so topics on current affairs need to be snappy.
- Not everyone has their own experience so they need it provided.
- How can '*it build on pupils' own experiences*' if we are not taken on fieldtrips?
- Does *geographical enquiry 'encourage questioning'* if we are told information and we are not encouraged to ask questions?
- We want geography to create new ideas.

See further examples of students' annotations in figures 1, 2 and 3. Such initial comments would need to be further explored with the students through a range of media (see activity two below).

Activity two	Description	Resources
Students create their own 'Importance of geography' statement	Students in pairs or groups now work towards producing their own 'Importance of geography' statement.	Variety of media possible: Word process, visual DVD e.g. moviemaker,

Activity two naturally builds upon the first activity and encourages students to think about what geography means to them. In groups they can discuss their ideas and synthesise the key aspects that they suggest into a shared representation of the statement. The finished product here could be a group statement in written form or presented using a wide range of alternative media. Such creative representations of the importance statement could be through a PowerPoint or movie-maker package set to music. Taking this a stage further, students could produce, star in and edit a DVD where they present the importance of geography creatively with music, interviews, television and movie clips complete with their voice-overs. Such DVDs were created by students attending the one-day conference and used to close the conference.

Whatever medium is used, the product should not be an end in itself. Further activities can be set up for teachers and students to compare student versions with the original. It is a useful exercise as a department (if you have not already carried this out) to revisit the 'Importance of geography' statement at a department meeting. As a geography team you can complete activity one and activity two. This then gives a shared geography team statement which can be shared with students enabling the potential for a co-constructed final version. Such a joint (teachers-students) statement will help to emphasise the students' responsibility to others as well as their rights as individuals.

This co-constructed Importance statement, along with the different stakeholders' versions, could then be displayed in the geography department as classroom wall displays or virtually on the department website.

The Key Concepts

These underpin the study of geography; identifying what learners need to learn in order to make progress. For students to understand the key concepts they need time to explore them both as discrete concepts and also as they appear naturally in the curriculum approach a created by the geography department. This does not mean that students need to explicitly reflect in lessons on which key concepts are being addressed each time but it may be that through discussion with your students you jointly decide the value (or not) of such an approach.

Activity one	Description	Resources
<p>Post-it activity relating to key concepts</p>	<p>Students in small groups are presented with post-its and asked to write their initial thoughts about what each of the key concepts means to them. This can be achieved through having a 'Key Concept' statement on different walls or on different tables around the classroom.</p> <p>Once students have completed their initial thoughts on the first key concept then they can either:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. As a group move onto the next key concept and repeat the task in the same group <p>Or</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Jigsaw so that one student per key concept makes up a new larger group where all key concepts are represented for discussion and sharing. The students then return after an allocated time to their original group to share their findings. 	<p>Post-its. Enlarged A3 key concepts on individual card.</p>

Here are a sample from the hundreds of comments from a range of students who carried out activity one.

Key Concepts	Comments
Place	<p>This is the study of different places and the changes that happen over time to them.</p> <p>Fieldtrips.</p> <p>Find out what students think of a place through both visiting and media and give accurate representations of the real thing.</p> <p>Think about why places are different.</p> <p>Look at the places we have been - use past experiences of holidays.</p> <p>Let pupils teach the class about what they learned on their holiday.</p> <p>I think we should choose the countries to study and see what they are really like.</p> <p>We should look at place in the curriculum as what we think it is like, what others say about it and then what it really like.</p> <p>TV doesn't show places as they are.</p> <p>Learning about places countries in the worlds but we don't know where places in England are.</p>
Space	<p>MySpace (communicate with other people all over the world).</p> <p>Spatial awareness.</p> <p>Star and planets (not geography).</p> <p>Population – too little space, using it all up.</p> <p>Everything around us.</p> <p>How places change and that change is affected by different things.</p> <p>Learn how areas got like they are.</p> <p>To understand what it is really like for people migrating.</p> <p>Space is getting smaller.</p> <p>Space to create in.</p>
Scale	<p>Looking at different spaces from environmental to virtual spaces.</p> <p>Use this on a map to know how far it is.</p> <p>We look at our school, then our town then England and then the world – this is getting bigger and further away – that is what scale is.</p> <p>To show the different experiences of the different countries.</p>
Interdependence	<p>Look at social and economic links between different countries and people.</p>

	<p>How can we get countries to interact? Learn about money and which countries are more economically better than others. Some people need more help than others. Everything has come from somewhere and there are lots of people and places involved in making something but some get more money than others from this.</p>
Physical and Human processes	<p>How humans affect countries and the physical effects. It is how the processes which humans do affect the environment we live in. How processes change places and who and what starts them. Most of the world is being taken over by big companies and so physical processes are changed by human processes.</p>
Environmental Interaction and Sustainable Development	<p>How people influence and have an effect on the world: pollution, global warming. Saving energy. This is to do with how citizens treat their world and how it is affected. How humans interact with each other, other animals and the environment. How can we help? Are we really destroying the world? Linking things that are happening now such as global warming with geography.</p>
Cultural Understanding and Diversity	<p>What is the culture of different countries and how does that differ from how I live my life. To understand how people do things differently for the same thing. Have a lesson as it would be taught in a different country. Media's output of cultures portrays our views differently. We need to live with lots of different cultures now so it is better to know about what is right and wrong.</p>

Building on this initial activity, students could then work with the more detailed descriptions of the Key Concepts from the geography document as outlined in activity two.

Activity two	Description	Resources
Students carry out a DARTs activity with the Key Concepts	Students in pairs annotate A3 versions of the Key Concepts. They can choose to focus on aspects which they :	A3 versions of each Key Concept.

	<p>Don't understand. Want to know more about. Think are missing. Give examples of how these translate into everyday life. Feel are not represented in the geography as presented to them currently at school. Want to question.</p>	
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Activity two will allow you to discuss as a department and with your students which key concepts your students perceive they understand and which they find difficult to grasp. In order to support students' developing understanding of these key concepts there may be opportunities for older geography students to work as co-researchers with Key Stage 3 students. Activity three could be one way forward.

Activity three	Description	Resources
Students create their own descriptions of the Key Concepts'	Students in groups (possibly supported by older geography students) now work towards producing their own 'student descriptions of the key concepts' to help other students understand how they are significant to them and what these key concepts mean in relation to their everyday lives.	Variety of media possible: Word process, visual, DVD

Working with and responding to students' understanding of the curriculum document is just one example of more active student participation in curriculum making. In many schools, there are good examples of effective participation by students within geography departments – the key to such effective participation is where teachers have created opportunities and time for student involvement to move from a passive to more active role in aspects of the department's planning and development.

The ideas presented here originate from a South Gloucestershire geography one-day conference held at the University of the West of England in July 2007 where secondary geography teachers and Key Stage 3 students came together to discuss their interpretations of what the new geography curriculum meant for them.

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