

Discussion Document

Teaching a distant locality

Emily Richardson (Senior Lecturer in Geography Education, Roehampton University) with thanks to the Geographical Association's Early Years and Primary Committee

Last year I was asked to deliver an INSET day at a primary school, which would contribute to their 'Geography week,' about the wider world. As part of this I contacted my colleagues on the GA Early Years and Primary Committee for contributions towards the INSET day. As well as receiving lots of useful hints and tips, it also sparked an interesting debate. For example, should we teach 'countries', small specific localities such as villages, or something in between these two extremes? Arising from the discussions we have had, it is believed that there are a number of important issues that trainees of primary geography need to consider when teaching about a distant locality.

Please note this discussion is a preamble to the excellent GTIP Think Piece on The Global Dimension by Arthur Kelly: [http://www.geography.org.uk/projects/gtip/thinkpieces/globaldimension\(primary\)](http://www.geography.org.uk/projects/gtip/thinkpieces/globaldimension(primary))

Issues to consider when teaching about a distant locality

Several members of the GA Early Years and Primary Committee expressed concerns over teaching countries and/or continents. Concerns include

1. That by studying a 'country', some schools assume they have covered 'geography'. Cracknell and North observe that according to the context, this may or may not be the case and can range from excellent, detailed practice through to unsatisfactory general teaching. The question to be answered here is 'how far have the children discovered the similarities and differences between our country and other countries?' – in weather, people, settlements, connections – and other factors affecting the character of each country. This could be a daunting prospect. The following questions were the top ten questions listed by a Year 6 in preparation for making a PowerPoint presentation about a country of their own choice.

Ten relevant questions to ask about a locality

Year 6 Basingstoke

(When researching information about a country connected to their family)

What jobs do they have?	Do the people there have a religion they believe in?
What is the most popular sport?	What kinds of plants grow out there?
Is it famous for anything?	What is the landscape like?
How far is it from here?	What is the traditional food?
What is the meaning of the place name?	What is their lifestyle like?
Do any famous people live there?	

2. On the other hand it was felt that although 'locality studies' **may** be preferred, they should be set in the wider context. Mackintosh suggests doing this through 'nesting' localities using the Russian doll' model: big doll (continent) to next doll (country) to other dolls through smaller settlements to small doll (locality). There is an example of this approach given in the geography section of the third issue of *Primary Subjects, Spring 2009*
3. Cracknell also made us aware that there is the possibility that if we study a 'locality', pupils may not have an accurate representation of the wider context of that locality; for example Chembakolli, does not represent India only a rural part of Kerala in SE India and is very different from its nearest urban settlement Bangalore. Scoffham however suggested that we may not need to be concerned about the whole country approach, provided the locality can be qualified with spotlights on real examples of other localities. Thus taking as a starting point the kind of locality within which the school is settled compare this to a similar distant locality i.e. rural with rural, urban with urban and so on – and then draw out the geographical differences – and locations within the larger global context.

Curriculum requirements

In light of these discussions, what does that National Curriculum require?

At Key Stage 1 we are not required to teach a locality outside of the UK. We do have the opportunity to do so, as the National Curriculum states we can study any locality that has contrasting features to the locality of the pupil's school. We are also informed that we should also teach at a 'local scale'. ([See: National Curriculum Geography KS1](#)). Thus a rural lowland school could consider the realities of a rural upland school; or an urban school could consider a local village or suburban school.

At Key Stage 2, we should study a locality in a country that is 'less economically developed', By the time a pupil finishes primary school, they should have studied at local, regional and national scales ([See: National Curriculum Geography at KS2](#))

These scales could include both localities and themes in UK and European countries

Key Questions:

- Should we teach a distant locality at Key Stage 1 and why/why not?

It should not be forgotten that research has shown that children as young as four years already come to school with stereotypical views of other cultures (Marsden 1976; Aboud 1988; Wiegand 1992)

- How can we teach appropriate attitudes towards distant place study?
- How can we incorporate a locality study in a less economically developed country and studies at local, regional and national scales into a KS2 curriculum?

Considerations:

- Are children developmentally ready to learn about distant places? Ans. According to research they already come to school at 4 years with preconceived ideas of distant places/
- Can we challenge stereotypes if we don't study a distant locality? Ans. How else can stereotypes be challenged if reality is not shown?
- From secondary sources can we get an accurate representation of a locality? Are children aware of this? Ans. As with all evidence this depends upon the range and accuracy of the material used – the greater the variety of artefacts, images, maps – and a visitor who can be questioned (See Martin 2006 p.50)

Barnaby Bear is a well-used and very well travelled geography resource. He now has an official group on Facebook. From one perspective it is fantastic that pupils are able to experience the wider world through his journeys but how do we ensure that children are aware that most of his travels are based on holiday experiences and not those of living as an inhabitant of that country?

Geography Policy

A well-planned geography policy would be sufficiently flexible to allow a variety of localities which also develop an understanding of region and nation. Where the school population has many different nationalities represented the possibilities are endless. The small village school may have to search for distant connections rather more thoroughly.

An example of a policy based upon exploring the idea of globalisation has been gleaned from a Primary Gold Quality Mark school (See Appendix).

It will be interesting to see what how far the expectations above are allowed to be followed in the light of The [Children's Plan](#) and The [Primary Review](#) . There is a discussion of these plans and the development of the curriculum reviews at <http://www.geography.org.uk/eyprimary/curriculumreview/> which has further relevant links including one to the QCA ['Thinking Primary'](#) pages where you can have your say.

Possible Activities with PGCE students in mind

Activity 1: Linking the local to the global

There is a growing tendency for schools to opt for a more global approach (recent emphasis on Global Citizenship and the International Award (run by the Schools Council) has been noticed in schools who have applied for the Primary Geography Quality Mark (<http://www.geography.org.uk/pgqm>) what measures would you undertake to ensure that good (or outstanding) quality geography teaching and learning is taking place in such a study?

<http://www.geography.org.uk/aboutus/committeesworkinggroups/earlyyearsprimary/>

Further considerations

There is much debate about whether schools should use charity based materials in their teaching of distant localities, and/or raise money for a 'less economically developed' (National Curriculum definition) region. Some of these concerns arise from the possibility of students forming negative, and possibly inaccurate stereotypical images. Yet, surely we would want our pupils to 'make a positive contribution' (Every Child Matters) for which charity work could feature strongly. Sally Wood discusses some of these issues in her article, '[Learning about Distant Places at Key Stage 1](#)' (as do [The Development Education Centre \(South Yorkshire\)](#)). There are some crucial benefits and disadvantages of such approaches; the most important element is that they have been considered carefully and the possible effects on pupils (positive and negative have been evaluated) before any teaching takes place. Some of the issues highlighted here may have an impact on global linking projects; see '[Thinking About Linking?](#)' by Margaret Burr (for the [DEA](#)).

Activity 2: Reflection and Planning

Read the three articles referenced above, and summarise the key areas to consider when planning a distant place study (further reading suggested at the end of this article).

There are a variety of distant locality packs available for schools to teach distant localities, aimed at a range of age groups (from The Geographical Association and Wildgoose for example). We all have our favourites, or those we favour less. With a class of PGCE students there were some common preferences and dislikes but there was quite a lot of valid debate about which packs were best and why. As with any secondary source, one of the pitfalls is that even before it has been published, some of the material may be out of date. Out of date material may also be a problem in terms of planning, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) plans are now at least 10 years old and they were never intended to be followed precisely by schools. The QCA has a section of its website ([Customise your Curriculum](#)) for helping schools in adapting the units. There is concern that many schools follow QCA Units of work without question. The desire is to encourage geography that is built around people's real experiences of other places and see the opportunities for sharing personal geographies in the primary curriculum.

Activity 3: Priorities in evaluation

Provide students with a variety of distant locality packs to discuss and evaluate. Examples published by the Geographical Association include St Lucia, Kaptalamwa and Tocuaro. www.geographyshop.org.uk

KS1 Possibilities

Barnaby Bear is a resource that has been able to bring 'personal geographies' to many schools. There are a wealth of resources available to use on the Barnaby theme, which as well as the [official Barnaby merchandise](#) includes a plethora of websites and The Official Barnaby Bear group on Facebook!

<http://www.geography.org.uk/aboutus/committeesworkinggroups/earlyyearsprimary/>

Barnaby is used to successfully motivate pupils in Early Years and Key Stage 1, and has been used as a focus in Local Area studies. Nevertheless we may need to make our pupils aware that through Barnaby they may not necessarily be learning about life in the place that Barnaby has visited, but the life of the tourist, which may be different. Through discussions and the children's questions (dialogic learning) the degree of children's' awareness of what they are learning about becomes apparent.

KS2 – A case study showing essential elements of distant place study

Case Study: Variations on Chembakolli

Year Four

Trisha Kavanagh

The children have learnt about Adivasi Art, lifestyle and the importance of Adivasi tribal imagery in ICT (through producing repeated patterns in Paint). In Literacy the themes from life in Chembakolli were used to provide a cumulative information source for a potentially creative backdrop to their story writing and traditional tale writing. In maths real life examples of distances and journeys as comparison for measuring were undertaken. In music we listened to Adivasi music for different situations (festivals, environmental songs) getting them to create their own tribal music on a theme and then brought them up to date with remixes which were well known to them such as Bhangra Beat and Hey Mista DJ pointing out all the time the Indian origin of this music and the strong drum beat as the constant undercurrent. In indoor PE studying movement we asked children to present their movements and balances in the style of forest animals in and around that region. Additionally we linked up with the children in Chembakolli by becoming a 'spotlight school' for the Action Aid website (<http://www.chembakolli.com>) where children exchanged details about day-to-day life and values. This was a powerful means of communicating a (fairly immediate) link with children who are so different but yet recognisably the same in terms of aspirations and needs. Finally we used our best resource our own children who have Indian heritage. One of my children went on a family visit last year and brought in a CD slideshow of her trip she was able to talk through it and thus it brought home to her peers the actual link between them and the children in India.

Discussions with the PGCE students after evaluating some information packs revealed certain key elements:

- Ensure that pupils have the appropriate attitudes and skills in undertaking a distant place study. These may require some teaching too

Learning intentions would include:

- To ensure that pupils are aware/understand that we are only looking at a particular snapshot in time
- To ensure that pupils are aware/understand that we only have a certain amount of information available to us about a distant locality.

- Evaluate any resources before using them especially if they are dated from previous years
- Make every effort to ensure artefacts and materials give accurate representations
- Use accurate first hand experience if possible
- To include what the locality/country can offer us, as well as possibly what we may offer them
- Ensure ways of motivating pupils and trying to inspire them to want to find out more

Activity 4: Photograph analysis

From a selection of non-stereotypical photographs of a less economically developed locality, ask students to guess where the photographs are from? What have they learnt from this activity, could they do something similar with children?

There is an interesting set of such photographs from the Action Aid photopack (OP) on Nairobi which when passed round different groups has elicited suggestions that they depicted London, Lagos, Dhaka, and so on. Recent photographs can be had as free downloads http://www.actionaid.org.uk/index.asp?page_id=100343

Conclusion

Scoffham felt that that many (non-specialist) teachers have difficulty teaching distant place localities and fall back on using packs in a half-hearted way. Geography is one of those subjects which when it is taught well is very good but when it is taught poorly can be very dreary. North continues, because there is such limited time available to engage with teachers about teaching geography I feel I need to find a clearer way of getting the message over that without a geographical education children will not develop the skills they need to live in our increasingly complex and challenging world.

As a committee (and indeed a subject association), we felt it was our responsibility to help teachers with distant place studies and teach them well. This is part of the challenge to come. What do your PGCE students think?

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APPENDIX

Faye Bridgehouse: Staff guidance

Global Citizenship curriculum

At Tithe Barn we have placed a high value on the importance of Global Citizenship – this is evident in our close links with other schools around the world and the fact that we were awarded ‘The International Schools Award’ in 2005. We have based our Global Citizenship work on the idea of twinning each year group with one of the seven continents. Our aim is that each class will have a twinned school with whom they correspond from within their continent. Below is a list of each class’s continent and the names/localities of their twinned schools.

RECEPTION - Antarctica / ‘Penguin School’

YEAR ONE – Australasia / Nikao School, Cook Islands

YEAR TWO – Asia / Dar Al Kalima School, Bethlehem

YEAR THREE – Africa/ Khensani School, South Africa

YEAR FOUR –Europe /

YEAR FIVE – South America / Alvarenga School, Sao Paulo

YEAR SIX – North America

Our school links are particularly successful in Asia, Africa and South America. We are constantly striving to build on and improve the links for the other continents.

We have devised a Global Citizenship curriculum based around six themes for each class to cover over the course of each school year. All themes are cross curricular – the major focus is clearly on Geography but all other aspects of the curriculum are represented, especially PHSE and of course Global Citizenship. The first two themes of ‘Location Knowledge’ and ‘A day in the life...’ are done in the Autumn term of each school year. It is then up to the individual class teacher on what order they do the remaining four themes.

Each class also has an ‘In the News’ board on which teachers and pupils display current news articles/reports from their continent. This allows staff to respond to current themes to discuss with their class at any given point in the school year. A letter is sent out to parents at the beginning of each school year explaining which continent their child will be learning about and encouraging them to spot and send into school any interesting articles/reports in the newspapers/magazines that they read.

Over the course of the year selections of work will be collected into a display book entitled ‘ My Journey Around the World ‘ and will then be sent up to the next class when each child moves on in July. Children will then have a record of their Global Citizenship work when they leave Tithe Barn.

OUR SIX GLOBAL THEMES

1 -Location Knowledge

Each year group to be taught the following significant places and environments in their continent;

- Countries
- Cities – to include significant capital cities
- Oceans/seas surrounding continent
- Longest rivers/largest mountain ranges
- Key landmarks physical or man made e.g Great Wall of China, Great Barrier Reef, Grand Canyon, Amazon rainforest, Eiffel Tower etc.

Work will include labelling maps, use of atlases, globes and ICT.

One of our school continent themed days will be based around location knowledge e.g an art day producing postcards, posters, a class mural of key landmarks of their continent.

Foundation Stage – use of a globe and maps to locate Antarctica.

2 'A Day In the life....'

Each class will find out about a typical day in the life of a child of a similar age, from either their twinned school or another locality from within their continent. If an e-mail link is available then digi–stories will be sent to children in their twinned school. If e-mail is difficult then a written version of a digi-story will be posted. Our aim is that we will also receive replies from our schools so that the comparison can be accurate and well informed. Differences and similarities will be celebrated.

Climate and Habitats

Each year group will be taught about the different types of climate/weather within their continent and its effects on the physical and human features. To link in with this the children should be taught about the key natural habitats within their continent and about what animals and plants live there.

Foundation Stage - learn names of animals in Antarctica including all the different kinds of penguins. Also learn about the weather in Antarctica and what it is like to live there – including a talk from a scientist who works in Antarctica.

Food/Natural resources

Each year group will investigate food/natural resources that we import from their class continent. In KS2 children will look at the effects of farming or extraction of resources has on these locations, the sustainability of the environment and at the ways that our economic choices (in the UK) have impacted on other communities.

They could also look at the history of the resource and the effects that the industry of farming/extraction has had in their country, e.g. coffee in Brazil.

Each class will have opportunities to cook food from their continent in our school kitchen – as outlined in our 'Food for Thought' curriculum.

People/Culture

Each class will look at differences/similarities between populations within their continent;

- Cultural – to include dress, foods, traditions, festivals etc
- Ethnic/racial diversity
- Languages
- Religious diversity

Foundation Stage – be introduced to Penguin school and its members.

Environmental Issues

Each class teacher will choose one/two current environmental issues which are affecting a location within their continent. They should research the reasons behind the issues and debate ways in which problems could be solved, including ways that they could help on a small scale. The children will then recognise how people can improve or damage the environment and how decisions about places and environments affect the future quality of people's lives.

Foundation Stage – talk about litter pollution and over fishing and its effects on the animals that live in Antarctica. Watch 'Happy Feet'.

Reporting on Global citizenship

We have devised an assessment sheet which outlines what we believe makes a good global citizen in KS1 and KS2. We are planning to feedback to parents on our end of year reports about the achievements their child has made in Global Citizenship over the course of the year and the knowledge that they have gained.

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