

Think Piece

Teaching A Level Geography

PGCE Session 2: Teaching strategies with post-16 students

This session, designed to last 90 minutes, focuses ways in which PGCE students can integrate active learning strategies into their post-16 teaching, just as they might hope to with younger age groups.

PGCE session 2: Preparation and resources

For this session you will need:

- To have considered the **groups** in which students will work. Activity 2 will be particularly suitable for PGCE students who have both interest and specialisation in physical geography, though with prior preparation, it can be a good way of upgrading subject knowledge of those whose degrees are strongly biased towards human geography. It requires some **prior preparation**; nine students need to be briefed about what to do, and told that will be running the activity in a 'goldfish bowl' format, with other PGCE students acting as observers. A 30-minute coffee break will be sufficient for students with expertise in physical geography, whilst advance preparation will help those whose subject knowledge is less secure.
- **Copies** (one per student) of **Resource Sheets 4 and 5**; keep the answers to **Resource Sheet 4** separate so that you can hand them out after!
- Either **paper or electronic copies** of the teaching unit on the Sydney Olympics, which comes in the form of an article previously published in 'Teaching Geography' together with student resource pages and activities, and a PowerPoint. This is probably best uploaded on to your server so that students can access it easily, and you can show it in the final part of this session. This part of the session will work best if you have access to computers. One computer between 2-3 students will be sufficient.
- Ask students to **read the article as preparation** for the session, so that they are ready to preview the activities.

The resources needed for this session can be downloaded here:

[Resource Sheet 4: Biomes activity \(PDF\)](#)

[Resource Sheet 5: Flood Management balloon debate \(PDF\)](#)

[TG article 'Teaching about the Olympics' \(GA members only\) plus additional Word resources](#)

PGCE Session 2: Suggested procedure

Activity 1: Starting where students are at; a sorting exercise about Biomes

20 minutes

1. Introduce the session and explain that you are going to run some practical exercises in order to model activities that can be used in post-16 classrooms. Explain that for the first one, their role will be as students, actually doing the activity.
2. Hand out **Resource Sheet 4**. Explain that the purpose of the activity in an A level lesson would not be to present students with information to be transmitted but to engage students in thinking and using their knowledge and prior understanding to work out which are the most productive Biomes. It comes from a school textbook (Digby, 2001) and is modelled to show what can be done with data in textbooks. The exercise is a matching one. There are three columns of data and every figure in each column should be allocated somewhere. Allow about 10 minutes to do this. Eavesdrop on the discussions and note for reference afterwards where you are hearing good examples of talk i.e. in which students exchange ideas on which data may or may not be correct. Only intervene where it seems appropriate to do so.
3. Either go through or hand out the answer sheets. Debrief the activity. How well did students work out the answers? Which parts were easy? Which difficult? How well did they find that they possessed prior knowledge of each biome in terms of its NPP or its size? Did they work out the relationship between NPP, Area and Mean global productivity – i.e. that columns 1 and 2 when multiplied will give the answers to column 3?
4. Discuss the appropriate nature of this activity for an A level class. Inform that it comes from an A level textbook and that it shows how standard data can be re-processed in order to generate higher order learning than simply looking at the table and accepting it as a given.

Activity 2: Creating a 'need to know'; a balloon debate about flood management

35 minutes

5. Hand out **Resource Sheet 5**. Introduce this activity by explaining that nine students are going to model an activity, a balloon debate, through which analysis will reveal which are the best flood management strategies. Explain that it is generic, but that the author (Digby, 2000) has used this in case studies as varied as Boscastle (small scale) through to the Mississippi Basin (large regional scale).
6. Explain how the balloon debate will operate in a goldfish bowl format, with others acting as observers, and that you would like those observers to feed back at the end how well they thought it went, and particularly how it could be used and managed in the classroom. For instance, with an A level class of more than 9 students, what might the others do during the balloon debate?
7. Let the activity run and keep a careful watch on timing. It should finish within about 25 minutes, though probably longer is needed with A level classes; I have run this over a 1-hour lesson, including debrief.
8. At the end, debrief the activity for 5 minutes. Debrief first still in role, i.e. with those who played, and

second those who observed. In that way, move out to debriefing as teachers. How would that exercise feel to run? What are the strengths of the exercise? Are there limitations? How might observers be used effectively in a real class? How would they prepare the exercise first? What would need to have been covered first? How might they follow this up as a private study activity, or in the subsequent lesson?

Activity 3: Developing an enquiry teaching unit; urban change and Sydney's Olympics

35 minutes

9. Explain that in this final part of the session you are going to go through a teaching unit with students. Explain how urban change and regeneration is part of every A level specification now and that this part of the session is designed to help them prepare a whole unit. This part of the session will focus upon an article and teaching materials written by Digby (2007) and available for download.
10. If they have read the article (Digby in Teaching Geography, 2007) prior to the teaching session, you can divide them into groups to explore different lessons. Groups of between 2-3 students could explore the lesson activities and feed back what each lesson involves. By asking students to feed back in turn, you can give the whole group a feel for the complete unit and its potential.

This session, though brief compared to the years spent teaching post-16 students, will hopefully provide a platform for thinking about how teaching this age group might be approached. For further thoughts, follow up the chapter and articles; also encourage PGCE students to become involved with post-16 work with the Geographical Association, and to attend feedback and conference sessions with the different examination boards for this age group.