

Think Piece

Geography and Happiness

Suggested PGCE activities

Use these activities either as free-standing sessions with PGCE students or as a sequence which develops ideas about geography and happiness.

1 Emotional maps

Encourage students to think about their thoughts and feelings about the different parts of the campus and its surroundings. One way of doing this is to devise an 'emotional' map. Give students a blank map of the site and ask them to classify their reactions to different places using words such as 'happy', 'sad', 'frightened' and 'excited'. Once they have written down their ideas they might colour code their results into positive and negative responses. You could also discuss the reasons for their reactions and ways in which the environment could be improved. This activity works equally well with children and has the advantage of allowing the teacher to talk with them about some of their hopes and fears.

2. My Special Place

Ask the students to think back to their childhood and to select a place which was special to them for one reason or another. What was it that made it special? Their answers will probably fall into one of three categories (a) memories of being happy there (b) memories of loved ones or, less frequently, (c) the intrinsic qualities of the place. Discuss their responses and go on to consider how children's literature often features places that have a particular meaning and significance. You might get the students to select a story of their own to bring to the next session. They could then use their story at the next appropriate opportunity when they are working with children in school.

3 Special places world wide

People have always recognised that some places are particularly special. The seven wonders of the ancient world are particularly famous (only the pyramids still survive). What places would students select for their seven modern wonders? This exercise is ideal for ICT research and power point presentations. It also works well with upper juniors. Extend the work by finding out about the world heritage sites designed by UNESCO <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list> Conclude by discussing how recognising human achievements helps to promote a sense of happiness and well-being.

4 Quality of life

What are the factors which contribute to quality of life? Talk with the students about the different things which make them happy. Does money always lead to happiness? Find out about people's lives in different parts of the world. Look too in atlases for maps showing quality of life around the world. The United Nations Human Development index <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/> is a key indicator. The index is compiled from data about income (GNP), education (school enrolment) and health (life expectancy).

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The WorldMapper Project has produced a map using this index:

http://www.worldmapper.org/posters/worldmapper_map173_ver5.pdf

You might also make comparisons with the world happiness map produced by researchers at the University of Leicester: <http://www.le.ac.uk/users/aw57/world/sample.html>

5 Children's Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed on the 10th December 1948

(<http://www.un.org/rights/>), is an enduring international commitment to human rights. The rights include the right to have a name, the right to be cared for, the right to think what you like and the right to meet people and make friends. Ask students to make a list of the things that they would put in their personal declaration of children's rights and why.

6. Thinking about the Future

The choices we make today will have an impact in the years to come. Ask students what they think the world might be like in 2050. You might distinguish between (a) what they think is probable (b) what they hope will happen and (c) what they fear will happen. Are they generally optimistic or pessimistic about the future? Do they think children would have the same perspective? If possible get students to collect data from the groups they teach in school to make comparisons. Extend the discussion to consider different ways of teaching children about environmental issues, stressing the need to balance realism with optimism.

7. Earth in Space

One way of promoting the serenity which comes with happiness is to step outside our everyday cares and worries and to think of the infinity of space. One astronaut, Edgar Mitchell, describes how when he looked back at the Earth from millions of miles it looked like '*a sparkling blue and white jewellaced with slowly swirling veils of white... ..like a small pearl in a thick sea of black mystery.*' Another, Michael Collins, recalls how he looked back at our fragile home, '*a tiny outpost suspended in the black infinity.*' Introduce students to these and other portraits – there are some excellent videos on the internet (www.youtube.com search for 'Earth from space') – and discuss the remarkable story of the Earth's evolution. The whole of human history hardly registers on a geological time frame.