

**SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR A PGCE SESSION ON THE USE OF
GAMES IN GEOGRAPHY**

Playing games

It is perhaps obvious to say that the best way for PGCE students to develop an understanding about the use of games is to play them themselves. Some require very little time or preparation to set up and actually play, but time must also be allowed for discussion of when it could be used and how it should be followed up.

It may be tempting to sample only the shorter and simpler games but there is a lot to be gained from running a full-blown simulation game, or, as in the focus of the half day session suggested below, going for two in succession. This provides a comparative element that really helps to bring out differing characteristics of the activities so helping PGCE students to select the most appropriate game for their purpose. Of course, if time is short, the final suggested activity can be carried out based on the experience of playing one simulation game.

Suggestion for a half day session

Play the simulation games of The Trading Game and Timber! one after another, each followed by a debrief of the game as would be done with a class. Then follow this with an overall debriefing session to consider games, unpicking their similarities and differences and evaluating their relative strengths and weaknesses. A rough guide to running times for the games, including debrief, is about an hour for The Trading Game and 75 minutes for Timber!, although there is some flexibility particularly with The Trading Game.

Obtaining these two games

THE TRADING GAME from Christian Aid

<http://learn.christianaid.org.uk/TeachersResources/secondary/ResourceOverview/simulation.aspx>

The Trading Game is one of six simulation games available on this website. The Trading Game is long established and is a popular choice due to its versatility – PGCE students are advised to check that it hasn't already been run with their chosen class.

TIMBER! from Just Business

<http://www.jusbiz.org/resourcesonline/>

Timber! is one of several games and other resources dealing with global and ethical issues available from this website set up by Norfolk Education and Action for Development (NEAD). Timber! was written by Graham Pike, a well-respected figure in Global Education.

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Preparing to play

For both games all instructions and resources, plus suggested ideas for the follow up, are freely available on the websites. They both need resources prepared beforehand and a room big enough for considerable movement of the players. They can be used with different age groups and a range of class sizes, both having a recommended minimum of 15. If your PGCE geography group is smaller than this, it is worth considering running the games with other PGCE groups. In fact there is a great deal of value in adopting an interdisciplinary approach anyway. Both games focus on topics that are of relevance to Citizenship, PSHE, RE and Economics whilst Timber! is also recommended for Biology and General Science students. The discussions that follow can be very rich and may lead to cross-curricular initiatives between PGCE students placed at the same schools.

Playing and following up

This stage of the session is about modelling the running of each game as it would be done with a class. Someone needs to 'be the teacher' and to take on the role of facilitator of the games, and The Trading Game also needs someone else to be banker. Obviously these roles are likely to be the PGCE tutor(s), however if one or more of the PGCE students have actually run the games when on placement it can work really well to get them to run this part of the session. As well as introducing the rules of the game, which are best kept as simple as possible so that play can commence quickly, the facilitators must also carry out the observations once the game is in play that go to inform the debrief, as outlined in the 'getting the best out of the games' section.

They are also the ones who manage the timing(s) – in the case of Timber! this needs particularly close attention as it involves blowing a whistle to signal the removal of some 'trees' every 5 minutes!

When a game has run its useful course – another decision to be made by the facilitator(s) – there needs to be a debrief, to be conducted as it would be with school students. Ideas for this follow-up are provided with the games and at this stage it is interesting to stick with these suggestions. In the next stage of session the PGCE students will have the opportunity to critique these from the perspective of a geography teacher and to consider how and in what ways these games, neither of them written specifically for geographers, contribute to geographical learning.

Comparative evaluation of both games

In this final discussion the PGCE students need to think critically about what each game offers, drawing from their experiences as participants in both games but also now bringing the focus on

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to their thoughts as geography teachers. They could start by identifying the key characteristics of each game, listing similarities and differences (some ideas are suggested below in Figs. 1 & 2). Once these have been identified, they should then consider what factors need to be considered when deciding to use either of these games e.g. what geographical concepts and skills could be developed through them, where and how these games match up with the National Curriculum/exam specifications, what the management issues are likely to be. At this point the group could be divided into two, to look at a game each and to consider how useful the questions that were used in their debrief were in relation to geographical learning and, also, what questions might be added and/or substituted in order to draw out and develop the geographical learning more effectively. They can then come back together to compare notes and conclusions. An alternative to this is to use the information below (Fig 3) as a focus for discussion and a basis for devising questions to use in debriefing.

A final activity could be for the group to formulate an overall list of questions that could be used to evaluate any game of this nature, drawing from what they have learned about the characteristics, strengths and weaknesses for these two games.

Fig 1: Shared characteristics

- Feelings are involved,
- Focus includes aspects of globalisation
- Movement around the room is essential
- Small groups work together and
- Contact is required between groups
- Props are involved that provide a visual dimension to the processes that are a significant part of the simulation
- Neither have been devised specifically for use in geography classrooms

Fig 2: How they differ:

Timber!

- specific role play structure with a simulated conference as an end point
- very clear right from start what the game is about
- background info on the roles and the situation required before playing
- more formalised procedure at times including a debate so there is a need for public speakers (although a final decision is deliberately avoided),
- explicit requirement to negotiate with other groups

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The Trading Game

- very simple set of rules,
- strong gaming element with potential for competition and/or co-operation between groups,
- no need for background information or context before playing,
- very open-ended (can be stopped at any point)
- variety of interventions – or none - are possible.

Fig 3: Geographical learning – concepts and skills

Both games have the potential to develop a number of geographical concepts and skills. What these are continue to be debated (e.g. Taylor, 2008) but the 2008 version of the National Curriculum for Geography (NCG) will be used here to highlight where that potential lies. Elements of all seven of the concepts in the NCG can be recognised in the games, with some more obvious and explicit than others. Here are examples of concepts which have been highlighted in relation to each game:

The Trading Game:

Place: whilst the game is being played place is not overtly significant as the groups are not told which country they are, but this becomes a major factor in the debrief when the connection to the 'real world' is made.

Space: interactions and flows, and their implications for people. This is clearly developed with the global trading system at the core of this game

Scale: the interconnectedness between nations within the global trading system is at the heart of this game

Interdependence: along with interconnectedness, these are probably the most obviously relevant concepts to this game.

Timber!

Place: this game is set in a particular place, that is subject to change and that different groups of people perceive in different ways.

Space: there are interactions within the space being considered.

Scale: the interconnectedness between different scales, local through to global, can be identified.

Interdependence: this is apparent in relation to all spheres (economic, social, political and environmental)

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Environmental interaction and sustainable development: these are central concepts to this game and are also likely to be ones that many school students will recognise easily.

Other Ideas

PGCE students could be set the challenge of devising their own games for particular topics. There is useful geography-specific support for doing this to be found in the last chapter of Rex Walford's latest publication (2007) and in Fien et. al. (1989), and there is generic, although still very useful and extremely detailed guidance in Jones (1985). It is also worth suggesting to PGCE students that school students may benefit from being offered the same challenge. With school students it is advisable to start with simple educational games rather than simulation games and to provide some parameters for them to work within. A tried and tested way of doing this is to ask school students to use what they've learned about a particular topic and turn it into a game, using the framework provided by a traditional game such as Snakes and Ladders.