GEOGRAPHY, QUESTIONS AND THINKING SKILLS

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Introduction
A curriculum example of developing enquiry questions was presented for discussion. From the discussion came ideas for development and consideration.

In a Middle School it is essential that the KS2 children have the tools to follow an enquiry which will prepare them for more rigorous enquiry work at KS3. The PoS requires at KS2 the children ask geographical questions and suggest ways of answering these questions followed by collecting and recording evidence. At KS3 the children are required to ask questions and suggest appropriate sequences of investigation before collecting, recording and presenting evidence.

Context
Children come to the Middle School from village First schools in Year 5. It is a change involving moving into a larger school community and moving from a rural, small community to a busy market town environment. Landmarks and features of the locality are understood by Year 5 and Year 6 actively queries the relationships between town, river, and countryside.

Issues
- The children come into school with inadequate skills for learning about the world
- They need considerable guidance upon the difference between general and geographical questions.
- There has to be found ways of creating time to enable the enquiry approach to be developed.

Process
- Opportunities are built into Year 5 and Year 6 to develop independent questioning skills
- Figure 1 was used with Year 5 to create links between metacognition and question creation on the theme 'Our New School and Its Environment'
- Figure 2 was used with Year 6 to develop enquiry in the theme 'On the Move' in particular preparing for a holiday destination
A worksheet used as a pre-test for a scheme or the next lesson and then re-phrased to be used as a post-test. The developments are endless depending upon your required outcome and the age and ability of your class.
Fig. 2 Questions about a new place

You are going on holiday. You’ve got your destination. What questions do we need to ask about where you are going?

What is the weather like? Do I need to take a certain type of clothes? Will I need to have any injections against diseases? How long will it take to get there? What continent is it in? Is it a healthy country, which is fully developed? Is the air full of pollution? Are there many animals and insects there? Is the food cheap or expensive?

Where are you going to find this information from?

I will find my information from:
Cook books, Doctor leaflets, computers, books, holiday brochures, e.t.c.

This was a below average response; another response generated 30 questions including ‘Can you drink their water?’, ‘Where am I going to stay?’, ‘Is the time zone different?’
Emergent ideas and development

- The content and type of questions asked by the children reflected several levels of metacognition.
- Direction on the type of question to ask is relevant for children of all abilities.
- Ability did not markedly affect the quality of the geographical questions asked.
- Opportunity to enquire e.g. through homework assignments could be a useful strategy.
- Real issues with the possibility of real outcomes for a real audience generate productive questions.
- The significance of outside influences can be recognised in the type of question asked and the kind of answers sought.

Considerations

- What kind of strategy develops a critical approach to questioning?
- How can the innate ability to ask questions, which are geographical, be strengthened and built upon?
- What kind of opportunities to develop questioning has been provided in the First schools?
- How far can one pursue cross-curricular enquiry links?
- How far do non-specialist staff understand the character of geographical enquiry?
- The necessity to analyse and look at what the children are learning and how the learning takes place demands a united approach from the staff. There are lessons to be learnt from the approaches described by David Leat (1998)

Reference


Website

http://www.geoworld.co.uk/index.htm accessed August 2011
Web Site dedicated to the production of Geography teaching materials using the 'Thinking through Geography' methods of David Leat
See also
http://www.geoworld.co.uk/pupilresources.htm accessed August 2011

Another site:
Staffordshire Learning network
http://www.sin.org.uk/geography/thinking_through_geography.htm

"Thinking through Geography"

Much of this work has been sent to us by teachers inspired by David Leat and Adam Nichols' work in Thinking Through Geography and More Thinking Through Geography or by their TLF / FSS work as part of the KS3 strategy. You should buy the books to understand the principles from Chris Kington Publishing. Thank you to all who have contributed..."