Using a different view with trainee teachers

Fred Martin, Vice Chair, GA Education Committee 2009-12
Introduction

A different view is a rich source of ideas for working with trainee teachers throughout their course. Here we have grouped the ideas into five themes, each with suggested activities and topics for discussion. The activities are largely self-contained, and can be adapted to suit trainees at different stages of their course.

Themes

1 Setting the scene
This comprises background ideas to help trainees understand the context they will be working in: the people and organisations, professional and governmental, who influence and determine the way geography is taught and learnt.

2 Vision statements
Some basic card sorting and classification activities will help trainees familiarise themselves with the key points of A different view, its structure and ideas.

3 Challenge and controversy
Encourage trainees to look critically at the ideas contained in A different view and to consider the nature and extent of the challenges they can present.

4 Geography in photos
Use these activities, based on the photos in A different view, to help trainees think about how visual images can convey concepts and explore how they can be linked.

5 Views in the classroom
Ask trainees to consider how A different view can inform their own planning and teaching in the classroom.

The extracts from A different view presented here are sometimes edited and out of context: encourage your trainees to read the whole document so they appreciate the full scope of its intent!
1 Setting the scene

Early in the course, set the scene for A different view:

- set out the legal position of geography in the school curriculum, and its recent history – ‘under threat’ in terms of time, resources and specialist staffing
- describe the role of the National Curriculum and exam boards in creating courses and assessment criteria, though not in determining pedagogy
- explain what opportunities there are for teachers, and the wider community, to be involved in decisions about subject teaching
- discuss the role of the Geographical Association as an independent organisation that represents and presents ideas about geographical education from the viewpoint of professional educators.

Activity 1.1: Manifest trivia

You can use this set of quiz questions with any suitable gaming technique to test trainees’ existing knowledge.

a In which year was the Education Reform Act passed, from which the National Curriculum Orders have been derived?
b What do the initials QCDA stand for?
c How many students sat a geography GCSE examination in 2008?
d How many students sat a geography GCSE examination in 2000?
e Who is the present Minister of State for Education?
f What is Ofqual’s main area of responsibility?
g How many concepts are listed in the NC Order for geography?
h Which geographical organisation has its headquarters in Sheffield?
i How many members does the Geographical Association have?
j Of which environmental organisation is Michael Palin president?

Answers


Activity 1.2: Vision for teaching

A different view presents a vision for good quality teaching and learning in the subject. But what were the features of the geographical education that you received when at school?

a From the following words choose the three that best describe how you were taught geography (choose a phase).
b Now choose the three words that you would like students to use about your teaching.

dynamic inspiring dull incoherent interactive questioning informative awesome repetitive pointless relevant boring challenging cool captivating creative turgid relentless visionary intriguing remote

Activity 1.3: Subject decisions

Discuss these questions with trainees.

a Is it right that the NC Orders and exam boards do not set out how the subject should be taught, i.e. matters of pedagogy?
b Who should determine the criteria for assessing subject work and the assessment methods used?
c Why and how might the views of teachers and an organisation like the GA conflict with the views of the governmental organisations responsible for the curriculum?
d What should be the nature and strength of the subject input to government documents from teachers and professional organisations such as the GA?
2 Vision statements

The ideas about teaching and learning geography described in *A different view* are embodied in ‘Living geography’. This focuses on the philosophy of geography education, rather than on subject content. Before looking at this ‘Living geography’ in detail, discuss with trainees what the manifesto says about these four questions:

What is geography’s contribution to a student’s intellectual development (thinking geographically)?
What should be the content of geography?
How should geography be taught?
What can be the place of geography in the curriculum?

**Activity 2.1: Questions of vision**

The statements on the next page are brief summaries of the key points in *A different view*. Print them onto cards and ask trainees, in pairs, to sort them according to which of the above questions the statements answer. Which questions do they think the statements answer especially well or less well? Are there other questions that the statements could or should answer?

**Activity 2.2: Sorting the vision**

*A different view* comprises seven sections, each with a set of ideas, supporting quotes and illustrations:

- A curriculum resource
- Thinking geographically
- Living Geography
- Geography and young people
- Investigating and exploring geography
- Geography and the ‘real world’
- Curriculum making with geography

Ask trainees to:
- Pair up the statements with the section in which they appear. This activity can be done in groups, each group taking responsibility for looking at one section.
- See if there are any statements, e.g. ‘Geography uses digital and other media’, which could pair up with several sections.
- As a group, discuss whether the sections cover all aspects relevant to geography education, e.g. teaching, topics, assessment etc. Are any sections particularly important, or less important?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geography is for everyone – not an academic subject for a few</th>
<th>Through geography, one can apply ideas to new and changing settings</th>
<th>Geography has its own grammar, based on a set of concepts that help organise thought</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geography is concerned with ‘real world’ issues</td>
<td>Geography helps students observe deeply and perceptively</td>
<td>Geography encourages communication, conversation and discussion about what is taught</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography offers visions beyond the students’ immediate horizons</td>
<td>Geography fosters imagination and creativity</td>
<td>Fieldwork is essential for ‘real world’ learning, and is often a strong motivator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography helps explain, inspire and address curiosity about the earth</td>
<td>Geography sees connections between places and scales</td>
<td>Geography’s subject matter is human and physical features and processes, inter-dependence, place, space and scale, young people’s lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography is relevant to the students’ lives and work</td>
<td>Geography encourages critical understanding of big ideas, such as ‘sustainable development’</td>
<td>Geography uses students’ everyday experiences – geography can be about them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography is about active participation in enquiry</td>
<td>Geography challenges prejudices and perceived wisdoms</td>
<td>Teachers of geography need to be active determinants of what and how they teach, responding to change in subject matter and context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography contributes to wider and deeper educational agendas, e.g. global dimension, community cohesion, environment</td>
<td>Geography has its own vocabulary of words and images</td>
<td>The geography curriculum must ensure that students are helped to think critically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography has a ‘futures’ perspective and orientation</td>
<td>Young people should help to shape what is taught in geography</td>
<td>Geography crosses intellectual boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography uses digital and other media</td>
<td>Geography addresses fundamental personal questions, e.g. identity, place, and physical and human processes</td>
<td>Geography lends itself to innovative teaching approaches</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5
3 Challenge and controversy

Some trainees may find some of the statements in *A different view* challenging, perhaps even controversial. They certainly present a ‘different view’ of teaching and learning in the subject, and finding ways to implement this ‘different view’ could be equally challenging.

**Activity 3.1: Deep thought**

The statements and challenges on the next page have been taken directly from *A different view*. Ask trainees to consider each statement, and discuss each challenge. This activity is best undertaken by small discussion groups, and their findings can feed into a wider discussion. If appropriate, you could replace the statements and challenges with others that raise different issues. The questions below may help frame their discussions.

- What do you think the statement means?
- What are the implications of implementing it?
- Do you think some teachers might find it difficult to implement?
- Do you agree with the thinking that lies behind the statement?

**Activity 3.2: Implementing the vision**

The trainees’ task is to devise a plan for a school geography department that implements one of the statements. The questions below will guide their work:

- Are there any whole school issues to address?
- What would need to change in the department’s schemes of work?
- What teaching methods would be needed?
- What resources would be needed?
- How would you monitor the effectiveness of your plan?
Statement 1: Geography: a curriculum resource par excellence
‘Geography contributes to a balanced education for all young people ….’

Challenge 1
With so much emphasis on specialist schools and personalised learning, is there still an argument that every young person is entitled to a balanced education that includes geography?

Statement 2: Thinking geographically
An essential educational outcome of learning geography is to be able to apply knowledge and conceptual understanding to new settings: that is, to ‘think geographically’ about a changing world.

Challenge 2
Is the ability to apply the ‘grammar’ of geography an aspiration for the most academically able, or should it be a key part of the geographical education for students of all ages and abilities?

Statement 3: Living geography
‘What is exciting about geography is that it is the first curriculum subject in the UK to take seriously the need for critical and creative thinking about the future’ – David Hicks

Challenge 3
What are the challenges in developing a ‘critical and creative’ approach to the study of geography?

Statement 4: Geography and young people
We should try to catch young people’s interest, but also find ways to challenge and excite them with content that might be beyond their immediate horizon.

Challenge 4
What are the likely tensions between catching young people’s interest whilst exciting them with content that might beyond their immediate horizon?

Statement 5: Investigating and exploring geography
Enquiry and investigation lie at the heart of geographical thinking. The geographical mind is well placed to respond to these questions (see page 21 of A different view).

Challenge 5
Whose questions should young people investigate, i.e. questions they ask themselves or questions that are asked by others?

Statement 6: Geography and the ‘real world’
Fieldwork – that is, learning directly in the untidy real world outside the classroom – is an essential component of geography education.

Challenge 6
What are the main arguments supporting fieldwork as an essential component of geographical education?

Statement 7: Curriculum making with geography
A synoptic understanding of the subject is not easy, for non-specialists particularly.

Challenge 7
The scope of geography is so vast: how can its teaching be coherent enough for students to achieve this synoptic understanding?
4 Geography in photos
The photos that illustrate *A different view* are a rich source of activities for trainees. They can serve not only to develop their understanding of *A different view*, but also to demonstrate the power of visual images in their own teaching.

**Activity 4.1: Missing maps**
Hold a short discussion about why no maps are used as illustrations in *A different view*. Now find the reference to using maps in *A different view* (page 5). Does this statement represent a view with which you agree?

**Activity 4.2: Photos for effect**
The study of geography should go beyond a list of content and concepts. It needs also to involve a sense of what it feels like to think geographically. These statements from *A different view* give a flavour of how geography should affect young people:

... fascinates and inspires ...
... young people’s everyday experiences – about them ...
... content that might be beyond their immediate horizons ...
... engage young people’s fundamental curiosity and questions ...
... live our lives as knowledgeable citizens, aware of our own local communities in a global setting.

Ask trainees to choose a photo from *A different view* that they think best illustrates each of these ideas, explaining their choice.

**Activity 4.3: Photo Scrabble**
This game uses *A different view*’s image bank to identify connections between the different photos, and is designed to help develop synoptic ideas about geography (see *A different view* page 28).

The game is based on Scrabble, but using pictures instead of letters, and each player has a pack of photos.

Each player in turn places a photo on the table. This photo needs to have a connection with the previous photo, which the player must explain. If the player cannot give a satisfactory explanation of the connection he/she misses a turn. The winner could be the player with the best explanations, or the first to use all the cards.

A variation can be for ‘challenges’ to be made, i.e. a player puts down a photo but does not need to explain the connection unless challenged. Players are only allowed a limited number of challenges.
Trainees could develop variations of this game, making their own rules to simulate a classroom activity.

**Activity 4.4: Photo age**

It is relatively easy to work out a reading age for text. But do photos also have a ‘reading age’, and are some more likely to interest students than others? Ask trainees to:

- Choose one photo likely to create the greatest interest for a student at each of these ages – 5, 8, 11, 14, 17 – and explain their criteria.
- Choose the photo they think would be the most difficult to use in a geography lesson with students for one of these age groups, explaining their choice.
- Choose one photo that would be suitable to use as the basis for a line drawing with annotation, then draw it and add the notes they would expect a student to make.
- For one of the photos, write a list of the questions they might expect a student in one age group to ask about it, thinking about how the questions might be different for a student both above and below this age.

**Activity 4.5: Illustrating concepts**

Trainee teachers will need to find ways to make geographical concepts explicit to their students, and one way to do this is by using photos. To ensure coverage of the concepts, this activity could be undertaken in groups. Ask trainees to:

- Choose one of the National Curriculum key concepts – place, space, scale. Select three photos that could visually represent their concept, e.g. different types of place.
- Choose one of the remaining key concepts – interdependence, physical and human processes, environmental interaction and sustainable development, cultural understanding and diversity. Select three photos that could visually represent their concept, e.g. different types of interdependence.
- Choose one photo which could illustrate at least three of the concepts, showing how they might be linked.
Activities 4.1-4.4 photo file
Activities 4.1-4.4 photo file
5 Views in the classroom
The main test of the success of *A different view* is how it affects classroom practice. Its ideas need to be incorporated into schemes of work and lesson plans, affecting choice of topics, teaching strategies and the philosophy underlying interaction with students.

One way to ensure this happens is to submit the proposed lesson to a set of questions based on the ideas in *A different view*. The trainees could devise these themselves, or you could ask them to use the ones below:

- Are the concepts clearly identified in the plan?
- Will the concepts be made explicit to students and used to organise information?
- Are local ideas set in global contexts?
- Are links made to other lessons, to develop a synoptic approach?
- Are links made to other subjects?
- Is the work accessible to all students?
- Does the work aim to fascinate, inspire and encourage curiosity?
- Are there opportunities for students to be creative?
- Will students develop their thinking skills?
- Will they develop geographical skills, e.g. in handling data and using GIS?
- Will knowledge and understanding be applied?
- Will subject ‘vocabulary’ be taught?
- Are students’ own lives and experiences part of the lesson?
- Is there ‘deep observation’ of subject material?
- Are there opportunities for challenge and critical understanding?

Activity 5.1: Teaching the vision
Ask trainees to:
- Use the list above, or their own, to develop a framework to review the ideas contained in *A different view*. They could add items or revise the wording.
- Use the list to evaluate the extent to which one or more lesson plans, and their delivery, has adopted the ideas in *A different view*, considering how any barriers to implementing the ideas might be overcome.
- When possible, discuss these ideas with their school-based mentor or another practising teacher.

Activity 5.2: Links to the Standards for QTS
Trainees will find it useful to make links between *A different view* and the Standards for QTS, to see, for example, where by teaching ‘good geography’ they are also doing what is needed to achieve specific Standards. You could use the list above as a starting point to cross-reference against the relevant Standards.