Guidance notes for ITE trainers/mentors

Using geography resources

‘Poor teaching may result from inadequate resources’ (Peter Smith HMI (1997))

Peter Smith’s statement is still very true today even though technology has revolutionized both the access and adequacy of resources for geography classrooms. Consider this comment:

‘Whereas a major constraint on the geography teacher in the past was the availability of appropriate information to enable lessons to be developed effectively, arguably the situation today is reversed, and there is too much information available and new skills are required to sift and select information, and to assess the relevance and importance of the information available. At the same time the burgeoning availability of information presents a wider range of opportunities for the classroom.’ (Charles Rawding, 2013)

While access to resources has improved dramatically with the arrival of the internet, issues now arise as a result of the inappropriate nature of many resources available via the web. Trainee teachers need to be aware that much of the material obtainable via search engines has not been peer-reviewed, and it is a teacher’s professional role to critique such resources before using them in the classroom. Discuss with trainees the careful selection and evaluation of resources early on in their training, so that they recognise the importance of this and adopt good habits in reviewing the resources they use.

Using geography resources well

- Refer to the trainee teacher webpages about Resources.

During their training, new teachers need to be introduced to a wide range of resources. (Suggest they browse the GA Resources page.) However, they should be warned not to think that the only factor that makes a good lesson is having impressive resources. Emphasise to trainees the importance of:

- having a clear learning purpose for using a resource
- evaluating the learning potential of a resource
- planning how they will manage the use of resources in their classrooms
- using their own creativity to make their own resources for their lessons.
Using printed materials and textbooks

- Refer to the trainee teacher webpages Printed materials and textbooks and encourage trainees to be adventurous in the range of printed materials they use and to go beyond the use of textbooks and worksheets.
- Ask trainees to look carefully at two or three examples of newspaper articles on a geographical issue and consider how these could be used with a class. Introduce them to the idea of readability – or suggest that they discuss this with the English department in their school. Use Task 6.4 on page 202 of Biddulph et al (2015).

When trainees are in school, mentors should facilitate access for them to a range of geography textbooks and encourage them to use them in different ways with their classes. Trainees should observe how geography teachers use textbooks with different classes and discuss with the teachers how and when they use textbooks and how valuable they find them.

Discuss with trainees how best to use geography textbooks. A good textbook should provide trainee teachers with opportunities to develop a lesson around a set of resources. Many textbook activities encourage good geography and focus on enquiry. The wealth of resources within a textbook should stimulate the teacher’s creativity and facilitate good teaching, but not be a substitute for it. However, warn trainees that they should not see textbooks as 'ready-made' lessons, and the activities are not necessarily the whole of a student’s learning experience.

Using textbooks in schools

Encourage trainees to explore and compare different geography textbooks and undertake an evaluation using the reading references listed on the trainee teacher webpage.

Discussion with trainee teachers

- What different strategies are suggested for use with textbooks in the classroom? Which of these have your trainees tried?
- Can textbooks be used for geographical enquiry?
- Has the geography textbook ‘had its day’ with present day ready access to electronic media?
- Use the questions suggested by Rawding (reference below) to consider how effectively your trainee uses textbooks and how to evaluate textbooks.

Reading for ITE trainers/mentors

- Fyte, H. and Yarwood, R. ‘Textbooks: bridges or barriers to university geography?’ Geography, Summer 2018

Planning and designing resources
When helping trainees to plan lessons, discuss with them what they are trying to achieve in their use of specific resources. New teachers often use resources as lesson ‘props’ without really considering their learning purposes. Encourage them to observe how experienced teachers manage resources when they observe lessons, and also how they manage the transitions in lessons between using resources and other learning activities.

Support trainees in designing their own resources as well as using those developed by others. Discuss with trainees Figure 6.1 on page 180 in Biddulph et al (2015) which sets out the stages for trainees’ planning, preparing and using their own resources.

Encourage trainees to produce stimulating resources that are also of high quality and which are geographically accurate and share them with other teachers in school. It is time consuming for new teachers to do generate new resources, so have realistic expectations of how much they can manageably achieve.

Review trainees’ early attempts at producing worksheets or PowerPoint presentations and give them pointers to how they could improve these visually or in their use of language for specific groups of students. Periodically review the resources trainees make and use and give them constructive feedback, for example during a mentor meeting.

Trainee teachers should be encouraged to be creative in their use of resources, including the ‘Arts’, models, artifacts, games and simulations, people. There are many references on the trainees’ webpages they can follow up and you should advise them about possible local resources and people, such as planners, that they could approach in the local area. Remind trainees that their own geographical experiences are a great resource.

- Refer to the Thinkpiece on Developing Cultural Geography by Charles Rawding which sets out how trainees might incorporate music and film into their geography teaching.

One approach could be to start planning with a curriculum artefact such as a picture, a poem or music. Suggest your trainee reads about this approach in Biddulph et al (2015) pages 66-69. The authors see an artifact as more than a mere ‘resource’ because in the hands of a good teacher they have special significance for learning.

**Evaluating resources**

Geography teachers now have access to a wealth of online resources and web communities that they can engage with via twitter, forums etc. Warn trainees that not all of this material promotes high quality geography and they should evaluate any resources and consider their ‘fitness for purpose’ before they use them. In particular, trainee teachers should check the source of materials they use with classes and review them for bias and stereotyping. Refer to the trainee teacher webpage on Media Literacy and the web, which provides on why and how they should evaluate all media and web-based resources carefully.

**Discuss with trainee teachers:**

- How do you judge the quality of these resources?
- How might geography be resourced in the future?
- How can resources be developed to make the best use of web-based technologies and cloud based services?
- How can these be used to promote student-led collaborative learning?
Consider with trainees the dangers of violating copyright when using web resources, especially images and video.

Review published resources with trainees, to give them models for evaluating the appropriateness of specific resources for different groups. Mentors could ask trainees to review any new or sample resources they have in their department and share their views with geography teachers in a department meeting.

The role of resources for developing students’ critical thinking and critical literacy

The evaluation of resources does not rest with teachers alone. It is important for students to be taught how to make sense of information and particularly to distinguish fact from opinion. This is part of Critical thinking. Encourage trainees to discuss the teaching of critical and media literacy with other teachers in their schools, such as those in English, IT and media studies departments.

The open spaces for dialogue and enquiry (OSDE) project at Nottingham University in 2008 used these questions as a framework for student discussions looking critically at images and films. These are worth exploring with trainee teachers to explore ideas of critical thinking and critical literacy:

- Where is this coming from and where is it leading to?
- How can this be re-interpreted in different contexts?
- How was this perspective constructed? In whose name and for whose benefit?
- What are the social, economic and environmental implications of holding this as true?
- What are the other possibilities of thinking about this?
- What are the limitations of these other perspectives?

Discussion with your trainee teacher

- Look together at some ‘resources’ on websites that might be potential resources for geography lessons on themes the trainee is planning to teach, and consider:
  - Is the text accessible for students?
  - Are the ‘facts’ correct?
  - What tasks/enquiries are most appropriate for students to do using this information?
- Why should geographers have a responsibility to teach media literacy to students?

References for ITE trainers/mentors (in addition to the trainee teacher readings)

- Pollard, G. and Hesslewood, A. ‘A more ‘authentic’ geographical education’, Teaching Geography Spring 2015 discusses strategies for using different types of resources to make geography more relevant for the work that students will go on to do.

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