Support for trainees and NQTs
Using your subject knowledge

Making the most of your subject knowledge

Read Improving and developing your subject content knowledge if you have not already done so.

While you will have to develop some aspects of your subject knowledge, do not forget that your own geographical education and experiences will have given you a number of subject strengths. One of the skills you will have developed through your study of geography in higher education is your 'synoptic capacity' - the ability to draw strands together to provide coherence and meaning in your understanding of a place, and make connections between the known and unknown. You know how to use and apply your geographical knowledge to new situations. You know how to think geographically. As a geography teacher you will be drawing on these synoptic skills to plan lessons and the curriculum for your pupils. You will also be planning how to develop your pupils’ synoptic capacity as geographers.

It is important that you fully use your own passion for geography as you teach your lessons. In the Nottingham University PGCE course, trainee teachers are encouraged to consider how they can connect their university geography experiences with the school geography curriculum through ‘Fantastic Geographies’ (Read about ‘passion’ as a geographer in Biddulph et al (2015) pp 18-20)

Clare Brooks writes that it is a teacher’s skill is to ‘bridge’ their knowledge of their subject to teach it to pupils. She identifies three ways that geography teachers do this, by:

- making connections with pupils' prior geographical knowledge or experiences
- tuning in to their personal geographies
- using their own geographical experiences as examples or stories.

Trainee teacher activity

As you observe geography lessons, look at the different ways teachers use to ‘bridge’ their geographical knowledge to help their pupils to understand. Can you find examples of the three ways listed above? Also look for:

- metaphors or analogies to help explain new geographical ideas or concepts
- questions that help pupils to make the ‘bridge’ between prior and new knowledge
- encouragement for pupils to consider a topic from different perspectives or viewpoints
- the use of frameworks to help pupils - such as when analysing a photograph
- using an analogy - such as a balloon for showing differences in air pressure.

To read more about making the most of your subject knowledge refer to:


geography.org.uk

(Last updated May 2017)