

GTIP Think Piece - Children's Worlds (Sue Bermingham)

Children's Worlds is an area of geography that incorporates citizenship, diversity and inclusion. Sue Bermingham (Senior Lecturer in Humanities Education, Manchester Metropolitan University) and Diane Selby describe how you can help trainee teachers to understand their pupils' experiences of the world in order to develop pupils' understanding of how other children live.

Menu

- Introduction, p1
- Key questions, p2
- Essential reading, p2
- Suggested activities, p3
- Bibliography, p4
- Links and journal abstracts, p5

Introduction

Each child will have a variety of identities or roles (e.g. as sibling, friend, consumer) and experiences of places (e.g. home, play, holidays). In children's lives Simon Catling (1993) has identified ten worlds of geographical significance:

- action world
- perceived world
- people world
- information world
- competence world
- valued world
- imaginary world
- source world
- future world
- commitment world.

A decade later Norman Gabriel questioned how difficult it is for adults to understand children's worlds:

'How can we begin to understand the experiences of children throughout the world? Children are 40% of the world's population, which is the largest generation of children in history. Yet in 2001, almost 160 million children under five were undernourished' (2004, p.25).

Standish (2004) is concerned that children's geographies treat children as adults, in that it is assumed they are able to understand and take responsibility for complex issues. Standish argues that:

'Students will learn little from a curriculum of children's geography. They might develop a better awareness of how their lives relate to those around them, including the lives of other children. It might also make them 'feel valued' because somebody is listening to them. But it will teach them nothing about the changing geography of the world - because this is a world shaped by adults' (2004).

Children's Worlds is a rich area of geography for trainee teachers to explore.

Key questions

What is a child? It is worth all trainee teachers exploring the notion of 'childhood'. A range of views can be explored including historical, religious, western, and those of geographical educators.

How are children's geographical worlds similar/different? (awareness of diversity of lives and experience) Using the trainees' own experiences this is introduced in the session described below.

What are children's needs/wants? How are they met? The session below explores the differences between wants (desires) and needs (for survival) and introduces the UN Convention on Children's Rights.

How do children perceive their world? As Bellamy (2004) mentions, it is difficult for an adult to see the world through children's eyes. Texts that offer methodologies for classroom-based research suggest a range of techniques for finding out children's views. Children develop their ideas about the world from a variety of sources in our information rich society, but do they have the skills to critically analyse the messages they receive? Does the media portray a balanced view?

Can children participate to improve their world? Education for sustainable development and citizenship are two areas of the national curriculum that highlight the role of teachers in helping children to be active citizens and responsible custodians of our planet.

Essential reading

In *The State of the World's Children*, Carol Bellamy (2004) offers the following key messages:

- For an adult it is difficult to elicit the views of children – to understand their verbal and non verbal messages.
- Children see the world differently to adults.
- Two billion children in the world, 150 million malnourished, 120 million primary-aged not in school.
- UN world leaders in May 2002 pledged to change the world not only for children but with their participation.
- Bellamy's book also contains lots of statistics and maps (e.g. the 'What the children want' map on pages 76-77).

Simon Catling's 'The whole world in our hands' (1993) deals with children's worlds, as does his article 'Curriculum contested: primary geography and social justice'. This and other articles appeared in [Geography](#) in July 2003 as part of a 'Children's Geographies' special.

Suggested activities

During a PGCE session on children's worlds, the following activities can be undertaken.

Objectives

Trainees will develop an awareness of the diversity of children's lives and experiences.

They will develop an understanding of children's needs, wants and rights.

Overview

Drawing out of the trainees their memories of childhood.

Widening their geographical understanding of childhood by looking at images of children from around the world.

Concluding with an understanding of wants, needs and rights.

Activity 1: My world - memories of childhood

(a) Post-it note activity as trainees arrive - write down five sweets that are linked to a childhood memory (e.g. jelly babies given to you for good school work).

(b) Share and justify memories.

Aim of activity - to help trainees to reflect on their own experiences of childhood, and to consider similarities and differences between individuals in the group.

Activity 2: Other children's worlds

Paired activity – deconstructing an image depicting children. (As a pre-session task ask trainee teachers to collect images of children from printed sources. You should ensure a balanced selection of images of children at work, rest and play across the world.)

(a) Group devise common set of prompt questions to aid deconstruction of image. Tutor reference: 'Multiple texts, alternative texts, multiple readings, alternative readings' (Birmingham et al. 1998.)

(b) Trainees present their analysis of their image to the group.

Aim of activity - to develop a greater awareness of children's experiences.

Activity 3: Children's needs

(a) Discuss - What basic needs do all children have in common? (i.e. food and water, shelter, love)

Tutor reference: Maslow's Hierarchy of needs

(b) Look at photographs again and decide whether or not there is evidence of basic needs being met.

Activity 4: Wants and needs

In groups of three – using UNICEF Wants and Needs cards from 'Time for Rights' 2002.

(a) What is missing? add ideas to the four blank cards in order for all children to be Safe, Happy and Healthy – share with group.

(b) Remove eight cards that are not essential for children to be Safe, Happy and Healthy – share with group.

(c) Remove an additional eight cards – can children still be Safe, Happy and Healthy? Discuss the difference between Wants and Needs.

Aim of activity – to be able to define and distinguish between wants and needs.

Activity 5: Children's rights

Tutor input on the UN 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and annual World Children's Day (download free leaflet 'What Rights' or 'Children's Rights and Responsibilities' from UNICEF).

To fully comply with the Convention a country goes through three stages:

Stage 1: they agree with Convention

Stage 2: they devise policies

Stage 3: they implement the policies

(Note: Not all countries are at the same stage of implementation.)

All 191 [UN Member States](#) have pledged to achieve the eight Millennium Development Goals by 2015. These goals incorporate many aspects that affect children's lives:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

Discussion: Do all children in the world today get their basic needs met?

Use statistics from, for example, [State of the World's Children Atlas](#) or the [World Bank](#). These can be plotted onto choropleth maps – see [Nation Master](#).

Plenary: reflection

Trainees draw around their hand and annotate each finger with something new they have learned or considered today in the session. Share with group.

Follow-on session could compare lives of particular children and/or explore how children develop a sense of place.

Bibliography

Aitken, S. (2001) *Geographies of Young People*. London: Routledge (very readable, shares anecdotes as to why and how he became interested in children's geographies. Questions terms of childhood, adolescence, etc., western view of childhood).

Archard, D. (1993) *Children Rights and Childhood*. London: Routledge.

Bellamy, C. (2004) *The State of the World's Children*. London: UNICEF.

Birmingham, S., Slater, F. and Yangopoulos, S. (1999) 'Multiple texts, alternative texts, multiple readings, alternative readings', *Teaching Geography*, 24, 4, pp. 160-4.

Catling, S. (1993) 'The whole world in our hands', *Geography*, 78, 4, pp. 340-58.

Catling, S. (2003) 'Curriculum contested: primary geography and social justice', *Geography*, 88, 3, pp. 164-210.

Chawla, L. (2002) *Growing Up in an Urbanizing World*. Paris: UNESCO.

Cook, D. (1995) *Kids Multicultural Cookbook*. Vermont: Williamson Publishing.

Erlbach, A. (1997) *Happy Birthday Everywhere*. Connecticut: Millbrook Press.

Gabriel, N. (2004) 'Space exploration', *Primary Geographer*, 53, pp. 24-5 (reminds us that children make up 40% of the world's population, the largest generation of children ever).

Hollyer, B. (1999) *Wake Up, World*. London: Francis Lincoln and Oxfam.

Kindersley, B. and Kindersley, A. (1995) *Children Just Like Me*. London: DK.

Kindersley, B. and Kindersley, A. (1999) *Millennium Children of Britain Just Like Me*. London: DK.

Mayall, B. (1994) *Children's Childhoods: Observed and experienced*. London: Falmer.

Minority Rights Group International (ed) (1998) *Forging New Identities* 'Young refugees and minority students tell their stories. MRG.

Ould, J. (ed) (2002) *A Long Way from Home* ' " Young refugees in Manchester write about their lives. Pelican Press.

Ritson, C. (1996) *Speaking for Ourselves, Listening to Others*. Leeds: Development Education Centre.

Standish, A. (2004) ' Losing the plot' .

UNICEF (2002) Wants and Needs cards (each pack of 20 illustrated cards depicts aspects of life that pupils have to decide is either 'a want' or 'a need' ' " can be bought online code 35161).

Wiegand, P. (1992) *Places in the primary school: knowledge and understanding of places at key stages 1 and 2*. London: Falmer.

Wyse, D. and Hawtin, A. (2000) *Children: A multi-professional perspective*. London: Arnold (' Chapter 1: Images of childhood' by N. Medforth et al. is very readable and takes a historical approach).

Other resources:

Primary Geographer No 45, 'Focus on multicultural British Isles' (many useful articles including 'Personal geographies' by Helen Martin and 'What's in a name' by Liz Lewis).

Register of Research in Primary Geography

1: Raising Achievement in Geography (2000) (especially: 'Young children's perceptions of their immediate environment' by Laraine Poulter and 'Conducting classroom based research in geography education' by Patrick Wiegand).

4: Place and Space (2004) (see *Researching children's geographies using a multi-method approach* by Nicola Ross and 'It's geography Jim, but not as we know it' by Arthur Kelly).

Children's Geographies - in his inaugural 'Editorial' Hugh Matthews (vol 1, no. 1) justifies the production of a journal that focuses on children and young people. See Carfax Publishing. Your local development education centre (see DEA for listing). Non-government organisations often have education officers and resources. e.g. Oxfam, Save the Children, UNICEF (see links below).

Links

[The Children's Society](#)

[Learning through Landscapes](#)

[The Children of the Andes](#)

[Oxfam](#)

[Save the Children](#) - especially the Young Lives project (follows the lives of children in four countries and looks at progress towards the Millennium Development Goals)

[UNICEF](#)

Journal abstracts

Angus, T., Cook, I. & Evans, J. (2001) 'A manifesto for cyborg pedagogy?' *IRGEE*, 10, 2, 195-201.

[Abstract](#)

Catling, S. (2001) 'English primary schoolchildren's definitions of geography', *IRGEE*, 10, 4, 363-378.

[Abstract](#)

Catling, S. (2005) 'Seeking younger children's 'voices' in geographical education research', *IRGEE*, 14, 4, 297-304. [Abstract](#)

Disney, A. (2005) 'Children's images of a distant locality', *IRGEE*, 14, 4, 330-335. [Abstract](#)

Hopwood, N. (2004) 'Pupils' conceptions of geography: towards an improved understanding', *IRGEE*, 13, 4, 348-361. [Abstract](#)

Kelly, A. (2005) 'Exploring children's geographies at key stage two', *IRGEE*, 14, 4, 342-347. [Abstract](#)

Pike, S & Clough, P. (2005) 'Children's voices on learning about countries in geography', *IRGEE*, 14, 4, 356-363. [Abstract](#)

Ross, N. (2005) 'Children's space', *IRGEE*, 14, 4, 336-341. [Abstract](#)

Spencer, C. (2005) 'Place attachment, place identity and the development of the child's self-identity: searching the literature to develop an hypothesis'. *IRGEE*, 14, 4, 305-309. [Abstract](#)

Storey, C. (2005) 'Teaching place: developing early understanding of "Nested Hierarchies" ', *IRGEE*, 14, 4, 310 – 315. [Abstract](#)