

Date

Tuesday 17 July 2007

Title of session

Workshop 3 - Education

Name of presenter/chair

Co -Chairs: Steve Brace, Head of Education and Outdoor Learning, Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers)

Jonathan Breckon, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, Royal Geographical Society (with the institute of British Geographers)

Presenters: Kate Amis, Geography Ambassadors Programme, Royal Geographical Society  
Stephen Guptill, Senior Research Physical Scientist, USGS  
Ken Lacey, Assistant Education Manager, Ordnance Survey

Rapporteurs

Cheryl Morrow, Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland and Dave Lovell, EuroGeographics

The pressures to find sufficient time for core subjects such as literacy and numeracy and the introduction of 'fashionable' subjects like media studies and psychology has resulted in recent years in a decline in the teaching and studying of geography. In Great Britain the subject is not offered in all schools.

In recent years The Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers [www.rgs.org](http://www.rgs.org) has:

- been successful in changing the perceptions of politicians and policy makers to ensure the subject, including GIS, is specifically mentioned in the curriculum,
- improved classroom capability through teacher training, pilot projects, case studies, simple guides and promoting a school vicinity as a study area.

This led to the launch of the 'Action Plan for Geography', in 2006.

Kate Amis, Royal Geographical Society with IBG (RGS - IBG), informed the workshop of the Geography Ambassador Program aimed at advancing geography and geographical learning. The programme was initially piloted in London with 140 Lower sixth students (age 17-18). The program has a target to visit 500 schools within two years to promote geography as a key educational subject. To date 300 schools have been visited by ambassadors during a six month period. These

visits have covered a wide geographical area across England by local ambassadors. The ambassadors comprise of 250 volunteers from both geography undergraduates and geographers in the workplace. Ambassadors have the opportunity to network with other geographers and promote geography within local schools through encouraging the next generation to study geography with enthusiasm.

The Ambassador Programme has been widely accepted by schools especially in those where geography was perhaps being overlooked in favour of some more 'fashionable' subjects. The examples demonstrated by the ambassadors deliver lively and engaging presentations on a wide range of careers based on geography. Thus the programme provides role models to inspire and enthuse students to choose geography as a strong subject to lead to a desired career. While ambassadors will still use traditional geography methods to demonstrate the subject, GIS has become a wonderful tool for capturing the attention of these young audiences.

Ambassadors work closely with schools and colleges in timing visits to coincide with when students must pick their subjects for the following year, thus keeping the benefits of geography as an exciting subject choice fresh in their minds when such decisions need to be made. The RGS – IBG has found that great importance lies in getting the message across to student's parents that geography as a subject can lead to a successful career. It may even be the case that geography teachers are often unaware of the career application of the subject.

The ambassador's work within the school timetable and with no need for lesson planning from the teacher will take over the entire lesson to engage with the students. Ambassadors not only visit during class time but also speak at career days or evenings allowing both students and parents to hear the benefits of geography.

The programme is also available online at [www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk](http://www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk). The site allows teachers, parents and students to browse information and view video clips of the ambassador's tales of their experiences from being a geography student to their current role. A career DVD is also being produced for distribution and thus reaching more potential geographers.

Early evaluation has been carried out on 28 of the schools showing that 26 have witnessed a number of students changing their subject choices to include geography and promote geography within local schools and encourage the next generation to study geography with enthusiasm.

The RGS – IBG strive to see schools developing the Ambassador Program internally and carrying on the work of promoting geography. The beauty of the scheme is that when ambassadors volunteer early in their own graduate studies they will often carry their role through to graduation and into their geography related careers. The ultimate success of the programme will be seen when students of today's audience will return as ambassadors within the same programme that drove their career.

Ordnance Survey (Great Britain) supports the teaching of geography in a number of ways including: an annual map scheme which provides each eleven year old with a 1:25,000 scale map of their local area and through on-line resources <http://mapzone.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/mapzone/> and the training of teachers.

In the USA organisations such as the Association of American Geographers are driving similar initiatives.

Questions	Answers
<p>Delegates were asked whether they thought it acceptable that the curriculum only requires geography to be studied to the age of 14 in UK</p>	<p>Delegates felt that it was reasonable that students should have a choice in the subjects they studied in later years. It was suggested that if the subject was made exciting prior to this students would choose it anyway.</p>
<p>Much of the discussions have been about the teaching of geography not about GIS. What is the real relevance of GIS in the teaching of geography?</p>	<p>GIS operationalises geography because it puts everything into a context which we can understand, often through a series of information overlays to a map base.</p> <p>Leroy Charles (Turks and Caicos Islands) felt that GIS brings geography to life. GIS is the geographer's equivalent of the astronomer's telescope.</p>
<p>Leroy Charles (Turks and Caicos Islands) enquired whether they could have access to the material described including the national curriculum and lesson plans.</p>	<p>Yes access is available to all the web based material but of course the case studies are in UK and therefore unlikely to be relevant. <a href="http://www.rgs.org">www.rgs.org</a>.</p> <p>The national curriculum is available from <a href="http://www.ngs.org">www.ngs.org</a></p>
<p>David Maguire (ESRI, USA) asked whether delegates were aware of or had participated in 'GIS day' which is held in November each year. He further suggested that this could be a useful instrument for raising awareness of the role and relevance of geography.</p>	<p>There was very low awareness of GIS day even though it attracts over 2 million participants and gives rise to thousands of projects.</p> <p>All delegates showed interest in gaining further information and Ordnance Survey will consider drawing schools attention to it through their regular schools newsletter.</p>
<p>Zeljko Bacic (Croatia) described their own free maps scheme for schoolchildren which they had introduced after learning of Ordnance Survey's initiative at the 2003 Cambridge Conference. Since then they have given away more than 600,000 maps.</p> <p>He felt that there was a danger in the teaching of GIS in schools because it is technology driven whereas GIS should be considered as tool to help in the understanding of geographic concepts and be seen as a subject in its own right.</p>	<p>In UK the technology focus is linked with and driven by the Government's concern that all young people should make better use and have a broader understanding of technology. Linking geography, through GIS with this is helpful in gaining political support for the subject. Additionally the 'wow' factor that GIS imparts in the classroom has been shown to capture student's imagination and stimulate their interest in the underlying issues that GIS can reveal. The Ambassador scheme focuses on career opportunities and not the technology.</p> <p>Teachers have also observed that giving students the capability to create something of their own, such as a GIS map increases their self confidence and esteem and is therefore important to their general development and progress.</p>
<p>Eydís Líndal Finnbogadóttir (Iceland) used the example of a Danish couple who used the internet to identify an apartment they wanted to buy and also accessed the</p>	<p>The (UK) national curriculum makes it a requirement for students to be taught to know where things are. Fieldwork reinforces this point particularly well.</p>

<p>contractual arrangements online but when questioned it became apparent they didn't know where the apartment was located.</p> <p>This suggests that there are people who are losing the instinct to question where they are in the world. Is this being addressed through formal education?</p>	<p>Delegates observed that in some countries the information available from Google was factually incorrect and expressed great concern that this was leading to 'dis-information'.</p> <p>No-one from Google was available to comment.</p>
<p>In Japan there is a lack of university places for the teaching of geography and whilst the material available from RGS, Ordnance Survey and other sources is very good it is only available in English. Language is regrettably a barrier to making this more widely available and useful. GIS software is too expensive for most schools budgets. Are there special schemes in UK and US to get cheaper software licenses</p>	<p>The UK government has introduced a scheme called 'e learning credits' which provides additional funding for use in ICT. Some schools have used this to take GIS into the classroom.</p> <p>Ordnance Survey emphasised the importance of getting schools to see GIS as a cross subject tool and therefore get wider support for its introduction within schools.</p> <p>It is important too that teachers keep up-to-date with the developments in and uses of new technologies, often introduced since their own education.</p> <p>In Malta geography degrees do not contain much on spatial sciences and so MEPA is lobbying the government to address this using the INSPIRE directive as the driver.</p>