

LEADING THE WAY WITH SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE

JANE WHITTLE

With little time allocated to geography during ITE, and school budgets strained at best, Jane shows how a new GA resource can provide sound subject knowledge support on a shoestring.

When pupils engage in geographical enquiry, they acquire new knowledge through their questioning, research, fieldwork and discussions. Pupils are then encouraged to share this knowledge using key vocabulary with their peers. The role of the teacher is to support pupils through their enquiries while recognising any misconceptions that may be forming along the way. In order to support and guide pupils through an enquiry, the geography teacher must be ready for the journey; armed with subject knowledge, case study examples and resources to enquire into.

A geography teacher must have a good grasp of how to lead a geographical enquiry and at the same time have the knowledge of the subject or know how to find out. Helping pupils to construct knowledge in multiple ways can be achieved when the teacher feels confident about the subject matter and the direction of the unit of work. In a busy classroom and school environment finding reliable sources to acquire knowledge can be a challenge; therefore, in recognising that teachers need support in subject knowledge acquisition, the Geographical Association has published a set of *In the Know* guides to give just that.

Are you *In the Know*?

Designed to be accurate, reliable and, importantly, affordable, the *In the Know* guides cover themes from mountains to grid references (see p. 33). They can accompany a teacher's planning and ensure they have the secure background knowledge to engage with the subject and promote meaningful enquiries within their classroom.

These digital resources provide an introduction to the relevance of the theme, key information supported by diagrams on the important elements of the theme, facts to capture attention and a glossary with key terms relating to the theme.

The key information provides explanations to engage the reader and develop their subject knowledge in order to feel more informed and prepared for answering those difficult questions that can arise in the classroom. The glossary indicates key words to use within the classroom and provides a starting point for how these can be explained to pupils.

Knowledge acquisition is one part of a very big picture of what primary geography entails and it is what pupils do with their acquired knowledge that promotes higher order thinking, reflection and possible further enquiries or fieldwork explorations. A pupil who acquires facts alone has not been given the opportunity to do as real geographers do. Geographers question and challenge knowledge, they seek to find solutions to problems and aim to use key vocabulary to explain their findings. Therefore, each *In the Know* guide is accompanied by a complementary online teaching resource. These resources share activities, possible starting points and further reading.

No-one can truly predict what the future holds for the pupils in our care: the jobs they will do, the knowledge they will need and the technologies they will use are unclear. Therefore, the skills we teach pupils at school are essential in their journey towards being life-long learners. The habits of research, questioning, wondering and wandering will take pupils into this uncertain future. Geography is a vehicle in which pupils can practise these skills – they can learn to question knowledge, to consider bias, to explore textual and pictorial connections and to seek further clarification through a range of media. The *In the Know* guides act as starting points to inform teachers and give them the confidence to guide pupils through their learning journey.

The *In the Know* guides can also be used by groups of teachers to further knowledge:

- The glossary gives a starting point for geography word walls in order to develop pupils' subject-specific vocabulary
- The detailed information can encourage teachers to work together to understand some of the more complex areas of geography ahead of teaching a subject

- The guides can be used to promote discussion on how much detail to delve into with a unit of work – are some pupils ready for all of this information? Would some be better left for the next key stage? In this way the guides make a useful transition tool
- Teachers who have a good understanding will be likely to have more effective ways to introduce a theme to pupils, will plan more engaging role play areas/classroom environments and will be able to foster a deeper exploration into the theme.

Teachers often use visible thinking routines and activities to encourage critical thinking within their pupils, and during staff CPD sessions teachers could use the guides followed by a reflection on their understanding. Using the visible thinking routine 'I used to think... but now I think...' allows teachers to share their acquired knowledge (see web panel). Asking teachers to make personal connections to the facts or images would encourage the use of the routine 'that's interesting, tell me more' to promote teachers' deeper engagement with the resource. As Jane Murray (2017, p. 27) explains, 'there are different types of knowledge that adults and children construct and use to help them to navigate the world'. When teachers feel confident in their subject knowledge, they too can embark on constructing meaning with their pupils and challenge them to explore more deeply.

Reference

Murray, J. (2017) *Building Knowledge in Early Childhood Education*. Abingdon: Routledge.

WEB RESOURCES

In the Know titles available at:
<http://www.geography.org.uk/ebooks>
Visible Thinking: http://www.visiblethinkingpz.org/VisibleThinking_html_files/03_ThinkingRoutines/03a_ThinkingRoutines.html

Jane Whittle is PYP co-ordinator and Head of Primary, International School Como, and In The Know Series Editor.