

Cities of the future: a cross-curricular project

Graeme Eyre

This cross-curricular project was launched in an assembly that began to consider the importance of cities. It started out by looking at how cities are important in everyday life, introducing the idea that, even if we live in the countryside many decisions that affect our lives are made in cities. Cities are often hubs of global decision-making. Building on from this, we considered the fact that more people live in cities than in rural areas, and that rapid urbanisation is still continuing on a global scale. We concluded with some identification of city problems.

In geography lessons

In subsequent geography lessons students began learning about the growth of cities, the reasons for the growth of cities and the problems caused by urban growth. Finally, the concept of sustainability was introduced as a potential solution to some city problems. Students not only learned about environmental sustainability, but considered the concept more holistically, including economic sustainability and how to make cities inclusive places.

Finally students were put into groups to design their realistic cities of the future – not sci-fi cities of the distant future but cities of the near future. Students had to prepare a 'concept model' of their city. The cities had to be not only environmentally sustainable but also sustainable in terms of economics and governance. This task was to lead into 'Cities Day', a day off timetable where students were to showcase their ideas and their understanding.

Cities Day

The main aim of this day was to produce an exhibition of students' 'cities of the future'. For the first two hours of the day, students finished designing the models of their cities, which were then exhibited in the school's main hall. This exhibition comprised 70 different and exciting models of sustainable and inclusive cities (see Figure 1). At the time, students also looked at video clips of real examples of sustainable communities. In the afternoon a carousel of activities was organised, with every student spending time evaluating the cities on display in the hall created by their peers. Every student also attended two other workshops run by different subject teachers. There was a session taught in religious studies looking at why Mecca is viewed as such an important place; a science lesson looking at how lichens in urban environments can be used as a measure of air quality, our Chinese language assistant taught a session looking at the difference between his city Nanjing, and London.

History sessions explored the historical importance of Rome, and in geography we learned about at the growth of Dubai.

The workshops gave students different experiences and perspectives enabling them to appreciate that cities are not homogeneous places. Instead, they are defined by a myriad of factors such as social and cultural shifts, historical processes and even scientific developments. At the end of the day prizes were awarded for the cities that demonstrated imagination and an understanding of key ideas such as sustainability and inclusion.

Follow up

In the geography lesson following the 'Cities Day', students were asked to evaluate and reflect on their experience. They explained why they designed the city they designed. They also reflected on how they could improve their city based on ideas from the other cities they had seen in the exhibition. This gave an opportunity to assess individual students' understanding and contribution to a group project. Students tended to annotate pictures of their 3D city, giving reasons for the choices they made.

Reflection

This activity involved 210 students being off of timetable for a whole day. As is always the case with such an event, this project succeeded, mainly thanks to the support across the school. In addition, the day was genuinely inexpensive to run, with the only cost being less than £50 for some materials.

The original idea for this project came from a workshop at the Tide Annual Conference in June 2008. | **TG**



Figure 1: City of the future produced by students on the year 8 cities day. **Photo:** Graeme Eyre

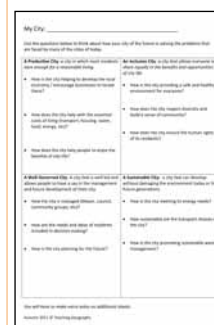
For the last three years the Anglo European School, has run a cross-curricular project with year 8 students looking at global cities. This was led by the geography department but brought in a variety of different subject areas. This article describes the project and reflects on the outcomes.



Accompanying
online materials

Online resources

Go to www.geography.org.uk/tg and click 'Autumn 2011' to find Graeme's resources for the cities day.



Graeme Eyre is Head of Geography at the Anglo European School in Ingatestone, Essex.

Email: eyreg@aessex.co.uk