

Progression in Geographical Skills

What are geographical skills?

Geographical skills are the methods that geographers use to find out about the world. These include the range of skills for geographical enquiry (asking questions, finding data, analysing data, communicating findings). Geographers put particular emphasis on finding out about the world through different types of maps, photographs, diagrams and other types of spatial data. They also use fieldwork to investigate the world around them directly. There is some overlap between geographical skills and mathematical skills (e.g. drawing graphs) but in geography we use real-world data and it is always spatially located. Extended writing is often used to present findings.

What's the Opening Worlds approach to geographical skills?

Through the Openingworlds scheme of work, geographical skills are integrated throughout the booklet and PowerPoint slides for each unit. This is important because geographical skills are never an end in themselves – their aim is to show pupils how geographers create or communicate new geographical knowledge. Therefore, whenever possible, children should learn to use and to practise them as an integral part of building their own geographical knowledge.

For example, in Unit 3.1 (Rivers), children use a range of photographs and maps of the River Indus to find out about how the river changes from source to sea. They learn and practise geographical skills as they do so.

Just as with geographical knowledge, geographical skills need explicit teaching and regular practice if they are to become integrated into learners' long-term memories. The first time a new skill is introduced, it is taught and reinforced in small steps. Then it is practised regularly in a range of different contexts. Teachers keep reminding pupils that when they use geographical skills and practise geographical vocabulary, they are learning what real geographers do.

How are geographical skills integrated in the units?

Geographical skills are integrated in all units, as appropriate for the knowledge context and students' level of development. For example, simple directional language (e.g. left, right, near, far) is learned in Key Stage 1 then reinforced in Year 3 units. More precise ways of talking about location, for example the 4-point compass, are emphasised in Year 3 and 4 units, then more advanced skills, such as the 8-point compass, are introduced and practised in Year 5 and 6. The skills are always used to help the children learn about the world, not as an end in themselves.

How does fieldwork fit in with geographical skills?

Fieldwork is an important part of geographical enquiry to learn about the world around us. Ideally, all year groups try undertake some fieldwork each year as part of their geography lessons. This fieldwork is often conducted in the local area within normal lesson times, or as an extended lesson, and does not have to involve special equipment or transport costs. There are many opportunities for fieldwork around the school buildings and grounds or within walking distance, for example visiting the River Mersey (Year 3 Autumn 1 Rivers), visiting a local high street (Year 3 Spring 1 Settlement) or recording the

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