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**Young Children’s Ideas of Different Nations, Peoples and Cultures: A research perspective**

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There is an increasing need for children at school today to learn about other people and cultures. The rapid growth of mass transport and world trade since the end of the Second World War and the explosion of electronic communication over the past few decades mean we are now linked by world-wide networks as never before. Global interdependence has become a feature of all our lives - economically, socially and politically. Whilst it impossible to anticipate the future, there is every possibility that these trends will continue in the years ahead. It makes sense therefore to ask how and where primary school children learn about the world that they inhabit and the extent of their knowledge of the different countries and places which make it up. This involves more than just factual recall. Recognising our role as global citizens is an essential part of living in the twenty first century. At the same time environmental issues such as climate change, the loss of biodiversity and resource depletion are occurring at a planetary level. Developing an understanding of how these forces are shaping our lives is part of what it means to be educated in the twenty first century.

Of all school subjects, geography is centrally concerned with global issues and helps children develop international understanding. The geography national curriculum clearly states that it aims to ensure that all pupils ‘develop contextual knowledge of the location of globally significant places – both terrestrial and marine – including their defining physical and human characteristics’ (DfE 2013a p1). Locational and place knowledge are specified in some detail in the programmes of study at both key stage one and key stage two. Pupils are also required to use world maps, atlases and globes as part of their skills development. No other primary school subject has such a clear international focus or directly seeks to develop global understanding. Indeed, other countries and cultures feature only tangentially in the history curriculum and are little more than a footnote in art and music. In other subjects the global dimension is almost completely absent. The responsibility for developing a secure framework of world knowledge and understanding is thus located firmly within the geography curriculum and is the responsibility of geography teachers.

This paper brings together a range of research findings which have explored different aspects of international understanding from both scholarly and empirical perspectives over the past fifty years, with a particular emphasis on seminal or historic studies. There are four key questions:

What do children know about different nations, people and cultures?

What are their feelings towards different nations, people and cultures?

How do they develop their ideas about different nations, people and cultures?

What teaching methods seem might be most effective in promoting their understanding?

There is limited scope in this paper for detailed analysis and deeper exploration of the theoretical and philosophical issues which arise from these questions. It is, however, acknowledged from the outset that the discussion is located in both time and space and that it is bounded by Western European modes of thought.

**What do children know about different nations, people and cultures?**

*Naming countries*

One of the simplest ways of exploring what children know about the wider world is to ask them to list the countries they can name. In a classic study Wiegand (1991a) worked with two groups of English children aged between 7-8 and 10-11. He found that the younger children could generally name about five or six countries. However, they also showed a degree of confusion and included imaginary places such Narnia and Never-never Land in their lists. Others mentioned cities such as Paris and New York or places they had visited such as Disneyland. The older children were considerably more secure in their knowledge, were much less likely to mix fiction with reality and could typically name fifteen countries whilst some were able to name as many as thirty.

Subsequent studies have produced similar results. Palmer (1993), for example, worked with groups of English children aged four, six, eight and ten years old to explore the differences between age groups. She found that only half the four-year-olds were able name any country at all. Meanwhile, the six- and eight-year-olds were aware of western Europe, the USA, India and Australia but still thought places like zoos, farms and the oceans might count as countries. The ten-year-olds, by contrast, exhibited a much wider knowledge and were able to name an increasing number of countries from around the world. The sudden growth in global awareness from around the age of eight was first noted by Jahoda (1962), in his pioneering research with Glaswegian children. Commenting on his subsequent research into national symbols, music and flags he remarks on the great intellectual distance children traverse in the span of just a few years:

At the outset their responses reveal an almost complete ignorance of the wider geographical and social world surrounding them; some five years later the outlook of most of them is no longer fundamentally different from that of an adult.

(Jahoda 1963 p150)

What then are the countries which children name most frequently in these verbal exercises? Neighbouring countries in Europe, the English speaking world and very large countries figure prominently in their mental maps. Countries which they had visited on holiday or had family and friends also featured, along with those in the news. However, even the oldest and most geographically aware children demonstrated large gaps in their knowledge. South East Asia, South America and the Arabic speaking world appeared to be little known. Africa, an entire continent, was generally regarded as a country. Eastern Europe was another significant omission. An unpublished study of primary ITE geography students by the author revealed a similar pattern. Less than half the students were able to identify countries to the east of Switzerland and Germany on a blank European map.

One of the most interesting aspects of these research studies is the conceptual difficulty which young children encounter in identifying a country and its defining characteristics. As in so many other fields of developmental psychology, Jean Piaget was the first researcher to conduct empirical studies in this area. As part of his investigations he explored the relationship between territories and the way that smaller places are located within larger places which themselves can be part of even larger units. Piaget and Weil (1951) were struck by the way young children, when questioned if they were Swiss would frequently answer ‘No I am from Geneva’ thereby revealing conceptual confusion. Their research led Piaget and Weil to postulate three developmental stages. In the first stage children view a country simply as a unit along with towns and districts which they regard as roughly equal in size and important. As they grow older they accept their nationality but still deny they can live both in a town (Geneva) and a country (Switzerland). Finally, they recognise the hierarchy in which towns and districts join together to create countries. The crucial moment comes when children abandon the idea that places are separate and appreciate the nested (Russian doll) relationship. Further research (Jahoda 1964, Harwood and McShane 1996, Storey 2005), has challenged Piaget and Weil’s notion of stages but confirms that many children still have not properly grasped the notion of nested hierarchies by the time they leave primary school.

*Free-recall maps of countries*

Another way to establish children’s world knowledge is to ask them to draw a free-recall map. Again, Wiegand (1995) provides a fascinating insight into both what children know and how their ideas develop. Wiegand classified the maps drawn by 268 primary school children into five stages to reveal a strong association with age. The most basic representations consisted of isolated and disconnected shapes representing places as varied as local towns, countries, the North Pole or places featured in stories. In the second stage territories begin to be differentiated by size and in the third sub-divided into areas. In the final stages the territories become increasingly recognisable and their scale and spatial distribution increasingly accurate. Lowes (2008) discovered a broadly similar sequence from more recent research in the United States but notes that in the interim stages children either tend to draw land masses floating in the sea (island maps) or clinging to the frame (edge maps). The most sophisticated and recognisable maps also exhibit a tendency towards symmetry and alignment of land masses – something which has also been noted in adult responses.

It is important to acknowledge that drawing a world map from memory is a challenging task which may well not reveal the full extent of a child’s knowledge. It also depends heavily on their drawing ability. Furthermore, some children are liable to be constrained by their desire for accuracy and feel inadequate when they recognise gaps in their knowledge. Despite these limitations, the evidence from free recall maps is highly significant. It reveals a pattern of world knowledge which is broadly consistent with the findings from the listing exercises described earlier and similar gaps in children’s awareness of the developing world. Furthermore, the progression from isolated and undifferentiated territories to maps which are increasingly spatially accurate, mirrors the conceptual challenges of understanding nested hierarchy relationships.

*Social and cultural factors*

In addition to variations and differences related to age, the research evidence also points up the influence of social and cultural factors. The fact that middle-class children’s geographical knowledge and reasoning was generally more advanced than that working-class children’s was first reported by Jahoda from his work in Glasgow in the 1960s. Wiegand too reported significant differences in the 1990s with middle-class children naming twice as many countries as those from working class backgrounds. However, Wiegand’s analysis also drew attention to ethnicity. Perhaps unsurprisingly children from Indian and Pakistani backgrounds were more knowledgeable about the Indian sub-continent, Africa and the Middle East than their white English counterparts who in their turn knew more about Western Europe. International comparisons extend this point. Axia and Bremner (1992), for example, found that Italian children outperformed English children in a battery of tasks designed to assess geographical knowledge. Meanwhile, Schmeinck (2013) found that whilst the European dimension has a prominent place in school curricular across Europe, there are significant national differences in how it is developed.

One area that is particularly contentious concerns comparisons between girls and boys. Matthews (1984), for example, found that girls tended to represent people and landmarks on their maps whereas boys shows paths, cars and other forms of transport. Boardman (1983) noted that boys consistently perform better than girls of the same age in map drawing tasks and the first version of the English geography national curriculum suggested that pedagogies needed to be girl-friendly in order to compensate for inherent disparities. A few years later, Barrett el al.(1996) conducted a study of English children’s knowledge of the physical and human geography of Europe using a range of different assessment techniques. They concluded from this that boys knew more than girls and that children from London were more knowledgeable than those from surrounding rural areas in south east England. Barrett (2007) speculates that gender differences may result either from cognitive or from motivational factors (girls have different interests to boys) but has no doubt about their reality. Indeed, he concludes from an extensive review spanning a variety of methodologies, populations and countries that the research presents an unambiguous message that:

‘there are substantial and systematic differences in children’s large-scale geographical knowledge as a function of their social group membership. In particular, systematic differences in geographical knowledge of foreign countries have been found to occur not only as a function of children’s age, but also as a function of children’s gender, social class, nationality, ethnicity and geographical location within their own country.’

(Barrett 2007 pp55-56)

Making comparisons between different ethnic groups, social classes and sexes can be contentious, especially if it leads to extolling the virtues or qualities of one of them. However, recognising the complexity of the variations in children’s world map knowledge within groups of all sizes, ages, social and cultural backgrounds is an essential basis on which to build a more nuanced appreciation of the nature of their understanding.

**What are children’s feelings towards different nations, people and cultures?**

If children are able to name a country or draw it on a map, the next step is to see what they feel and think about it. Jahoda (1962) explored children’s country preferences simply asking which countries they liked and disliked. He found that the youngest children (6-7 years-old) tended to like unusual or exotic countries, that children aged 8-9 preferred familiar countries such as holiday destinations whilst those aged 10-11 years old justified their preference by reference to particular physical features or the character of the people. Former enemy countries such as Germany and Japan were sometimes singled out for negative sentiments.

The sequence which Jadoda identified raises questions about the extent which knowledge influences feelings and the relationship between them. Earlier research by Tajfel (1966) suggested that while children usually have at least some knowledge about the countries they like, they have often have little or no factual knowledge about the countries towards which they have negative sentiments. What happens when they learn more? Working with nine-year old English children Stillwell and Spencer (1973) exposed children to information about four target countries and assessed the change in their attitudes. They found that whilst the children generally developed more positive images, their feelings about one country (India) actually became more negative, perhaps because it appeared so very different from their own. Other researchers such as Bourchier, Barrett and Lyons (2002) confirm that the relationship between knowledge and affect is complex and that it would be naïve to assume that simply exposing children to information will always result in a positive image, even if this tends to happen in quite a lot of cases.

English children’s attitude to the developing world represents a particularly complex and delicate area of study. Early research depended heavily on word association exercises. For example, when Storm (cited in Fyson1984) investigated primary school children’s ideas about Africa he discovered a great diversity of notions with a strong emphasis on the physical and natural environment, especially wildlife. ‘Lions’, ‘heat’, ‘snakes’, ‘elephants’, palm trees’, ‘tigers’ were some of the words which were used most frequently and had the highest scores. The research implied an exotic and romantic view of the continent, far removed from the realities of everyday life. A further small scale study by Gambrill (1996) uncovered a similar range of stereotypical images alongside powerful negative associations. Typical comments included ‘thousands of animals’, ‘people that are ill’, ‘houses that are thatched’, ‘refugees’, ‘wars’ and ‘people’ that fight’. One child asked poignantly ‘Why can’t we help them?’ thereby unconsciously opening up a raft of uncomfortable questions and anxieties about post colonialism and power relations in the modern world.

There is nothing dated about these findings. A report by Oberman et al. (2014) into how nine-year-old Irish children conceptualise global and justice issues found that they too regard Africa as universally poor. For example, many children in the study alluded to people in Africa needing to travel long distances to get to water. They also held a range of negative images which clearly indicated the impact of emergency appeals and the dominance of a charity based mentality. Such results, the report concluded, indicates not only a need to challenge children’s ideas about developing countries but for a more nuanced exploration of poverty, equality, human rights and social justice in education.

*Stereotypes*

It has long been recognised that stereotypes and bias colour our thinking. The term itself was first coined nearly a century ago in 1922 by Walter Lippmann, who described stereotypes as ‘pictures in our heads’. Stereotypes are valuable in that they help us order our ideas and organise our thoughts and experience into categories. However, the problem with stereotypes is that they tend to be rigid. They also illustrate what psychologists call ‘confirmation bias’ which is a tendency in human reasoning to seek out evidence which confirms our prior beliefs. Not only does this result in a lack criticality it is far too easy for our ideas to become joined together in what the Nigerian writer, Chimamanda Adiche calls a ‘single story’ (Griffiths and Allbut 2011). Once formed, such stories tend to limit our thinking and attitudes to other people and places. All too often they lead us to deny the similarities between people and undermine our common humanity.

In their research into children’s images of the developing world, Graham and Lynn (1989) showed children a range of photographs which they asked them to sort and discuss. Although the photographs showed both modern and traditional ways of life it was striking how quickly the children latched onto those images which confirmed their preconceptions. Graham and Lynn commented how scenes showing dry landscapes or bare feet triggered ideas of a hunting life-style, regardless of surroundings. To counter this they included city scenes but found they achieved only ‘limited results’. The same tendency was noted by Elliott (1992) who presented children with 25 pictures of India. To test their pre-conceptions she asked them to decide which ones they thought were of India and which ones they thought were showed other places. She comments:

‘The children quickly disregarded fifteen of the pictures that didn’t match their pre-conceived images and were very reluctant to accept that they were all of India once this had been explained. One boy’s reaction to this was: ‘No way are they all of India, Miss. You’ve gone brain dead!’’

Such findings suggest the need for deeper levels of understanding which recognise the legacy of colonialism, the impact of different cultural lenses and the social and historical baggage which goes with them. Martin (2011) is one of a number of researchers who argues that teaching children about different nations and cultures challenges us to reflect on our own world view. This is a theme to which we will return later in this paper.

**How do children develop their knowledge and feelings towards different nations, people and cultures?**

Children gather knowledge about the world around them in multiple ways. In a seminal study on place knowledge, Gould and White (1986) examined children’s knowledge of their home country using mental maps. They asked Swedish children aged between 7 and 13 to write down the names of all the places in Sweden they could think of in a five-minute period. They then plotted the frequencies with which each place had been mentioned on a blank outline map drawing contours to link places with equal frequencies to create an information surface. The results showed that the younger children were simply aware of their own locality and some of the larger cities in Sweden. Older children elaborated on this basic structure by filling in the gaps between the nodes with corridors of information. Popular holiday destinations were a notable feature of their mental maps. Gould reported that the amount of information children held about a region was related to its population and inversely correlated to its perceived distance from their home locality. Drawing on statistical analysis he decided that as a general principal our emotional involvement with places falls off logarithmically with the square root of the distance.

When it comes to children’s knowledge of foreign countries, Sararinen’s study (1973) with 16-18 year olds provides a useful starting point. Saarinen tested four groups of high school students in North America, Europe and Africa asking them to label places on a blank outline world map which they had drawn themselves. He found that over half the labels related to countries, that there was a preponderance of human over physical features and that very few rivers, mountains or lakes were included. The size, shape and proximity of places seemed important factors influencing the students’ choices. Current affairs and cultural links were also important. There is a dearth of research into the factors which make world map information memorable for children and further studies are definitely needed. However, Barrett (2007) concludes that what research has been conducted suggests that exposure to information is a key factor in developing children’s locational framework.

There has also been surprisingly little research into the role of parents, peers and family in influencing children’s attitudes. The importance of role models is, however, well known and significant others undoubtedly have a very considerable impact on children’s emerging ideas. Children themselves acknowledge this, often citing their parents as one of the sources of their knowledge about the people who live in other countries (Barrett and Short 1992). Whilst it should be assumed that parents are universally well-intentioned and want the best for their children, there is a real danger that the information children receive from significant others may be partial, anecdotal or biased. Direct contact with foreigners, for example, may leave lasting impressions from which they base sweeping generalisations, either positive or negative. Such considerations have led Scoffham (2010) to argue that geography teachers have a key role in broadening children’s awareness and devising positive teaching programmes which will counter incipient negative attitudes.

Travel experience either for holiday or to visit friends, family and relatives provides children with direct experiences of foreign countries and is another significant source of information. Wiegand (1991b) investigated the travel experiences of children aged nine to eleven in three West Yorkshire primary schools with contrasting catchments and profiles. He found that at the most basic level the children who had travelled were able to name the countries and resorts they had visited and that many could provide detailed information about routes. Differences in the weather featured prominently in their accounts. Wiegand is cautious about claiming that holiday experiences are universally beneficial as they may sometimes confirm ingrained attitudes and prejudices. He also highlights the differences between white English children holidaying in Spain and ethnic Indian and Pakistani children visiting their relatives. However, he argues that in general terms overseas travel provides children with powerful experiences and helps them to view the world from different perspectives. In turn this leads them to evaluate stereotypes against their personal impressions and to develop a more mature understanding.

Today children increasingly find out about places overseas through electronic media. Films ranging from Westerns to Kung Fu movies provide powerful images of different parts of the world. Some films, like Indiana Jones and Crocodile Dundee, promote strong stereotypes. These distorted images are amplified and extended through advertisements many of which are built around caricatures. News reports too are highly selective. Inevitably they tend to focus on disasters and emergencies and beam urgent footage of harrowing scenes into our homes as Oberman et al. (2014) report. Depending on the events which are unfolding at the time, specific countries may feature on a regular basis and therefore become memorable for children from a specific age range. On a more positive note wildlife films and travelogues give children access to different perspectives and alert them to the wonders of the natural and built environment. These general observations are backed up by research. Holloway and Valentine (2000), for example, collected data from over a thousand children in Britain and New Zealand to find out what they thought of each other’s country. They discovered that many of their images were derived from movies, television programmes (particularly soap operas) and advertisements. Intriguingly, some children appeared to have formed impressions from their trips to local supermarkets where goods from the other country were on prominent display.

One source of information which has particular significance for very young children are picture books. From the earliest ages onwards children are treated to stories about the world presented anthropomorphically through the medium of animals and birds. Adventure stories take them to exotic places and far-away lands. Heroes and heroines overcome adversity in a range of geographical settings, both probable and improbable. The elements too play their part, often adding an extra level of hazard. The colourful and evocative illustrations which accompany these tales amplify the text and feed the imagination. Geography educators have long been aware how picture-books provide powerful entry points to geographical learning. These opportunities have been widely detailed as, for example, in *You, Me and Diversity* Dolan (2014).

The conclusion that emerges from a review of research is that children knowledge of their homeland and wider world is liable to be both variable and partial. However, given the range of sources available to them it is likely that some at least will have developed an awareness that considerably exceeds expectations for their age range. Catling (2011) puts it this way:

‘Children seem to know more of, and construct perspectives on, the wider world and the environmental concerns that they encounter than is generally appreciated (Palmer and Birch 2004, Spencer and Blades 2006, Barrett 2007). Through play young children imagine and creatively enact a variety of their everyday experiences (Tovey 2007). They may draw on family and school experiences but often also involve ideas about distances and unfamiliar social and physical environments drawn from story books, the visits to friends’ places, television programmes or, for some older children, via the internet and computer games. This, however, is a little researched area….’

Catling 2011 (p18)

**How can schools help children develop their knowledge and understanding?**

There are many accounts of teaching projects and educational projects which have successfully promoted children’s international understanding. As far as primary geography is concerned, these are reported especially in the journal *Primary Geography*, in books which provide teacher guidance such as the *Primary Geography Handbook* (Scoffham 2010) and in electronic material posted on the Geographical Association website. Research articles also appear regularly in referred journals such as *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education* as well as in themed issues of *Education 3-13*. The papers presented at the annual Charney Manor Research Conferences over a period of nearly 20 years, though largely unpublished, are another invaluable resources. The *Register of Research into Geographical Education* provides an additional and very useful reference point.

The evidence that emerges is that schools can and do play a major role in developing children’s understanding of and attitude to other nations, peoples and cultures. Some specific studies include the impact of using a photo pack on Nairobi with children aged 8-10 (Harrington 1998), the principles and practice of schools linking (Disney 2005), how foreign nationals can challenge stereotypes and prejudice (Scoffham and Potter 2007) and different ways of exploring cultural diversity (Picton 2008).

**Theoretical perspectives**

On the surface, teaching children about the wider world may appear to be a relatively straight forward activity. The curriculum simply specifies that pupils need to gain a working knowledge of the world map and learn about different countries and their human and physical features. Yet even knowledge which seems overtly factual is fraught with difficulties. To begin with there has to be a selection process. It would be impossible to teach children absolutely everything about the world and its peoples so information has to be sifted. Deciding what is important and what to leave out inevitably raises questions about values. On what basis do we decide to include some information and exclude other things? This draws us in to acknowledging our priorities - priorities which are liable to be historically, culturally and ethnically mediated. Other influences will also colour our view, such as class and gender and our location in time and space. Whether we acknowledge it or not, our perception of the world is inevitably partial and circumscribed.

Factual information also has the disadvantage of being fixed and precise, whereas as the world around us is in a constant state of flux. Even the population of cities and the boundaries of countries, for example, are never as clear-cut in reality as they appear in an atlas or gazetteer. They are continually changing and they are often contested, either actively or passively. Facts may appear to be objective but a factual lens runs the danger of presenting a ‘single story’ about the world and laying the foundations for stereotypes, as Griffiths and Allbut (2011) pointed out. This raises interesting questions about truth and reality. Of course facts do have meaning but they need to be used judiciously and are best regarded as tentative and provisional and the certainly need to be set in context. The underlying danger is that schools may over-emphasise factual knowledge and introduce children to simplistic portraits of nations, peoples and cultures. In fact they may end up telling the story of a world that either no longer exists and or which maybe a world that never existed in the first place.

Another important observation is that learning about people and places, rather than being emotionally neutral actually appears to be emotionally charged. Piaget and Weil (1951), for example, found the children they interviewed also expressed idiosyncratic likes and dislikes about foreign countries, Jahoda (1962) found Glaswegian children were hostile towards Germany and Stillwell and Spencer (1973) uncovered negative images of India. Learning about other countries and acquiring attitudes and feelings towards them go hand in hand.

There should be nothing surprising about this link. Over the past few decades, empirical studies in neuroscience have established that nearly all learning involves an emotional component (Immordino Yang and Damasio 2007). Whilst the inter-relationship between cognition and affect is highly complex, place knowledge seems to be particularly highly charged. People fight and die for their homeland and nationalism and national identity are issues which divide political parties, excite strong feelings of patriotism and have led to devastating conflicts. Barrett argues that the thinking which is associated with nations and national groups is ‘emotionally hot’ (2007 p2). This places it in a category of its own. The way that children sometimes express negative sentiments towards different national groups when they have little or no factual knowledge about them is particularly significant. However, it is important to remember that learning about other nations does not always change children’s feelings (Bourchier et al. 2002). From an educational point of view this may provide support for teaching programmes which are predicated on powerful emotional experiences rather than knowledge transfer. Research by Scoffham and Barnes (2009) into student teachers’ perceptions of India certainly confirms that emotional disturbance can be the catalyst for deep learning.

Finally, there are questions about child development. Piaget’s research alerted educationalist to the notions of stages and the needs of different age groups. Whilst it is now established that children reason in exactly the same way as adults and that infants have the capacity to engage in all forms of learning important for human cognition (Goswami 2015), it remains true that the way material is presented and the manner in which it is interpreted needs to be adjusted for different learners and age groups. The fact that research into children’s international understanding reveals sequences in the development of (a) world map knowledge, (b) feelings about different national groups and (c) the understanding of different peoples and cultures is significant. Furthermore, the burst in world knowledge noted by Jahoda and others around the age of eight is no coincidence. It too seems to reflect developmental factors and the shift from infant egocentrism to more expansive modes of thought. Equally, the way that the notion of hunter-gathers appeals to certain groups of children reported by both Graham and Lynn (1989) and Scoffham and Potter (2007) seems to equate with a particular developmental stage. In many ways this echoes the dinosaur phase which parents of young children and Key Stage One science teachers will immediately recognise.

**Conclusion**

Learning about different nations, peoples and cultures is a vital part of geography. Finding out about global difference and inequalities does, however raises awkward questions. It is sometimes difficult even to answer the most innocent queries about inequality. For example, explaining why Ugandans are generally poorer than Western Europeans requires an historical explanation which draws on accounts of slavery, colonialism and conquest. We also need to look at current trade agreements and the way they are maintained through power differentials. On a more general level, understanding, in human terms, that our prosperity and way of life in Western Europe is predicated on the exploitation and repression of people in other parts of the world (the ‘dark side’ of capitalism) is both disquieting and distressing. For some it is quite simply disorientating. Few teachers are equipped to handle the complexities that this involves. Andreotti (2013) sums up the challenges in the following way:

‘Education, in the best sense of the word, can be understood as being precisely about wrestling with the challenges of the world in all its complexity, plurality, uncertainty, contingency and (unfortunately) severe levels of inequality, in order to enlarge possibilities for thinking and living together in a finite planet that is already in crisis.’ (Andreotti 2013 p13)

Wrestling with the challenges of the world in all its complexities is a daunting task, particularly when working with young children is concerned, but surely it is one that is worth trying when the stakes are so high. As Martin (2011) points out what Andreotti invites us to do involves:

1. learning to unlearn (unpacking one’s own historical baggage)
2. learning to listen (to multiple perspectives)
3. learning to learn (taking on new perspectives, rearranging and expanding one’s own), and
4. learning to reach out (exploring news ways of being, thinking, doing knowing and relating).

To put it another way, we need to recognise that facts are provisional, that the present is written through with the colonial legacy, that there are multiple ways of seeing the world all of them equally valid and that we need to constantly revisit, refresh and revise our understanding.

There has been dearth of research over the last few decades into children’s understanding of other nations, peoples and cultures. Andreotti argues that ‘expanding pupils’ world views to include different spaces, forms of living and ways of knowing is perhaps the most significant thing that geography teachers can achieve’ (2011 p12). Her approach could provide the framework for a new generation of research into questions which stand at the very heart of geographical thinking and learning. If we are to build an authentic geography curriculum for the middle years of the coming century we need new ways of thinking. Could this be the way forward?

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Travelling with minds (as well as our hearts, bodies and spirits) is an integral part of teaching and learning geography. Expanding pupils world views to include different spaces, forms and living and ways of knowing and being is perhaps the most significant thing that geography teachers can achieve…..