

Level 6 Geography - Role Playing in Geography

PEEL in Practice: 1300 ideas for quality teaching

Gillian Pinnis, Avila College

Aims:

The main aim of this Geography lesson was to have Year 9 students thrash out their ideas about the particularly difficult concept of Longshore Drift. The next step was to demonstrate this procedure as a role play and record it on video. This concept had already been covered in class and so the exercise was to be a consolidation of the information and revision before a test.

Method:

Students were paired and then asked to brainstorm how the process of longshore drift could be role played. They were given minimal instructions but it was suggested that they refer to their notes first. After five minutes of discussion, the class was then divided into two groups of sixteen and asked to discuss their ideas and decide which one they would proceed with. Each group had approximately fifteen minutes to work out what they would do before their plays were to be video taped. After taping, the two versions were viewed by the whole class.

Observations:

This exercise was welcomed enthusiastically, particularly by the more vocal members of the class. I tried not to interfere with their discussion and stood back taping the proceedings on the video for future reference. Exchanges between students were fascinating to observe as they worked through their ideas. It was obvious that there was still confusion about the process, let alone how best to role play it. Girls turned to each other rather than to me for direction and clarification of their thoughts. I noticed that the more kinaesthetic type of students took the lead in the action (being the crashing waves) and left the others to take the more passive roles (being a groyne or the narrator). They not only discussed their differing ideas but also play acted them over and over until they all agreed about how best to perform longshore drift. It seemed that whilst they discussed what should happen, it wasn't until they actually performed the motion of the waves that their lack of clear understanding became evident and they could then change their actions to accurately represent the movement of the waves. Finally the plays were performed, successfully taped and viewed in class, each with quite different approaches to the task.

Evaluation:

In terms of clarification of a difficult concept and revision, this technique worked beautifully. The Role Play employed skills that are appropriate to a class of mixed ability and mixed learning styles. We were rushed, having only one period, but I think to have had longer could have meant students would tune out if they had minor roles. Ideally, role plays would be performed in smaller groups but this concept required more performers. On the test question which asked students to explain the process of longshore drift and draw a diagram, their answers were significantly superior to those in previous classes. All students attempted to answer it and most gained between three quarters to full marks.