



Geography: Maps and Local Needs

What if looking at the local area helped children to see people as wholes?

John is responsible for geography in his school. He wanted his unit on land use in the local neighborhood to go beyond talking about the stores, parks, schools, and transportation.

"I started by using a map with the members in our local Episcopalian church marked on it. This immediately put the work in a different framework. We also used an aerial map of the same location. We spent some time exploring the maps and getting to know what was in the area. Then I asked them to list what different land uses they knew in this area. (Since this is a small-town school, it wasn't too difficult.) We used the normal criteria. I made no changes there.

"We listed what we knew from memory, and then different groups walked parts of the area with adults and took photographs. We created a large map and marked the different types of land use, adding photographs around the map.

"I gave my students a second question: 'How does the land use serve the needs of people in who live in this area?' We talked about people being not just bodies—but minds, emotions, and spirits as well. We discussed the sort of things that might come under each heading. For example, we saw the playing field as serving not just physical but also emotional needs (friendship), and the church as serving spiritual, physical, and friendship needs. We soon found that things fit in more than one category. We talked about these not as separate parts, but rather as woven together.

"We looked at our map and used colors to indicate what needs were being met. Some things had lots of colors. We analyzed the land use and created graphs, which led to a discussion about whether all of the people's needs were being met. The class made suggestions about what was needed."

What's going on here?

John **saw** his geography lesson as a way to help his students to see people in a holistic way and to connect geography with faith and a focus on the needs of others.

He **engaged** his students in gathering information and organizing it in the light of guiding questions, which helped them make connections and gain a broader picture that included faith in a course other than religion.

John **reshaped his practice** by choosing a fresh context to frame the work (map of the congregation, serving the community); by choosing questions, resources, and tasks that supported the focus and encouraged the class to be outward looking (thinking about the community's needs); and by discussing the relationship of the work to faith.

What does this have to do with faith, hope, and love?

John put **faith** at the center of the local community, because the area where the church members live is the area a church serves. John's lesson reflects the Bible's teaching that people are not just minds or bodies; they are whole creatures. The students thought about their **hopes** for the local community when they looked at what was missing in the community in order to serve all the needs of the people living there.

What difference does it make?

By using a congregational map and his second question, John integrated faith into geography in a natural way. The students still covered the material in the curriculum, but they did it differently. It helped them to see their area differently and to relate it to other people's needs, not just their own.

Where could we go from here?

Changing the viewpoint you use can radically alter a lesson. It doesn't have to be a map; it can be an account of an event from a different perspective or a view from an unusual angle in art (for example, Salvador Dali's view of Christ from above). Changing viewpoints and contexts can help students to see things differently.

Digging deeper

The Bible is not precise in its terms. The “soul” can stand for the whole human being and take on the meaning “person” or stand for an aspect of our being ([Genesis 2:7](#)). People are not like hand puppets, with the soul inside the body. The two are intricately connected and affect each other. They describe different facets of what we are as whole people. Worship involves the whole person, as do most activities.

The human spirit makes us aware of a spiritual dimension of life and helps us to connect with God, but spirit, body, and mind are intimately connected. We perceive and express the spiritual through our senses, minds, and emotions.

In the Bible, “flesh” is not the same as the body. It can refer to “flesh and blood” as we use the expression, but “the flesh” is also used to describe any aspect of human nature that veers away from God, so it can apply to mind and emotions as well as the body. The Bible does not see the soul as good and the body as bad; both can be spiritual. The Bible talks of the mind being renewed by God ([Romans 12:2](#)). As a result, those who serve human bodily, intellectual, or emotional needs are as important as those who serve humanity’s spiritual needs.



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