

ON OUR OWN (WITH A BIT OF HELP)

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WITH ORLA O'MAHONY AND SUSAN PIKE

Here, Juliette, Anna and Muireann, three 6th class pupils at St James' National School in Stradbally, Ireland, share their experiences of geographical enquiry.

Our school is a small school with only 27 pupils. It is in the village of Stradbally in County Waterford, Ireland. There are two teachers, one for each classroom, who teach four classes each. We are in the senior room, and are 12 years old. We are in 6th class and we have almost finished primary school!

We have been doing geography since we were 4 years old, in junior infants. We still remember learning about India and going on a walk to Woodhouse, a large country estate near to our school. We like geography, but this year we have been doing more geography through enquiry. We have learnt new things, in interesting ways.

People and work in our area

We started off this topic by writing down jobs people do. We thought of all types of jobs we could, like fisherman, jockey, businessman, vet, etc. Then we put them into our own categories. We ended up with two categories: making and doing. This was a different way to learn because it was a new topic, but also because our teachers let us do it by ourselves. Then our teachers helped us put the jobs into three other categories, called primary, secondary and tertiary. We felt proud of ourselves because we had worked the categories out! We also got to talk a lot and we had a heated discussion about where to



Figure 1: Having the freedom to explore the different photographs. Photo: Susan Pike.

put 'jockey' in the lists. After this, we came up with lots of questions we would like to find the answer about, to do with people and work. We also put these into categories. We learnt about people's jobs on maps and in photographs.

We looked at an oblique aerial photograph of our area (Figure 1). Our teachers let us look at the photograph of our area for a long time without telling us to do anything. We felt free and not under pressure, so we could



Figure 2: The trip to the television studio was a highlight. Photo: Susan Pike.



Figure 3: Devising a fieldwork investigation on 'How can we make our lane safer?'. Photo: Susan Pike.

work out what the features were. We were surprised at how much development had taken place in our locality in recent years. We looked at maps of our locality and of Dublin (1:20,000 scale maps). We talked about the maps for ages. To help us understand about maps, we made our own maps of islands. We then learnt about the process of making chocolate. We watched a clip on YouTube of how chocolate is made. On pieces of paper we wrote what happened, then ordered them, so we understood about

the inputs, processes and outputs involved. We also visited Nemeton, a local television company. Maeve Quill (a local presenter) showed us around: it was amazing to see the equipment and be in a TV studio (Figure 2).

We remember a lot of what we did on people and work, because we had to take time to work things out: it made more of an impression on us. At the end of our enquiry about people and work, we presented what we had found

out to our parents at an open afternoon. They liked finding out what we had done and were very impressed!

How can we make our lane safer?

We asked people questions about the road going up to our school. Our main question was: 'How can we make our lane safer?' (Figures 3 and 4). We then decided what data we needed to collect. We collected:

- people's suggestions on questionnaires that we had made ourselves
- photographs we took and notes on discussions we had down the lane
- our own ideas.

We presented our data as graphs, maps, photographs and in writing. We included the opinions of the residents of the lane, parents of children and the pupils, teachers and other adults that are part of our school community.

We wrote up our findings. We found this very hard to do because we had a lot of data. We had to pull together lots of information and we did this on the computer but we were very pleased with what we ended up with. We then made a flyer to give to people who use or live on the lane.

Overall, the best things we have done this year were the enquiry and being outside. Learning through enquiry was different because it was more relaxed, but at the same time we were more focused. Being outside was good because it is open, quiet and we were free to think.

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Figure 4: Our questions revolved around how to make the lane safer. Photo: Susan Pike.