

## LOCAL POPULATION STUDIES IN SCHOOLS

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On behalf of the editorial board Terry Gwynne has been seeking contributions from teachers who have had experience of using local population studies in the classroom. What follows is a general introduction to a series of articles, the first of which appears after this introduction.

Not very long ago a curious situation seemed to exist with regard to history teaching in general; whilst the subject in the school curriculum was felt to be badly in need of reform the shelves of bookshops were loaded with history books of all sorts, shapes and sizes. Why, it was asked, was history so attractive to the adult reading public but at the same time lacking in interest at school level? The question was answered in many different ways, but there is no need to pursue them here. It is worth noting, however, that local population studies are in a somewhat similar situation; an enormous growth area in adult education they have not made the same impact in schools. Where, we may now ask, are the future demographers being trained? Will each generation of adult students have to come to local population studies with no previous knowledge or experience of them at school level? In fact the school situation is by no means as bad as has so far been implied. There is much interesting work being undertaken; in general there is no longer a great need to preach the educational value of local population studies in the classroom. Far from being viewed suspiciously as a limited topic of study they are now seen as a means of developing a variety of work, on family life, living conditions, disease, travel, occupations, and so on. Such work can fruitfully be linked to local studies of buildings, of streets, of villages, and with the environment generally. It can be pursued in conjunction with visits to museums, or objects provided by the pupils; it can encompass a wide range of subsidiary activities such as oral recordings. Fundamentally local population studies operate either as a stimulus (when starting with demographic studies) or as illustrative material (when demography is used to give substance to abstract generalisations about, for example, overcrowding). There is much supportive material available to back up these studies; advice and help, as the editors hope to make clear, are readily given.

For the teacher seeking to win the support of his colleagues there is the fact that local population studies are underpinned by sound educational principles. They are activity-based and source-based and as such meet important criteria in current educational thinking. They are ideally suited to group work and can encompass mixed-ability groupings. Methods of presentation can include creative art work; a stimulus for some dramatic reconstruction may be provided. There is no reason why such studies should remain the province of the history teacher; a multi-disciplinary approach will bring many advantages. Local population studies will contribute to two areas of current concern. The study of language across the curriculum will be enhanced when, for example, children have to grapple

with the terminology of job descriptions. The contribution to children's numeracy is evident; but it is much more than mere practice in addition or subtraction. Exercises commonly associated with the arithmetic lesson will be seen to have relevance in a much wider context. Children will in effect attain a familiarity and perhaps an ease with the use of figures. So, in an educational sense, local population studies offer much to the teacher whether at primary, middle or secondary level.

Their appeal is not just to somewhat abstract educational principles. Whilst a sound educational rationale is essential teachers will want to know what in particular local population studies have to offer, and how in practice they operate. Aims and objectives will here be of paramount importance; they will need to be tailored to particular circumstances, and emphasis will vary according to age and ability. Some features will be common to all such studies. A useful link between written, visual and oral work will be provided. Both functional and creative activities will be catered for. An environmental connection is established; local population studies are dynamic, helping to explain the present environment. The role of the family emerges as a significant element, establishing a sociological dimension which again is an area of current concern. Pupils will be introduced to population size and structure as important historical determinants albeit in some circumstances in a fairly elementary fashion; and furthermore ones which are debated in the contemporary world with its concern with unemployment, overcrowding, inadequate resources, etc. Essentially what local population studies are offering the teacher is a human study; a study of people from all levels of society, people with whom pupils can readily identify and who can satisfy children's curiosity about the lives of their forebears.

The organisation of group activity so that it produces systematic recording, classification and enumeration of data, orderly presentation and some attempt at interpretation will create a real-life situation, the excitement of investigation, a feeling of immediacy and relevance. But if the **activity** is to be the prime concern the work will need to be organised with this in mind. On the other hand some teachers will be more concerned with the **content** and will need to organise the work accordingly. In any circumstances it would be foolish to initiate such work without first being clear about the objectives. Care needs to be taken to determine the depth of the study, for local population studies have been used at all stages from junior schools to quite sophisticated work in sixth forms.

There will, of course, be difficulties; but they are in no way insurmountable provided they are recognised at the outset. Most fall into one of two categories. There are the administrative problems associated with ensuring sufficient time is available, that the timetable is not disrupted, that colleagues are not inconvenienced, and so on. These have to be solved within the particular circumstances of each school. The second difficulty is one of resource provision and advice on what is feasible. The editors hope that this is where **LPS** can make a useful contribution. We are publishing in this issue an article on using local population studies with 13-14 year-olds and further articles will follow in future issues. The editors hope that a substantial series of articles dealing with classroom practice will

develop. But we also hope that, in the best traditions of **LPS**, a fruitful correspondence will appear; many **LPS** readers will without doubt have valuable comments to make on the basis of their own experience. It is to be hoped that the essential link between school and the community will be reflected in readers' comments. Perhaps some of our adult enthusiasts for local population studies can offer an answer to the question why they have appealed so much to adult education groups. The editors see the debate as one which involves both teachers and the community. But, for the teacher, we can offer advice both on the general principles of population studies and on the availability of suitable material. **LPS** has regularly reminded all readers that the editorial board is always prepared to offer advice on subjects within the scope of **LPS**; we should be only too pleased to receive enquiries from teachers about the availability of materials, the feasibility of studies, the most appropriate methodology, etc. A really successful pooling of teaching experience, expressed in articles, correspondence and queries, would be a most valuable development.

For the moment though this remains, by a deliberate decision, an introductory statement. Too often in the past there have been attempts to deal with local population studies in schools in general terms. Here, in the first instance, the articles must speak for themselves. They are offered not as ideal methodology nor as perfect teaching practice; they are reports of what has actually been attempted in the classroom, with varying degrees of success. Eventually a **schema** of good practice may emerge, but this will not be achieved without the help of teachers. In a future issue a bibliography of useful books, pamphlets and articles will be appropriate but here too the editors would welcome information from teachers and readers in general about works they have personally found particularly useful. There can be no question but that this introductory article has raised issues rather than offered solutions. Many of the future articles will no doubt leave readers with many questions; but in all instances they will be based upon practical experience in the classroom. The first article by Stan Saul is firmly based in the 13-14 year-old age range, and has to take account of the need to fit the work into an existing syllabus. Here is a teacher who has found his own way to local population studies as a rewarding element within the syllabus. We wonder how many other teachers are working in isolation on various aspects of historical demography. Another article will be submitted by a primary teacher working with 10-11 year olds who as well as meeting objectives in terms of local population studies has to remain ever mindful of the basic skills of numeracy and literacy which children of this age are expected to acquire. A project devised for some pupils from a fifth-form History CSE/GCE 'O' level class will provide the basis of an article, and since this scheme may have the use of a computer there will be an important link with an article on the development of information retrieval banks using multi-source demographic data. A separate scheme by a group of teachers supported by their LEA adviser to make use of data banks of census information will develop this aspect further. These reports will come from many regions, the north east, north west, East Anglia, Cambridgeshire, etc. In all cases they are written by teachers with an active interest in local population studies in the classroom.