The SORTING GAME

University of Bristol has run interactive sessions using CLICKERS / POLLING SOFTWARE in which students had to repeatedly sort a set of countries as they received more and more information in order to try and answer a 'real-life' request from a colleague at the UN. This can be run in a lecture style setting and so works for promoting thought and discussion in large groups and is easily adapted to suit students at any age from 11-18+.

How does the game work?

Students are shown a stylised email from a colleague at the UN which asks the recipient to quickly identify, from a list of 10-15 countries which are developing countries and which are developed. For example, the list might include the USA, Russia, Peru, South Africa etc. Without any further information, students are asked to select all the countries which they think are developing countries. Responses are collected via your choice of clickers/polling or audience response software and a graph of the results (showing how many people chose each country) are then displayed on screen. The lecturer can then discuss the results and the need for more information before coming to a conclusion. The exercise is then repeated, each time giving students a new piece of data to sort the countries by. For example, you might first give them average income then life expectancy, corruption etc. Typically, the countries would be ranked differently according to each piece of data and this would be reflected in students' responses. This then allows discussion of how difficult it is to separate countries into crude categories like this and that either more or different categories are required to group countries today. This can be followed up by showing some of the dynamic graphs of countries over time on Gapminder.

The session works well because it builds on concepts students are likely to be familiar with from Geography at school, whilst showing them some of the difficulties of working with data. For school students, particularly those under 16, the session works best when clickers (rather than polling software on their phones) are used, as there is no need for them to have a phone and there are no difficulties surrounding internet access or logging in.