

An introduction to geography and global learning

Geography enables young people to understand better the world and its people, places and environments, together with the connections between them at a variety of scales. It provides an invaluable opportunity to explore global learning, particularly in developing pupils' global sense of place, knowledge and understanding of the contemporary world, their geographical view of other places and people and of global sense of place.

This subject 'should inspire in pupils a curiosity and fascination about the world and its people that will remain with them for the rest of their lives' and 'equip pupils with knowledge about diverse places, people, resources and natural and human environment, together with a deep understanding of the Earth's physical and human processes'¹. In doing so pupils will be able to address geographical questions that are highly pertinent to global learning such as: 'Where is this place?', 'What is it like and why?' How is it changing and how do these changes impact of the people who live there? And how is this place connected to other places and other peoples' lives, including connections with the UK?

A geographical approach enables young people to access to particular subject specific knowledge understanding and skills which will enable them to examine global learning through the lens of geography which will highlight the following elements:

- the importance of places and their locations at different scales, including local, regional, national, international and global
- human and physical geographical processes and how they influence, shape and change the lives and prospects of people living around the world
- spatial differences and disparities, helping to illustrate and better understand patterns of uneven development within and between countries
- interactions and inter-relationships between different parts of the world, and between natural and human processes and systems and how this brings about change and also variation in the use of and access to resources.

So whether at Key Stage 2, Key Stage 3 or beyond, this subject has a long tradition of investigating development issues; the characteristics of developing countries and localities within them and how they experience change; and how development issues connect the economies, lives and prospects of countries and populations living in different parts of the world. As David Lambert and John Morgan have noted 'In schools in England and Wales, Geography is one of the most important sources available to pupils for gaining knowledge and understanding of development issues.' (Geography and Development Education 2013)²

Indeed, the need for global learning within this subject is further reinforced by [Ofsted's subject-specific guidance](#) for geography which identifies the significant contribution of geography to learning and understanding about current and relevant local, national and global issues.³

As well as the opportunity to explore knowledge and understanding about the world, geography also engages pupils in different ideas and perspectives on it, and whether some approaches might present a partial, incomplete or stereotyped view of particular parts of the world. For example, there are long standing debates within the discipline concerned with different perspectives on development issues and how these are explored and presented in the classroom. These debates span different approaches to development; what development is and the different ways in which it

¹ Purpose of Study, [Geography National Curriculum](#)

² <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/GeographyAndDevelopment.pdf>

³ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/generic-grade-descriptors-and-supplementary-subject-specific-guidance-for-inspectors-making-judgements>

can be measured; why some places prosper whilst others do not; the changing characteristics of developing countries and the terminology associated with this (such as LEDCs, MEDCs, BRICS, developing/developed or the global North and South); and the nature and impact of local, national and global inter-connections.

In this way the geography classroom becomes an ideal setting in which young people can address the key Global Learning Programme aims, which are to:

- help young people understand their role in a globally-interdependent world and explore strategies by which they can make it more just and sustainable
- familiarise pupils with the concepts of interdependence, development, globalisation and sustainability
- enable teachers to move pupils from a charity mentality to a social justice mentality
- stimulate critical thinking about global issues both at a whole school and at pupil level
- help schools promote greater awareness of poverty and sustainability
- enable schools to explore alternative models of development and sustainability in the classroom.

In addition geography is also central to the key areas of knowledge identified by the GLP, as well as how this knowledge might be approached:

1. Knowledge of developing countries, their economies, histories and human geography
2. Knowledge of the basic elements of globalisation
3. Knowledge of different ways to achieve global poverty reduction and the arguments around the merits of these different approaches.
4. Knowledge and understanding of the concepts of interdependence and sustainability
5. Supporting enquiry and critical thinking about development and development issues.

Geography is a key part of the curriculum for developing learners' knowledge of global learning. However, partly because it can involve the consideration of values, this is also the focus of debate within the discipline, which touches on 'what' is taught, 'how' it is taught and 'why' it is taught.

One critique cautions against using geography to promote a particular set of values. A version of this argument is that it is only through dispassionate study that pupils should be introduced to an impartial body of geography knowledge about the world, compared with 'the replacement of knowledge with morality as the central focus of the (geography) curriculum (in which) global problems are not presented as issues to be interrogated for truth, knowledge and meaning, with a view to developing ideas about the potential courses of social and political action. Instead, the solution is to be found in the personal and presented as a given: consume less, have fewer children, take public transport, be less money-grabbing (and) support charities.'⁴

Another focuses on the choice of content, suggesting that 'there is a tendency to promote particular values in school geography which favour 'local' development projects, focus on 'sustainable tourism' or persuade pupils that Fair Trade is the solution to issues of poverty... it is possible to argue that many geography lessons in schools are underpinned by a world-view based on ...'Growth scepticism'.⁵' (Lambert and Morgan 2011). A caricature of this tendency would be if pupils are led to believe inadvertently that most of global trade is 'fair trade'; when fair traded products account for roughly c\$5 billion of the total value of global trade estimated to be c\$18 trillion.

⁴Alex Standish *The Corruption of the Curriculum* 2009

⁵Lambert and Morgan *Geography and Development* 2011

Finally, there is a significant debate about the meaning of 'development'. Defining which countries are 'developing' is complex, and some believe that such terms are becoming less useful. As many countries make rapid progress in their development, dividing the world up into North and South, or more or less developed, has less and less validity. The [Gapminder](#) website illustrates this graphically and highlights the significant progress many countries have made over recent decades. Similarly, it can be difficult to say what the characteristics are of 'developing countries' as a homogenous group. It may be more productive to start with investigating individual places, what they are like, how they are linked and compare to the rest of the world and how they are developing.

Support

One response to these critiques is to remember that learners are engaged in geographical enquiry, including consideration of a range of viewpoints through critical thinking; another is to argue for the professional engagement and development of teachers of geography. As partners within the GLP the Geographical Association and Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) recognise that many teachers, across Key Stages 2 and 3, may seek additional support around geographical subject knowledge and also appropriate pedagogical approaches in relation to global learning.

There is much support for geography teachers available through the GLP. We recommend that you also draw on the membership programmes and additional support, guidance and resources of the [Geographical Association](#) and [Royal Geographical Society \(with IBG\)](#) respectively.

Through the GLP the:

- Geographical Association is providing specific support for Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 – including work to explore how global learning can support transition – as well as online support materials, CPD and the development of global learning through the respective primary and secondary geography quality marks
- Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) has provided online case studies, interviews and interactives to support subject knowledge about development for Key Stage 3, alongside CPD and the provision of geography Ambassador visits with a specific focus on development issues.

Both organisations also provide a wider range of support, advice and guidance for geography across the primary and secondary phases.

We would also encourage teachers to consider the following principles in relation to their curriculum planning, schemes of work and accompanying resources.

- What are the learning objective and relevant enquiry question/s?
- What content are you using and how is it being considered?
- What are the essential knowledge, understanding and skills that underpin this work?
- How are you exploring a range of relevant core concepts such as development, interdependence, globalisation, poverty or sustainable development?
- Do you feel secure in your own subject knowledge?
- How does this support relevant opportunities within the geography national curriculum at Key Stage 2 or 3?

In addition, the following key questions might help frame different enquires and approaches:



Key questions to frame geographical enquiries in global learning

- What do we mean by 'developing country'? How is it similar to or different to our own or other countries? How is this measured? Which countries are 'developing'? Do different countries have less and more developed regions within them?
- What do we mean by globalisation? What is it? Why is it happening? Where is it happening? Where isn't it happening? How does it affect people's lives? What are its positive or negative effects? What kinds of issues are there? Who benefits or is disadvantaged in a globalised world?
- What do we mean by poverty? What is relative and what is absolute poverty? Why is it happening? Where is it happening and why? How do we measure quality of life? What's it got to do with us? How can poverty be reduced and eradicated?
- How are different places interdependent with each other? What are the implications of this? What challenges does it create? How does technology have an impact on global development?
- Where is this information from and is it valid? What approaches do I need to explore these issues? What is evidence, bias or opinion?

Further reading

The following reports will provide further support, guidance and advice for the development of global learning within geography. Please note that a number of them were written before 2013, so you may wish to review their specific support to the new geography National Curriculum:

- [*Developing the Global Dimension in the School Curriculum*](#), DfES, DfID, DEA et al (2005)
- [*Exploring together: a global dimension to the secondary curriculum*](#), Think Global (2009)
- [*Geography and Development: Development education in schools and the part played by geography teachers*](#), David Lambert and John Morgan 2011
- [*Geography: the Global Dimension*](#), Development Education Association (2004)
- *Global Perspectives in the geography curriculum: reviewing the moral case for geography*, Alex Standish 2009.
- Details of the [geography national curriculum](#)