

An introduction to geography and global learning

Geography enables young people better to understand 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, and their geographical imaginations.

As the geography National Curriculum identifies, the 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.

Geography has a long tradition of investigating development issues, including the characteristics of developing countries and localities within them, 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. 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?' and 'How is this place connected to other places'.

A geographical approach to global learning highlights the following:

- 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
- interactions and inter-relationships between different parts of the world, and between natural and human processes and systems
- spatial differences and disparities, helping to illustrate and better understand patterns of uneven development within and between countries.

Whether at Key Stage 2, Key Stage 3 or beyond, 'geography is one of the most important sources available to pupils for gaining knowledge and understanding of development issues², a view supported by Ofsted, which identifies the significant contribution of geography to 'learning about current and relevant local, national and global issues³'. Recognising this, geography is the lead subject in the Global Learning Programme, and central to developing its five key areas of knowledge:

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.

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

² David Lambert and John Morgan (2011) *Geography and Development Education*

³ [Ofsted subject-specific guidance for geography](#)

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 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. Some geographers believe that defining which countries are 'developing', or what the characteristics of 'developing countries' as a group are, may no longer be really possible, as the [Gapminder](#) website illustrates graphically.

Thus the geography classroom becomes an ideal setting in which young people can address the key GLP 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.

However, partly because of global learning's values dimension, another debate within the discipline touches on 'how' as well as 'what' is taught. One critique cautions against using geography to promote a particular set of values. A version of this argument is that pupils should be introduced to an impartial body of geography knowledge about the world, compared with the value-laden approach this viewpoint considers to be implicit in learning about 'global problems'⁴. Another focuses on the choice of content, suggesting that there is a tendency to promote values in school geography which favour particular types of development programme, such as uncritical teaching about fair trade⁵.

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.

⁴ Alex Standish *The Corruption of the Curriculum* 2009

⁵ Lambert and Morgan *Geography and Development* 2011

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.