

Going round in circles

The visual curriculum (or dartboard) model was the brainchild of an enthusiastic group of teachers who met at a GA curriculum-making course in Bristol in February 2007. Developed by Garry Atterton and Laura Douglas for the then forthcoming KS3 programme of study, it was presented at a CPD session at the RGS-IBG in March 2007. An article in the Spring 2008 issue of *GA Magazine* invited readers e-mail for a blank copy of the dartboard to use in their own KS3 planning and the response was exceptional. The model has also been presented at regional conferences run by CfBT, where demand for hard copies often outstripped supply, and various interpretations were devised. We feel it is now time to reflect on their use and impact. Numerous schools have been kind enough to return their completed models and this has allowed us to make the following observations.

Figure 1, from Kennet School in West Berkshire, utilises the three year/six slice base concept, as do most schools. By far the most popular slices are termed 'Places' or 'World'. Dave Monk from Woodrush Community High School, Birmingham (Figure 2) takes a different approach with QCA Whole Curriculum Dimensions forming the theme for each slice; while Figure 3, from Kingdown Community School, represents probably the commonest type of visualised curriculum with typical unit headings.

The overwhelming response from users of the visual curriculum model has been positive:

'Refreshing and thought-provoking'

'A visual stimulus for the kids in our classrooms'

'I preferred this to the "butterfly" model of different unrelated modules'.

'Process is as important as outcome'.

The last comment emphasises the value of the visualised curriculum model in developing departmental strategy.

Having used the model ourselves, and from feedback from other geography departments, we noted that the advantages of this curriculum visualisation process are:

- It acts as a quick aide-memoire to remind users of curriculum plans, which is useful at a time of significant change
- It helps to identify departmental training needs both in terms of new curriculum content and updating units of work
- It helps to clarify the journey through KS3
- It is simple to use and ideal for prompting departmental discussion on what's in, what's out, what works well, what could work better
- It can be adapted for use in other humanities subjects
- It can be used to plan and track assessments ensuring a variety of approaches over time
- It helps the geography department lead the way on curriculum development.

However, some disadvantages have become apparent:

'It forces the KS3 geography curriculum to conform to a pattern, assuming three years/six half terms per year'

'Users can easily overlook entitlements such as fieldwork and ICT'

'Doesn't focus on key concepts such as place and space'

'Imposed changes in curriculum time allowance can render the model obsolete overnight'

'It's not a conceptual development framework, being too content-orientated'

'Our KS3 geography curriculum could end up being set in concrete for years to come'

A key issue that arises is how to manage changes phased into year 7 when years 8 and 9 are still following the 'old' curriculum, and at a time when schools may be busy developing A-level, diploma, IB and BTech courses, and not forgetting SEAL, Learning to Learn, AFL, SEN, G and T, DoT days, cross-curricular initiatives...

Ways forward for visualising the curriculum

- You can add PLTS, QCA whole curriculum dimensions and statutory expectations to the model. Other additions could include coding of assessments, teaching order, staff responsible for each section of work, fieldwork and ICT requirements. Students can have a copy of the model in their exercise books and so share the geographical journey. It has potential to become interactive with diagrams incorporating hotspots linked to schemes of work and assessments
- You could add two additional concentric rings and so create a key stage 3/4 model (see Figure 4). This approach has worked well at The High Arcal School in Dudley where WJEC specification A fits very well with our KS3 plans, helping us to plan our GCSE course in relation to KS3.

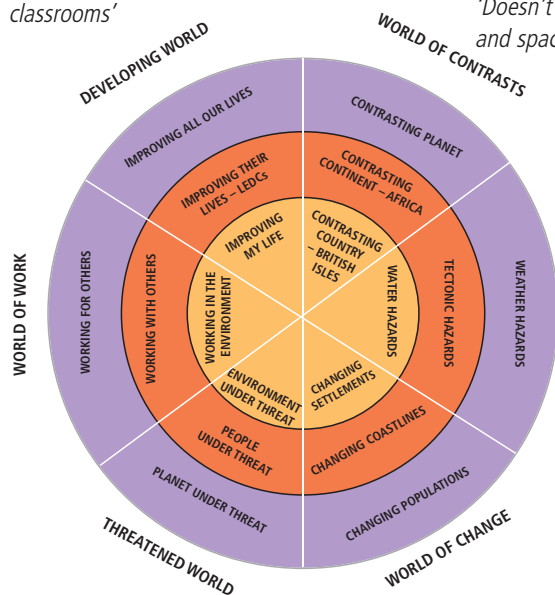


Figure 1: Dartboard from Kennet School, West Berkshire

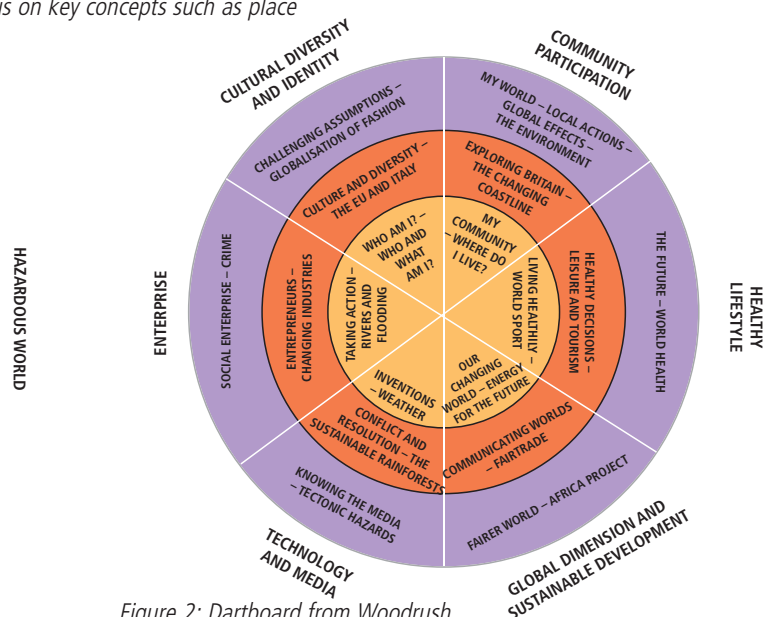


Figure 2: Dartboard from Woodrush Community High School, Birmingham

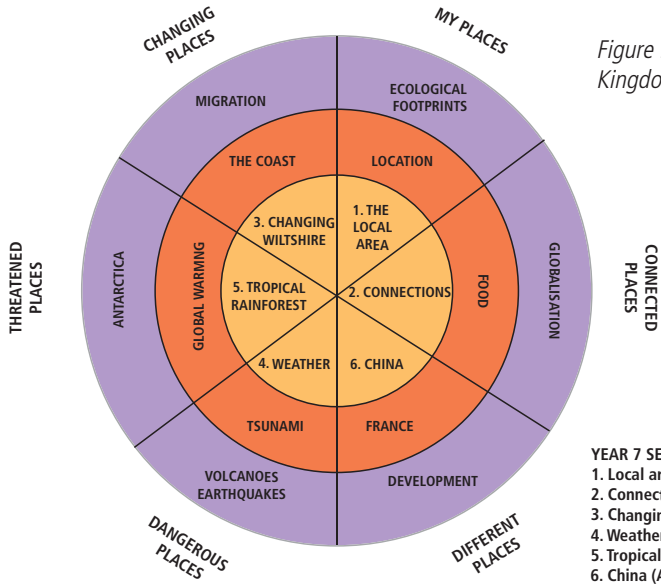



Figure 3: Dartboard from Kingdown Community School

YEAR 7 SEPTEMBER 2008
 1. Local area (KHW) OC
 2. Connections (Ass) En
 3. Changing Wiltshire (KHW) Or
 4. Weather (KHW) En
 5. Tropical Rainforest (Ass) Or
 6. China (Ass) OC

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 **Members can access the original article via the GA website. Simply log into the site and click on 'Journals' then 'GA Magazine'. You can then download the Spring 2008 issue – or any other issue published since Autumn 2004!**

In conclusion, judging by the overwhelming number of respondents to the article, the way in which blank copies for departmental use were snapped up at various conferences and the numerous positive comments and

feedback from schools across the country, we think this model for visualising the curriculum in an holistic way has been a great success. We look forward to having more feedback from you.

- YEAR 11
- YEAR 10
- YEAR 9
- YEAR 8
- YEAR 7

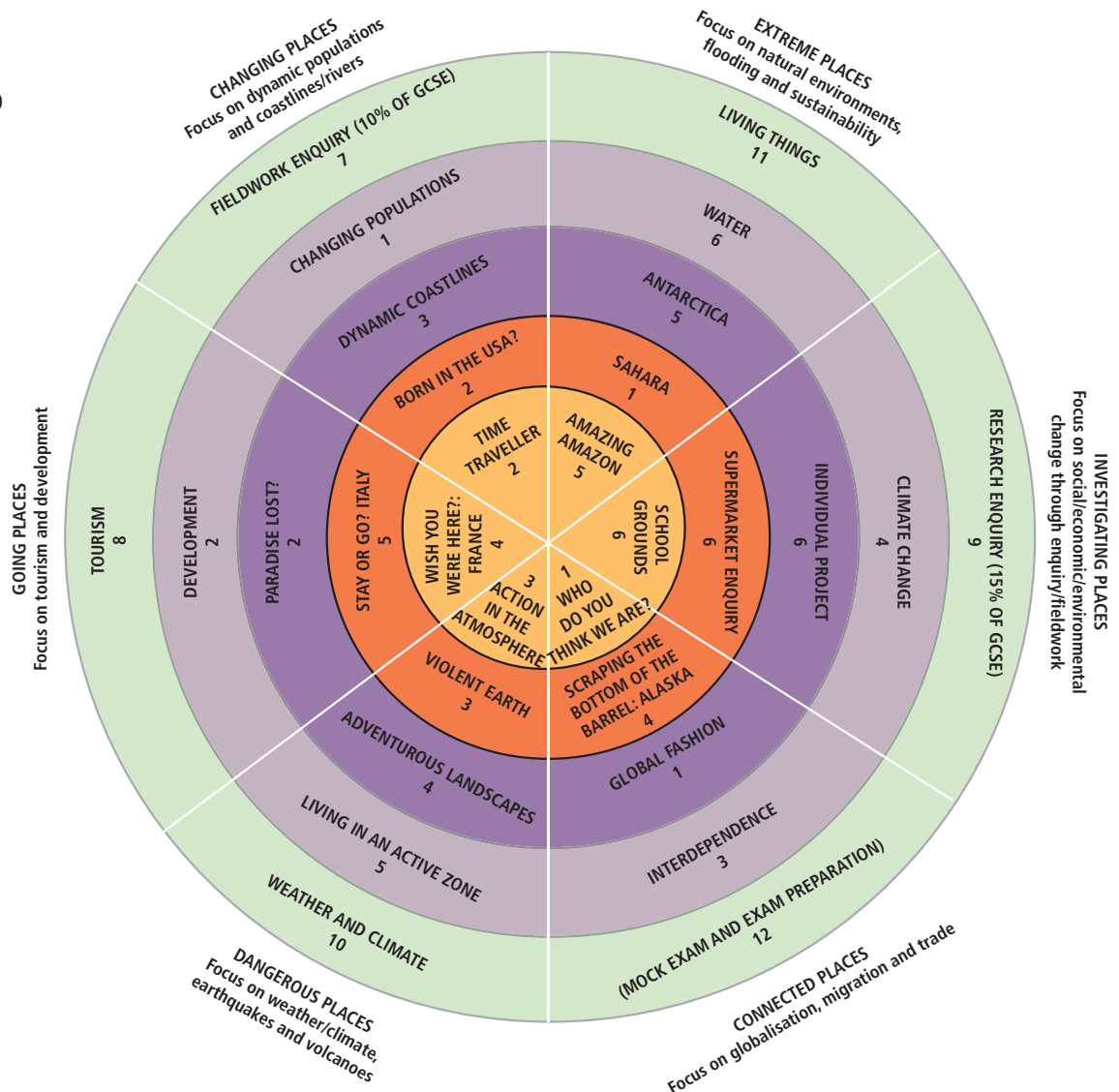


Figure 4: Dartboard from The High Arcal School, Dudley