

## The global dimension: helping to put back the relevance into geography

(Source: *Geography in schools: changing practice*, Ofsted, 2008)

Education plays a vital role in helping students and young people recognise their contribution and responsibilities as citizens of this global community and equipping them with the skills to make informed decisions and take responsible actions. Through including the global dimension in teaching, links can be made between local and global issues. It also means that young people are given opportunities to: critically examine their own values and attitudes; appreciate the similarities between peoples everywhere, and value diversity; understand the global context of their local lives; and develop skills that will enable them to combat injustice, prejudice and discrimination. Such knowledge, skills and understanding enable young people to make informed decisions about playing an active role in the global community<sup>1</sup>.

In the sample of secondary schools visited, students' understanding of the global dimension was usually satisfactory, but it was good in only a minority of schools. In many schools, the focus was on only a narrow range of places or case studies. Countries that were studied in greater depth, often revisited during the key stage, were Brazil, Kenya, Italy and Japan. The danger of this is that other countries and areas which are of great significance in shaping the world now are ignored, including South East Asia, China and the Middle East. Often, the global dimension is not studied in greater depth until Year 9.

A further problem is that, whatever countries are chosen, students' knowledge of them is not extended from local to global, and links between them to develop broader understanding are not made. 'Acting locally, thinking globally' is a cornerstone of the global dimension. Students in secondary schools should be thinking about the issues of global citizenship, conflict resolution, diversity, human rights, interdependence, social justice and sustainable development. However, in many schemes of work, these concepts are absent or incidental. Teaching programmes which are dominated by content provide few opportunities to pursue them. Generally, sixth form students have a more highly developed understanding of the global dimension, where they have more opportunities for debate and the expression of personal opinion.

Secondary schools generally do less well than primary schools in creating opportunities for studying the global dimension across the curriculum. In a few schools, the links to other subjects, most obviously citizenship, had been mapped and in these schools provision was better organised and developed. In one school, for example, very productive links had been made to modern languages.

*This innovative and exciting cross-curricular bilingual project focuses on teaching geography through the medium of French. The curricular link being developed provides excellent opportunities for enriched learning and enjoyment as well as enhancing global citizenship and understanding through studies of topics linked to population and sustainability. In this case, students benefit from the opportunity to learn two disciplines and one language. Their concentration levels*

*are noticeably enhanced as they strive to make sense of the French vocabulary and apply this to their previous learning in geography. Both subjects benefit in terms of the enthusiasm of the students and their desire to learn. They are not afraid to make mistakes and this often supports their learning as they rectify their errors. Students showed very good understanding of the geographical processes and started to develop a range of different vocabulary in French.*

Some schools exploit well the potential of links with schools abroad. In some cases, the emphasis is on teachers' professional development, but links between students, for example as pen pals, can be very productive when well supported and sustained.

Schools that have attained the International School Award are often good at sustaining such links, seeing the potential benefits for learning geography<sup>ii</sup>. For example, one school which had won the award had introduced a unit called 'passport to the world' in Year 7. This allowed students to research key features of different countries and make comparisons between them, so providing a very strong baseline for further work. In another school, the global dimension permeated many aspects of the school's work.

*The range of topics studied includes relevant, global issues such as the sustainability of air travel which is considered in the follow up to a visit to Manchester airport. Students also consider topics such as fair trade and the sustainability of the 2012 Olympic site. The department played a central role in a 'World Geography Day' event linking the school with visitors from other countries. Year 7 students worked with visitors from different countries to find out about those countries and the people's way of life. This has led to developing initial links with a Ghanaian community. The subject is at the heart of the school's intermediate award for international status. The school curriculum was audited for the award and geography forms a significant proportion of the school's international curriculum.*

In schools where the global dimension is prominent, students get below the surface of descriptive geography and begin to analyse issues such as the way in which places are seen through the media. Students found examples of places that were heavily stereotyped by the media and issues that were seen from only one side. This understanding, in turn, made them more critical users of the media.

Many schools, particularly denominational schools, sustain a culture of giving to charities. Such work provides obvious opportunities for studying the global dimension, but often it fails to do so and, when done in a misguided way, can reinforce unfortunate stereotypes. Schools which plan their charity work well and link it to the curriculum make good use of materials from non-governmental organisations such as the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development and Oxfam. Placing this work within the study of geography enables students to see the role of charities within a much wider frame: of human rights, justice, interdependence and sustainability. This is why good geography is so important.

***'Our geography' – Royston High School, Barnsley and The City School, Sheffield: the global dimension***

*Over the last few years, students have travelled from Yorkshire to Lesotho, a landlocked country surrounded by South Africa, to take part in a development project. Both schools have mainly white students, some of whom are known to have intolerant views on issues such as race and migration. The visits provided*

*the opportunity both to challenge these views and to make a contribution to educational improvement in the Malealea valley, by helping to improve the infrastructure there.*

*The students had their eyes opened to lives completely different from their own. During their stay students became involved in supporting a number of projects linked to the refurbishment of the primary and high school in Malealea as well as the school grounds. Many of the students who have attended construction courses in the United Kingdom were called upon to use their skills. Mortar was prepared and extensive patching, pointing and plastering was completed before painting was undertaken of the external walls and roof. Hundreds of trees were planted to contain soil erosion as well as to terrace the hillside to stabilise the soil.*

*The visit enabled students to reflect on the realities of life in the 21st century and made them question their own lives and their own values.*

*'As we entered the Plettenberg area we stumbled upon a black township. However, these townships were nothing like the ones we had witnessed in Cape Town. The Plettenberg Bay Township was far more developed than the ones in Cape Town. These contained running water, electricity and sewage systems. Also these houses were not made out of bits of wood and metal, they were real brick houses. As we approached the coast we entered a millionaire's paradise, with multimillion pound mansions as far as the eye could see and Lear jets flying overhead. It was hard to believe that these two different communities were so close, yet so far apart.'*

'So close, yet so far apart': geography, well planned and well taught, will help all students to understand and value contrasting cultures and communities, both at home and abroad. The examples offered in this section show what is possible in widening students' horizons so that they understand the relevance of the global dimension to their own lives.

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<sup>i</sup> *Developing a global dimension in the school curriculum* (DfES-1409-2005), DfES, 2005.

<sup>ii</sup> See also: *Evaluating internationalism in schools* (HMI 2683), Ofsted, 2006