

A teacher's toolkit for key stage 3

Geography teachers are currently facing an almost unprecedented series of challenges in terms of curriculum planning. **Alan Kinder** suggests some tools of the trade to help you face these challenges.

Why do we need a toolkit for key stage 3?

Since September 2008, colleagues have begun working with the new key stage 3 Programme of Study (KS3 PoS), new GCE A level specifications and Diplomas. At the same time, planning is already underway for new GCSEs from September 2009.

The new KS3 PoS is intended to 'introduce greater flexibility and allow the development of a "local curriculum" within a national framework' (Kinder, 2007). This 'one programme, many geographies' approach is more challenging than earlier versions as it is less prescriptive and returns responsibility for detailed curriculum development, quite rightly, to teachers. Not only does the PoS encourage teachers to select and develop their own content, it forms part of the 'new secondary curriculum' and sits within a framework of whole-curriculum aims, cross-curriculum dimensions, personal learning and thinking skills (PLTS) and other whole-school contexts. These are outlined in QCA's Big Picture of the curriculum – towards which geography must make a meaningful and distinctive contribution. Geography teachers are therefore not only faced with significant changes to their own specialism, their planning and thinking needs to take account of wider changes if geography is to thrive as a subject.

What is the KS3 Geography Teacher's Toolkit?

The *Toolkit* is a series of teachers' books published by the Geographical Association. Each title in the series tackles an important place, theme or issue for twenty-first century geography (Figure 1) and includes unit and lesson plans, activities and resources. An important aspect of the series is the

advice on teaching and learning strategies built into the units. The books are authored by creative geography teachers and together they form the 'spine' of a new key stage 3 geography curriculum. It is the intention of this article to share some of the key lessons in curriculum development (the 'tools') that emerged from the development of the series.

What tools are in the kit?

How to select content

The most pressing challenge facing the *Toolkit* team when it was first assembled in January 2007 was to respond to the issue highlighted above: to select carefully a balance of places, themes and issues of relevance to the early twenty-first century. We were determined that each place, theme or issue would resonate with teachers and learners and could be justified in terms of its geographical significance (Taylor and Catling, 2006). It was also important that, taken together, the ten titles presented balanced 'coverage' in terms of place/region, scale and human/phys-

Place studies at a variety of scales

- *Into Africa* investigates Africa's diversity, its development and its connections with our lives through a variety of places and themes across the continent.
- *The Rise and Rise of China* considers the rapid emergence of China as a global superpower, and the impacts of this change within China and beyond.
- *British or European?* explores pupils' identity within Britain and Europe and how this might change with the growing influence of the European Union on our lives.

Human, physical and environmental themes

- *Water Works* investigates the use and abuse of water resources across the world (with a focus on the Middle East) and asks what water rights and responsibilities tell us about the sustainable use of water.
- *Faster, Higher, Stronger* focuses on the sustainable urban regeneration of cities from a variety of perspectives, and assesses the plans and preparations for the London 2012 Olympics.
- *A Thorny Issue* traces links between consumer choices and the production and trade in fresh flowers, introducing ideas of food miles, fair trade and sustainable development.
- *Look at it This Way* approaches the study of physical geography through landscapes: how and why landscapes vary and the part that people play in change.

Issues in geography

- *Changing my World* asks what individuals, companies, governments and others can do in response to the global issue of climate change: the choices that can be made and the impacts of our decisions.
- *Moving Stories* examines the issues that lie behind population change and migration into and out of the UK and considers different perspectives on Britain's future population.
- *Future Floods* proposes that people need to live alongside and manage the risks of hazardous environments, and shows how geography can help us manage hazards effectively.

Figure 1: Geographical coverage in the *Toolkit* series.

Tectonic hazards	Local area study	Italy: north and south
Coastal management	Climate change	World climate
Glacial landscapes	Population	Emerging superpowers
Map skills	Geography of football	Threatened ecosystems

Figure 2: Topic cards for a 'balloon debate'.

ical/environmental geography. A further challenge was to ensure from the beginning that the series of units allowed the development of the key concepts and processes outlined in the PoS. Figure 1 shows the results of our discussion – judge for yourself how well the *Toolkit* team did!

Of equal importance are the lessons to be learned from this experience. The new PoS requires all geography teachers to think carefully about their rationale for selecting content. Local opportunities and practical considerations (e.g. resources available) will doubtless play a role. Relevance to the lives of learners is vital, as is the need for learning to build on learners' previous geographical experience (Rawling, 2008). A key tool in the selection of content is the idea of geographical significance.

There is absolutely no substitute for professional debate and discussion about what content to select, discard, adapt or update. Every teacher of geography should contribute to this discussion and take 'ownership' of the curriculum development process.

Departments are increasingly involving learners in this debate in order to ensure relevance and promote engagement.

A lively way to kick off a discussion is to use a version of the balloon debate. Copy and cut out the topic title cards from Figure 2 (also available to download free as a Word document at www.geography.org.uk/journals) in preparation for a department meeting. Challenge the department to reject each of the units in turn, until only one topic remains (explain that the head teacher is cutting the curriculum time for geography, so some units need to go!). What reasons are given for jettisoning each topic? Can the remaining topic(s) be adapted in some way to accommodate a broader range of skills or ideas?

How to justify content selection

The first writing task handed to authors in the *Toolkit* series was to answer the question: 'Why teach this topic?'. Although broad agreement had already been reached on the principles we wished to use to choose or reject ideas, the more difficult task was to articulate

(for teachers and for learners) precisely why this place, theme or issue was worthy of study. This proved to be an extremely challenging task. Its value went well beyond 'selling' the idea: both authors and editors found it invaluable as a means of shaping the ideas and skills that would really underpin the learning. It was also the single best opportunity for linking the topic to the Importance Statement and to cross-curricular themes, PLTS and other elements of the Bigger Picture. As the extracts in Figure 3 illustrate, this was achieved through a concise piece of prose at the beginning of the unit (allowing the teacher to say *how* and *why* the topic is relevant) rather than through a tick box approach.

Rather than drawing a conclusion to this, perhaps it is more valuable to ask a question:

Once you, as a department, have selected content to teach, how do you communicate its purpose and relevance to your senior leadership, your students and their parents?

Why teach about the London 2012 Olympic Games?

David Beckham is ecstatic about it! 'I come from the East End of London where the main Olympic Park will be, so I am really excited by the plans for the development of the area.'

Orphee Tshiyamba isn't. The 10-year-old lives on a local housing estate, but cannot walk to school the way she used to. The road has been closed to build a new through-road connecting Stratford old town to the future Olympic site (Kelly, 2007).

The London 2012 Olympics is a theme with relevance to young people's lives, and is likely to create a legacy that will impact on all of our futures. The project has become a defining flagship for Britishness, with media fascination guaranteed for the foreseeable future. Surely we'd be mad, as geographers, not to help young learners make sense of it?

Why teach about the UK's changing population?

Look around you. The population of the UK is changing. It's part of broader shift in population patterns within a dynamically-changing world. Some of these changes are clearly visible, such as the arrival of new groups of immigrants and urban expansion in south-east England. Other changes are less apparent, but equally important, such as our ageing population or continuing emigration. These changes are relevant to students' lives now, and are likely to have a profound impact on the UK throughout their lifetime.

Figure 3: Extracts from the 'Why teach about...?' section of some of the Toolkit books.

Concept map: Africa

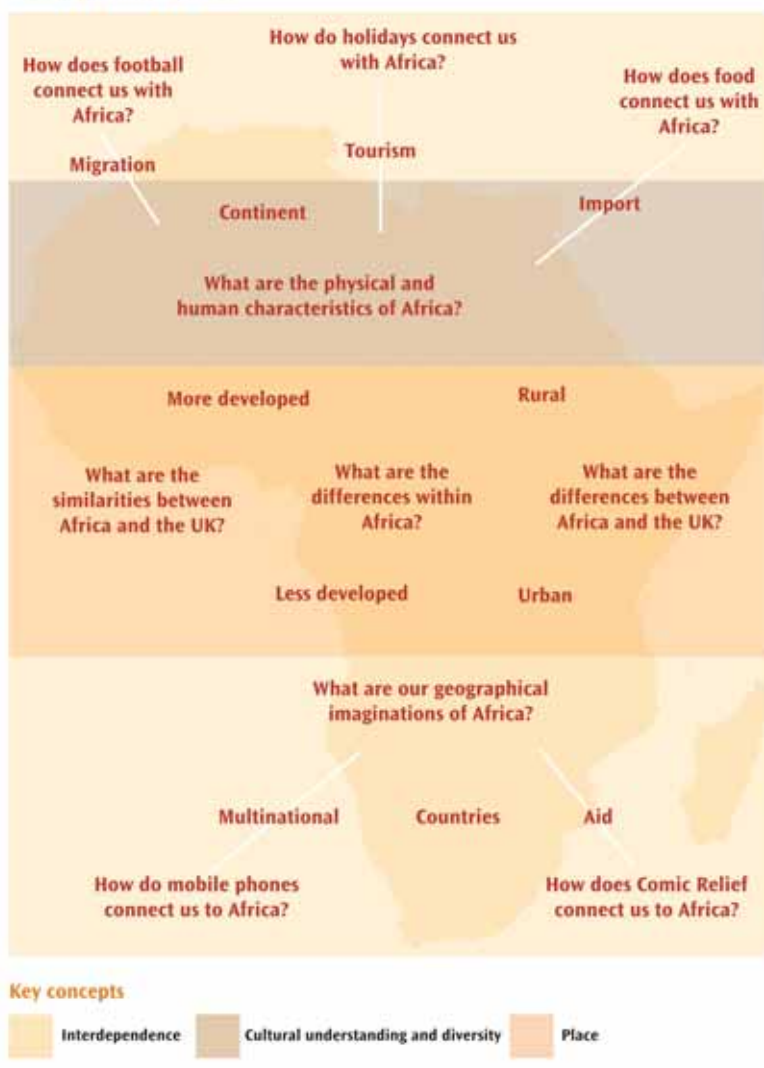


Figure 4: 'Into Africa' concept map.

How to plan using concepts

One of the most striking features of the new PoS is the prominence of the key concepts – the ideas underpinning a good understanding of the subject at key stage 3. Much has now been written by way of advice in this area (e.g. Lambert, 2007) and there are several approaches to planning using concepts.

The approach adopted by the toolkit team was both straightforward and challenging. Initial 'concept mapping' was undertaken, with authors teasing out from their own place/theme/issue the related geographical ideas and language on a large piece of sugar paper. These initial thoughts were discussed, challenged and refined face-to-face. From these early drafts, the team agreed between two and four key concepts that appeared to really underpin the geographical study of each unit. A decision was taken to represent this graphically. Authors finalised the geographical statements, questions and language drawn from the key concepts and arranged these as a concept map. Coloured zones were added underneath to show how particular key concepts would really 'drive' the learning. Figures 4 and 5 illustrate results from two Toolkit titles.

Two important conclusions arise from this approach. The first is that key concepts are broad geographical ideas: they require the teacher to interpret them and relate them to specific geographical questions or statements. Secondly, for students to really develop their understanding of these concepts, it is necessary to select a small number of key concepts and to explore these over time – not in one activity or in one lesson.

How to frame questions for enquiry

As authors worked on their unit overviews (concept maps and 'Why teach about?' sections) they also considered the central, overarching enquiry question that would form the subtitle to their unit. A decision had earlier been taken that each title would be punchy and hopefully intriguing. The subtitle would frame the purpose of the learning as a single question. Although finding 'good' enquiry questions is a creative process, there are some rules worth following. Does the question:

- Capture the interest and imagination of pupils?
- Place an aspect of geographical thinking or investigating at the forefront of the mind?
- Result in tangible, lively, substantial, enjoyable 'outcome activities' (Riley, 2000).

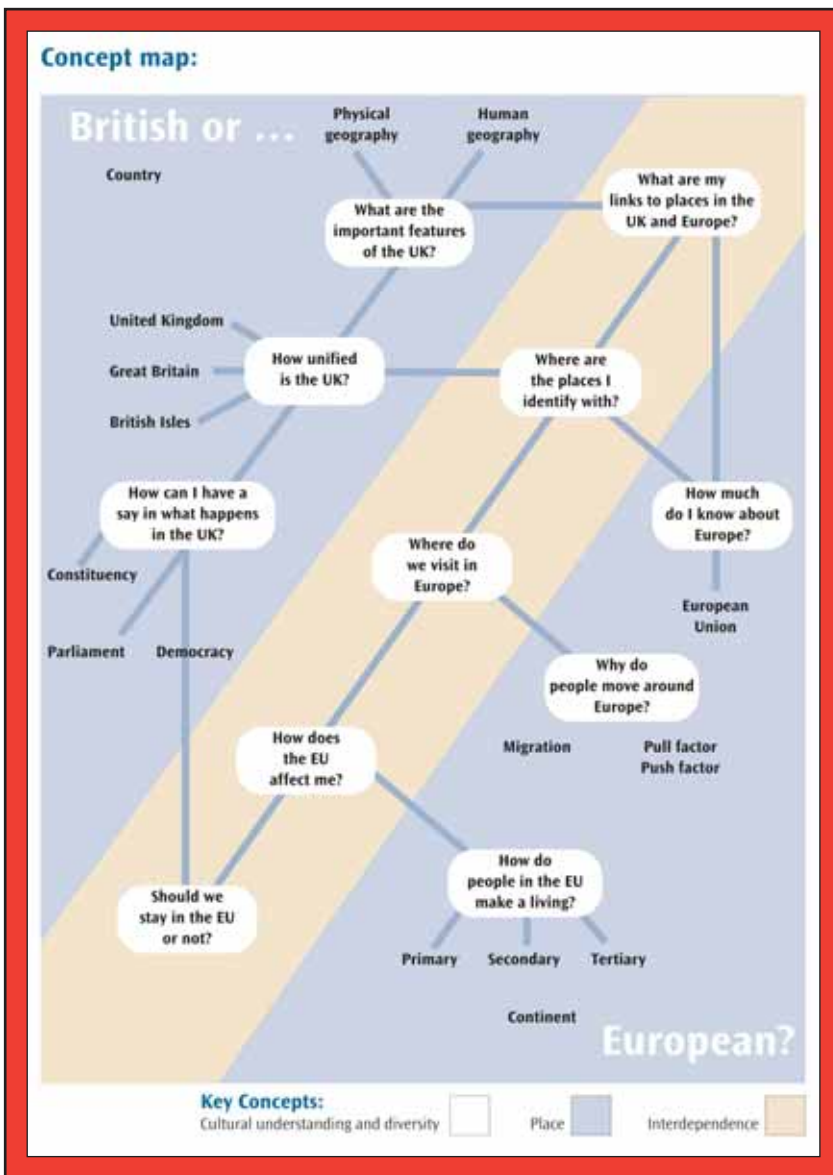


Figure 5: 'British or European?' concept map.

Figure 6 shows the key enquiry questions from the *Toolkit* series. One way to consider the strength of these questions is to ask: 'Would a geographer answer this more thoughtfully than a specialist from any other discipline?'. For example, when considering the question: 'Should I buy a Valentine's rose?', learners might first be struck by the apparent simplicity of the question. A simple product, a simple answer? Only a sequence of *geographical* enquiry would reveal the global pattern of rose production, the interdependence of the people and places involved in flower production and consumption, the economic, social and environmental processes at work and the difficult ethical questions involved in making a personal decision about buying a fresh rose in February!

The same enquiry 'rules' were applied to each of the lesson titles. Although the process was challenging, it was felt that every single lesson should pose a subsidiary question that learners would instantly respond to, so that their learning in that lesson

became a *necessary step* in answering an overarching question.

How to make geographical pedagogy explicit

Much progress has been made in recent years in identifying and sharing effective teaching and learning strategies across subjects. The most concise summary of this work is probably contained in the so-called 'Ped pack' sent to all schools (DfES, 2004).

Despite these attempts to make teaching strategies explicit, one of the most common weaknesses seen in schemes of work is the emphasis given to detailing resources and activities at the expense of explaining the 'how to' of teaching. In order to tackle this, *Toolkit* authors wrote a piece of prose on 'How to teach' their units. In doing so, they identified three or four key teaching strategies that were important to the geographical learning they had in mind. Figure 7 suggests a range of principles which are applied in a geographical context when teaching the units. Each of these ideas was then jus-

A Thorny Issue: Should I buy a Valentine's rose?

British or European?: Who do you think you are?

Changing my World: What difference can we make to the climate?

Faster, Higher, Stronger: Are the Olympics the best way to regenerate East London?

Future Floods: How can geography make a difference?

Into Africa: How are our lives connected with Africa?

Look at it This Way: What are your views on landscapes?

Moving Stories: Why is the population of the UK changing?

The Rise and Rise of China: Where does China go from here?

Water Works: Do we have equal rights to resources?

Figure 6: Enquiry questions in the *Toolkit* series.

tified ('why use it?') and explained ('how to use it').

In addition to the 'Why teach about...?' section at the front of each unit, authors were also encouraged to use 'callouts' in their detailed lesson plans. The callouts were a means of revealing the thinking of the teacher (author) – a chance to explain why a specific strategy was being used in a particular instance, how it might work or how it could be adapted for the needs of different learners. This resulted in a wider set of teaching and learning strategies that were more closely related to the overall purposes and

- Learn through talk
- Make it personal
- Ask the right questions
- Recognise multiple identities
- Avoid the temptation to oversimplify a complex world
- Use real places to teach how interdependence works
- Address contentious issues
- Focus on real-world place studies
- Detect bias in different media

Figure 7: Applying a range of principles in a geographical context.

objectives of the unit. Authors were forced to reflect on their suggested strategies and learning activities and explain why they were the most effective in helping pupils make progress.

How can the *Toolkit* be used?

The *Toolkit* can be used in a number of ways. Each title in this series provides a complete unit of work: a bank of ready-made lesson plans and accompanying resources. These materials can be used directly in the classroom, with teachers deciding how to use the given lesson plans and resources in their own school contexts to meet the needs of their own particular students.

Toolkit materials can also be extended. Links to websites of interest and to further resources and reading encourage teachers and students to 'dig deeper' into their chosen places, themes and issues. Some lessons within each unit can be extended into full-scale enquiries, to stretch the highest attainers.

The *Toolkit* has also been designed to be adapted. It is hoped that teachers using the materials will be encouraged to select ideas, change them to meet the needs of their own learners, and begin to use relevant teaching strategies elsewhere in their curriculum. Each title is therefore a source of teacher-to-teacher advice, a professional development resource that can be used to inform the teaching of places, themes and issues in a local curriculum.

Departments can also use the process of curriculum-making used by the authors of the *Toolkit* books to construct a unit of work related to something that they want to include in the key stage 3 curriculum.

Conclusion

The process of designing and developing a curriculum is demanding. It is a creative process and relies on inspiration as well as good subject and pedagogical knowledge. The *KS3*

Geography Teacher's Toolkit provides a template for writing new curriculum materials. Unit summaries, concept maps linked to new key concepts, assessment frameworks, glossaries, lesson plans and other materials are included as exemplars of rigorous curriculum planning. By using, extending, selecting and adapting appropriate 'tools' from the *Toolkit*, it is hoped teachers will regain confidence in developing their own materials to create a high-quality curriculum suited to the needs and interests of their learners. ■

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