Oliver Picton

Shrinking world? Globalisation at key stage 3

This article looks at a research project exploring how KS3 students construct globalisation. Globalisation is an important geographical concept and process, but one which can be hard to explore in the classroom. The article suggests how ideas from academic geography can be introduced into KS3 geography through enquiries into mobile phones and McDonalds, to develop engaging geographical learning. The article also demonstrates the value of 'concept mapping' in helping students explore complex ideas, such as globalisation.

Introducing critical geographies of globalisation at key stage 3

In the Summer 2008 issue of *Teaching Geography*, Martin Cox explored the concept of globalisation in geography education. His article raised some important issues about how we might tackle globalisation while questioning the notion of 'global cultural islands' (places distanced at a cultural level) and avoiding the simplistic binary of being 'for' or 'against' globalisation. This article reports on the results of a small-scale project exploring students' changing perceptions of globalisation at key stage 3.

The study took place with 28 year 9 students from a mixed comprehensive school in south-east England. They created two concept maps: one before undertaking a geographical enquiry on an aspect of globalisation; and another following completion of the work. In addition, four students were interviewed after completing both concept maps in order to explore their understanding in more detail.

What can we learn from academic geography?

Several writers, notably Castells (1996) and Appadurai (1996), have explored global networks and flows. Massey (2002) sees the identities of places as a product of relations with 'elsewhere' – a contextualising of place as meeting places where people, things and ideas get entangled. Massey talks about 'a global sense of place' in which the 'thrown-togetherness' of physical proximity is even more significant in an age of globalisation.

> *On the one hand globalisation is represented as ineluctable – a force in the face of which we must adapt or be cast into oblivion. On the other hand some of the most powerful agencies in the world are utterly intent on its production…How easy it is to slip into ways of thinking that repress the challenge of space; and how politically significant spatial imageries can be. 'Globalisation,' told in this way, is like the old story of modernity. Once again it convenes spatial difference into temporal sequence, and thereby denies the possibility of multiple trajectories; the future is not held open.*
> (Massey, 2005)

It is easy to fall into the trap of seeing all places as being on the same trajectory of increasing connectedness and time–space compression and this is certainly the narrative of globalisation (and of the related concept of development) that is often presented in many school curricula, resources and possibly even in the imaginations of some teachers. Indeed, globalisation and development are often presented in many ways as modernisation – to be 'global' or 'globalised' is to be 'modern'. Massey's exploration of the concept of space is fundamental to my understanding of globalisation insofar as it puts (spatial) geography at the heart of processes such as globalisation. Massey's ideas can be outlined in five key propositions, which are relevant to teaching about globalisation at key stage 3:

1. Distance is still important but has been crumpled and distorted (the world is still big).
2. Geography is about more than just distance. Geography is about heterogeneity existing now – of peoples, places and cultures.
3. Heterogeneity – the economic, cultural and social distances between people – and different understandings of the world still exist. Inequality also still exists and many of the gulfs are widening.
4. The argument that we will/should all become the same is a prophecy leading to its precise opposite – the reassertion of local uniqueness and sometimes fundamentalism.
5. Imagining other cultures and places as being stuck at the back of a 'historical queue' – 'developing' countries waiting to become 'developed', or 'isolated' countries waiting to become 'connected', for instance – diminishes the differences that actually exist now. Substituting space for time helps to justify inequality now.

In the classroom: introducing critical geographies of globalisation

Because of the importance of globalisation as a concept and process in geography, I devised a scheme of work comprising two enquiries. They were structured around eight key assertions:

- globalisation as a concept and as a process to be explored explicitly, rather than indirectly (students should be encouraged to apply the concept to all work throughout these units and beyond)
- globalisation as interaction over space unfolding as change over time
- globalisation as spatial – experienced in space, in unique ways, in real time (maps should be used to highlight where places are)
- globalisation as contested – contested in time and space
- globalisation as embedded in complex power relationships on every scale
- globalisation as a process that affects all aspects of life and all topics/themes of interest to geographers: economic relations, socio-cultural relations, political relations, the environment (all bound in geometries of power)
- alternative globalisations, and the significance of changing geographies of power
- that students' understandings should emerge not from studying globalisation *per se*, but from the context and process of their geographical enquiries.

The planning and design of the two enquiries here focused on the students' lived experiences and in particular on their use/consumption of two familiar products: mobile phones and McDonalds. I felt that these two examples would provide familiar routes into complex ideas about globalisation.

Enquiry 1: How far has your mobile travelled?
Driving concept: (global) interaction

Lesson title	Key ideas and aims raised in lessons
Who killed the gorillas in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DMC)? (see Figure 2)	• How consumption connects us to distant places • Geographies of responsibility
Where was my phone made?	• The globalisation of production • Power and responsibility
Where are all the phones now?	• The spread of consumer goods – mobiles • Uneven development
Mobile phones – RIP?	• Recycling • The problem of toxic materials and pollution from electronics
Making the connections	• Consolidating work/outcome

Enquiry 2: Should McDonalds be allowed to locate in our town?
Driving concept: (global) interaction, but perception/representation, diversity and change are also significant

Lesson title	Key ideas and aims raised in lessons
What is McGeography?	• How can we have a geography of McDonalds? • The broader question of what is geography?
McDonalds – are you lovin' it?	• Impacts of McDonalds – economic, environmental, health-related, cultural
Is McDonalds everywhere?	• The distribution of restaurants and reasons for this • What are the challenges faced by TNCs like McDonalds?
Is McDonalds the same everywhere? (see Figure 3)	• Glocalisation and localisation – introduce ideas and consider their significance
Why is Sanjay so angry with McDonalds?	• Reactions to McDonalds • Reactions to globalisation
Against McDonalds: 'buy local!'	• Reactions to globalisation • The 'buy local' movement
Assessment opportunity	• The application of key ideas and concepts to our community.

The two enquiries:

1. The first enquiry, driven by an understanding of global interaction, explored the geography of mobile phones. The enquiry examined the students' own use, as well as the global consumption and use, of mobile phones. They explored the extraction of the raw materials used to make the phones, the global division of labour in the production of phones, and finally the recycling/disposal of phones including reference to the environmental consequences of mobile phone production.

2. The second enquiry, driven by the organising principles of diversity and perception/representation and change, explored the global giant, McDonalds.

The overall strategy was to enable students to understand the connections and interactions that exist in the world by exploring their own experiences and lives. Where appropriate, activities such as mysteries and living graphs were used.

Students' initial constructions of globalisation

Students' initial understandings of globalisation varied greatly. Although 58% of the students in the class were familiar with the term 'globalisation', none of them had studied globalisation in school before. The pre-study concept maps varied greatly in the level of detail and understanding. However, some particular themes emerged such as a strong association between globalisation and climate change/global

Figure 3: The opening of the first McDonalds restaurant in Chungking, China. The mixture of orient and occident is evident in the use of Chinese balloons and streamers decorated with the yellow logo. **Photo:** Kevin Cook.

warming. Many students had a basic understanding of globalisation and global links/connections, and many referred to some of the key '-scapes' of globalisation identified by Appadurai (1996) such as ethnoscapes, technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes and ideoscapes.

The detailed results from the coding of all the concept maps are on the TG pages of the GA website. In summary these maps showed that students had some understanding of the economic, environmental and people/personal 'landscape' of globalisation. However, perhaps not unsurprisingly, their understanding of links with the political, technological and values 'landscape' appeared very limited.

Figure 4 shows a concept map produced by a student in the group that highlights some of the key big ideas emerging.

Students' developing constructions of globalisation

After they had conducted their enquiries, the students' 'new' concept maps showed significant developments and shifts in their understanding. All produced more detailed and focused concept maps, incorporating a wider variety of ideas, and expressed using a wider range of geographical terms. Some key changes in understanding which emerged included:

- greater emphasis on power derived from wealth
- awareness of scope and spread of TNCs
- consideration of our role in economic globalisation
- development of ideas about localisation and glocalisation – change, adaptation and diversity
- consideration of power geometries forged by geopolitical relationships (links made between economics and politics)
- overall, fewer references to global environmental issues and greater emphasis on links between

environmental concerns and consumption and politics

- ideas similar to those in pre-study concept maps but greater emphasis on connections forged by new technologies and the impacts of these
- more recognition of the importance of emerging superpowers acknowledged more – in particular China; reference made in most concept maps to places mentioned and examined in class – for example Democratic Republic of Congo, China and India
- technology in post-study concept maps is linked more to its function and role in globalisation – for example, in connecting people through information or transport of goods
- far more references to feelings, ideas about care/responsibility and equity in the globalisation process (this was often related to personal experiences).

A more detailed analysis of students' pre-study and post-study understanding can also be found on the TG pages of the GA website.

Comparing Figures 4 and 5 shows how one student's ideas developed during the two enquiries. Ideas explored in Figure 5 suggest a more critical engagement with the process of globalisation with reference to responsibility, knowledge and power. Some students even started to question the inevitability of globalising processes, and started to explore the possibility of alternative 'globalisations', perhaps led by new superpowers. There was greater questioning of the breadth and depth of globalisation, and exploration of inclusion/exclusion. These key changes can be summarised as:

- a shift away from equating globalisation so strongly with global environmental issues
- a far more complex understanding of power geometries and issues of equality
- an increased sense of responsibility, care and concern for those people/places they found themselves connected to through consumption and daily life – near and distant
- increased use of geographical vocabulary, generally used accurately
- more application of understandings to contexts and named localities
- more linkages made between different '-scapes' of globalisation – for example between economic and socio-cultural aspects of globalisation.
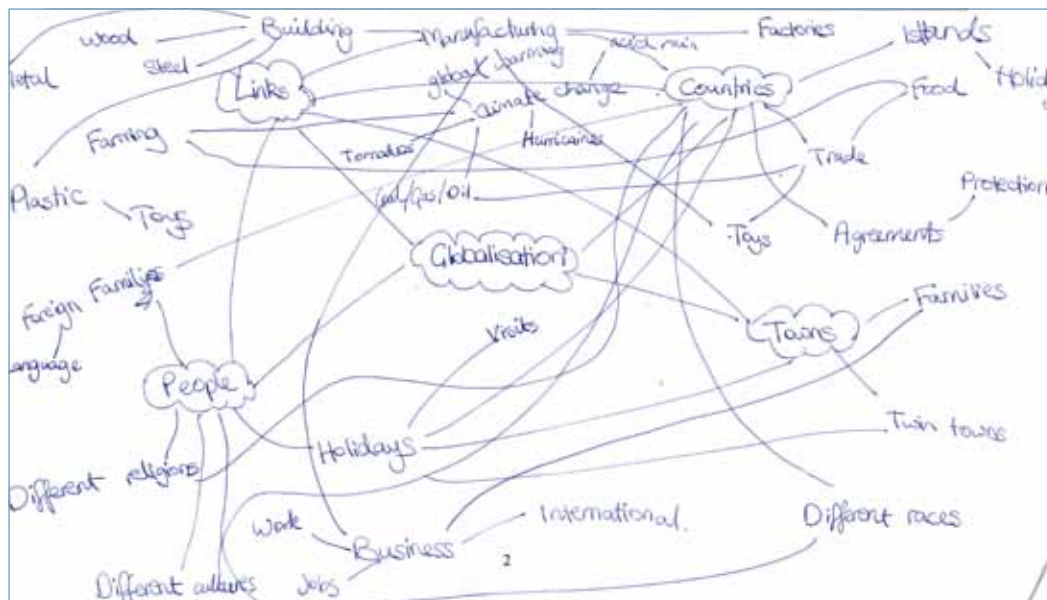
How do year 9 students construct globalisation?

Knowledge and understanding of globalisation as explored in this research is best understood in terms of 'spheres of understanding' (see Figure 6). 'Spheres of understanding' is a useful way to consider students' understanding of globalisation; each sphere is complementary and interconnected. One student might develop each sphere of understanding at different times, in different ways and to a different extent depending on a variety of factors inside and outside the classroom. This overlapping of understanding was illustrated by the variety of responses in pre- and post-study concept maps.

Sphere 1: the big ideas

This sphere is so labelled because connectivity, interaction and change can be applied to all

aspects of globalisation theory. Within this sphere, students understood that globalisation is about global interaction and change. The interaction aspect is broadly constructed by students in this case through linkages/connections. The change aspect is constructed through ideas of development, modernisation, gain, loss and 'Westernisation' – ideas referred to in both pre- and post-study concept maps and interviews.

Sphere 2: the nature of globalisation

This sphere includes the central categories of globalisation that emerged in pre-study concept maps and interviews, and which I have termed the '-scapes' of understanding. Within this sphere, links are forged between '-scapes' rather than seeing them as mutually independent. Evidence in concept maps suggests that only a limited number of students were able to see the interconnectivity and overlap between different '-scapes' of understanding – for example, the economic and socio-cultural '-scapes' of globalisation.
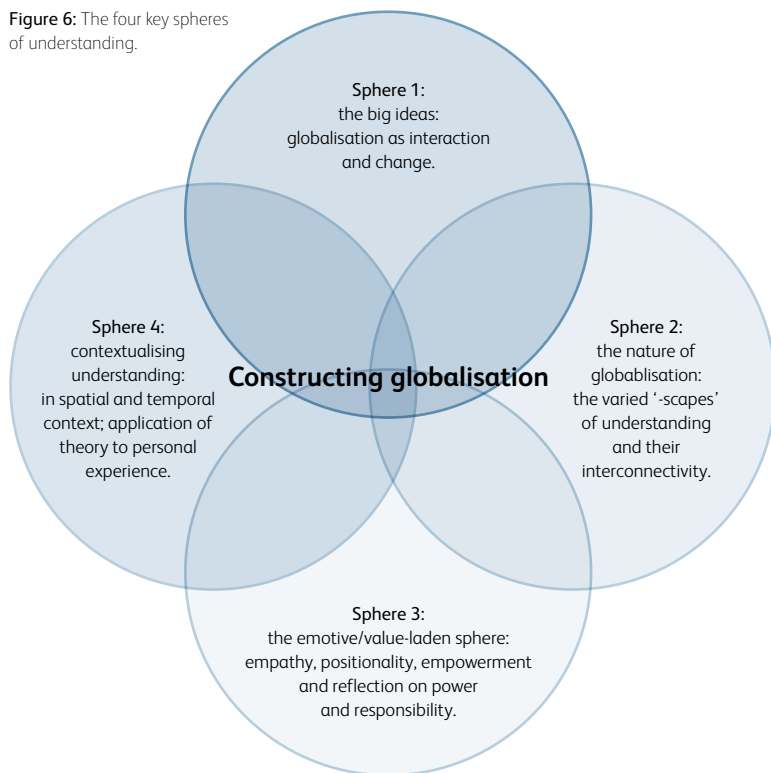
Sphere 3: the emotive/value-laden sphere

This sphere of understanding incorporates the values and emotions expressed by students – in particular, feelings of responsibility, moral justice and equity with reference to power, and the process of globalisation as

interaction and change. By considering the impacts of their decisions – for example, through consumption – students can connect themselves to near and distant places, spatially, socio-culturally and emotionally. Highlighting such connections enables the emotional dimension of studying geography to come to the fore. This sphere of learning and understanding clearly developed greatly during the two enquiries as students engaged with resources and each other's ideas. The post-study concept maps were filled with references to fairness and quite politicised questionings of the processes and outcomes of globalisation. This suggests that through teaching and learning about globalisation, influenced strongly by critical academic geographies, students quickly develop a value-laden concept of globalisation, closely related to the materials and ideas developed in class. The role and ideas of the teacher become powerful here, so educators must be conscious of their influence on students' understanding of ideas in geography.

Sphere 4: contextualising understandings

This sphere of understanding involves the application of globalisation theory to specific contexts, experiences and places, such as the students' enquiries into McDonalds and mobile phones. Evidence in both pre- and post-study concept maps suggests that

Sphere 1:
the big ideas:
globalisation as interaction
and change.

Sphere 4:
contextualising
understanding:
in spatial and temporal
context; application of
theory to personal
experience.

Constructing globalisation

Sphere 2:
the nature of
globablisation:
the varied '-scapes'
of understanding
and their
interconnectivity.

Sphere 3:
the emotive/value-laden sphere:
empathy, positionality, empowerment
and reflection on power
and responsibility.

some, though not all, students do consider their role in the processes of globalisation as they are required to move away from seeing globalisation as being 'out there' and involve themselves in the processes. By using an enquiry-based approach to teaching and learning, students were able to apply the key ideas of globalisation to a variety of places, human activity and contexts – not least their own lives.

What are the implications for practice?

Improving practice in the classroom:

I would like to suggest four key improvements to the approach of teaching and learning about globalisation that I have identified by reflecting on my experiences, and which I will be incorporating into my practice:

1. Allow more time for students to consider and develop their own constructions of globalisation, and to question ideas raised in class and texts (written, visual, digital, audio). This geographical literacy is fundamental in enabling students to think creatively, critically and geographically. In this sense I would like students to engage critically with ideas raised in class, to consider alternatives and different viewpoints and ultimately to question and debate ideas more.

2. Place more emphasis on the local construction of the global. This would reduce the sense of globalisation/the 'global' being 'out there' and would place the students themselves into the complex process and web of connections – a consideration of how we are part of processes of interaction and change. This is possible by making relevant and personal enquiries, linking students to globalisation as has been attempted in this research.

3. Encourage students to develop their locational knowledge through the study of globalisation. Consideration of links and interaction is meaningless if the people and places which are connected are not located.

4. While the unit and research has considered power and who 'wins'/'loses', in reality the situation is far more complex. Further exploration and deconstruction of the win/lose binary, and reasons for the existence of 'winners' and 'losers' in globalising processes, would be beneficial in enquiries exploring globalisation.

Overall, my experiences of teaching about globalisation have encouraged me to seek ways of incorporating ideas from academic geography into the classroom, and have allowed me to value enquiry-based teaching and learning. This not only helps to bridge the gap between school and academic geography, but often also means students are learning about more relevant and engaging topics and ideas in geography.

Teaching and learning about globalisation poses some substantial challenges, but opportunities abound to create engaging and rigorous enquiries for key stage 3 students. Teachers should not be put off by how sprawling the subject of globalisation might seem. One option is to tackle the more manageable parts of globalisation – global shift, global consumption, global warming, flows of people and so forth. While this might seem more straightforward, doing so without referring to globalisation and exploring its meaning might result in students not linking the parts together to understand the complex breadth and depth of global interaction, connectivity and change. | **TG**

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Oliver Picton teaches geography at Al Khor International School in Qatar. He is also a part-time geography education PhD student at the University of Bath.

E-mail: *oliver.picton@cantab.net*