

# From the archive: decades of global learning

*Fred delves into the forty-year Teaching Geography archive and traces, with reference to individual articles, the development of global learning over that time.*



Accompanying  
online materials

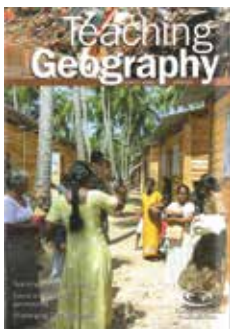
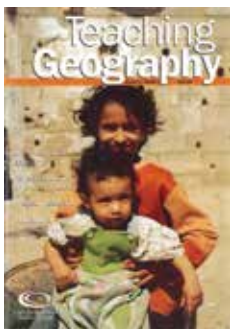


Figure 1

Global learning has featured many times during the forty volumes of *Teaching Geography* (Figure 1). This article comments on the ways in which global learning has developed since the first issue of *Teaching Geography* in 1975. The comments are roughly divided into decades, but these are not intended to represent specific moments of change. The selected articles illustrate ways in which the journal has both responded to and influenced these changes.

## 1970–1980: a decade of transition

When the first issue of *Teaching Geography* came out, geography was being strongly influenced by a statistical and model-based approach to the subject that tried to show order in geographical features. At the same time, teachers were using small-scale case studies to provide in-depth information and ideas about the unique features of places. The previous, descriptive, approach to teaching about countries and natural regions to achieve an overview of world geography, was in rapid decline: in its place came simulations and ‘games’. These were part of the move from fact-based teaching to learning that called for greater student involvement through decision taking and the application of ideas.

Throughout this period, teaching divided countries – often starkly – into those that were economically wealthy and those that were not. The phrase ‘Third World’ was used to describe the less economically developed countries, with no apparent thought for the pejorative nature of this ranking. ‘The Third World’ was regarded as a set of countries that could only be developed through the giving of ‘aid’.

Take a look at these articles:

- Tropicania: A simulation model for the study of the problems of a developing country (Palmer, B., April 1975)
- Alternative approaches to the geography of development (King, R., November 1976)
- The Third World: What should we be teaching? (Hicks, D., July 1977)
- Independencia: A simulation in political geography (Jenkins, A., July 1977)

## 1980–1990: a decade of questioning

By the beginning of this decade, many questions were being asked about the notion of development and there was growing awareness that the ‘us and them’ approach was neither realistic nor appropriate. The Brandt Report (1980) gave impetus to the teaching of development processes and issues. Global ‘issues’ such as deforestation, desertification and population increase gave students a view of an increasingly

interdependent world in which problems predominated. The phrase ‘the global village’ was used to convey the idea of interdependence.

Looking beyond the stereotypes and questioning the economic models of development became key parts of geographical education, and the idea of ‘development education’ as a field of study, with its own content and pedagogy, took root. Geographers began to explore values and viewpoints in order to provide students with different perspectives on the very meaning of ‘development’.

Take a look at these articles:

- Third World studies: Pitfalls to be avoided (Owen, R., January 1980)
- The geography of development: A teaching sequence (Skinner, C., November 1981)
- The countries of the Third World (Massingham, B., July 1982)
- Fieldwork in Tunisia (Duffield, P. and Hardcastle, L., January 1983)
- The Third World v. modern civilization (Boyle, C., October 1983)
- Value positions in teaching about development (Waterman, S. and Maitland, S., January 1984)
- Other worlds: What should we be teaching? (Hicks, D., June 1986)
- Viewpoint 1: geography 5–16: A global dimension? (Hopkin, J., January 1988)
- Geography and development education: Recent teaching and future strategies (Mason, P., January 1989)

## 1990–2000: a decade of prescription

The requirements of the national curriculum came to dominate much of this decade. In the geography programmes of study, a strong element of prescription, which initially required schools to teach about specific countries, was introduced. As the decade progressed, attention was moved from subject content and ideas to what were seen as basic generic skills, such as literacy and numeracy. In some classrooms, it appeared that subject content was little more than a vehicle through which these skills could be taught. A description of a country or place, for example, had to follow a set of writing genres. Data about countries became a vehicle through which to ‘deliver’ numeracy.

The geography programmes of study tacitly encouraged teachers to choose countries and places in order to highlight their differences, i.e. to contrast ‘developed’ with ‘developing’ countries. Even within countries, students were expected to study contrasting regions, and identifying their ‘contrasts’ became more important than identifying their various degrees of similarity.

Making sure that the various items in the subject Programmes of study could be ticked off in the limited curriculum time available meant a constant risk of exposing students to stereotypes. The narrowing effects of the programmes of study were compounded by the effect of one textbook series that, while offering teachers a reliable resource, also unwittingly played a part in fossilising more creative approaches to teaching about a greater variety of global topics and places. Country size and current economic importance became the criteria for choice of where to study.

The GA and other geography educators did what they could to keep the subject alive and prevent it becoming a sterile vehicle for the delivery of basic skills. Although 'values and viewpoints' were part of the subject's level descriptors, a special concern was that values education could be lost as a result of national curriculum requirements and the demands of the various National Strategy guidance documents.

Take a look at these articles:

- An idea for comparing different economies (Taylor, L., January 1994)
- India: Asia's next economic tiger? (Bradnock, R., July 1994) (Figure 2)
- Teaching sustainable development (Boardman, D. and Ranger, G., October 1996)
- Writing about development (Jones, B. *et al.*, January 1997)
- Challenging images of the developing world using slide photographs (Hopkirk, G., January 1998) (Figure 2)

## 2000–2010: the decade of concepts and choices

By the turn of the century, the era of the heavily prescriptive national curriculum was largely over. The 2008 national curriculum put the emphasis on geographical concepts, many of which were directly related to aspects of global learning. Interdependence, for example, became a key concept that helped to shape thinking about what should be taught about relationships between different countries. There was an open choice of countries, though in some schools the pattern set by more prescriptive programmes of study continued to dominate – partly because the relevant teaching resources were already in place.

New topics such as the global nature of the fashion industry provided students with ideas about fair trade and the role of multinational companies. Urbanisation and migration demonstrated processes with global dimensions, affecting people across the world. There was a focus on environmental sustainability, providing students with a positive alternative to their previous diet of seemingly hopeless issues. There were some concerns that students were being 'greenwashed' by this more reflective and 'alternative' approach to thinking about development.

ICT has also played a part in helping to expand the horizons of what could be taught. There was, for example, no longer any need to rely on one textbook for teaching resources. Teachers could now go directly to original sources overseas; some schools made links with partner schools in other countries, which developed into teacher and student exchanges. Access to digital images vastly expanded the available resources: students were no longer limited to a few images selected by textbook authors. Access to real-time events added another dimension to the subject, though the flexibility to incorporate such events was often lacking.

Take a look at these articles:

- Sustainable development education and Curriculum 2000 (Wade, R., July 2002)
- Crisis in a coffee cup? (Pritchard, B., Autumn 2005)
- Globalisation – are you for or against it? (Cox, M., Summer 2008)
- Developing the international dimension at KS3 (Owen, C., Autumn 2008)

## 2010–present: the decade of decisions?

It has become increasingly difficult to know what is being taught in schools about global learning or, indeed, most other geographical ideas and topics. From 2013 the national curriculum no longer provides either common content or, since 2014, a common set of standards for all schools. More than half can opt out of national curriculum requirements, a proportion that is set to increase.

The attempt to 'raise standards' by revising the national curriculum, supposedly giving it a renewed focus on knowledge, seems based on the assumption that a body of knowledge, for example about the location of, and basic information about, countries, is needed before students can be introduced to ideas and issues. Fortunately, it seems likely that teachers will have the freedom to make their own decisions about where the balance should lie. They will increasingly need to refresh their choices of places and topics to reflect on world events, for example, on global supplies of food, energy and water. *Teaching Geography* and other journals will need to play their part in providing the ideas and resources to keep teachers up to date with the content they teach.

Take a look at these articles:

- Shrinking world? Globalisation at key stage 3 (Picton, O., Spring 2010)
- Teaching the geography of development from 'the big picture' (Sassoon, H., Autumn 2012) (Figure 2)
- Development: contested, complex and diverse (Brook, M., Spring 2013) | **TG**

### References

Brandt, W. 1980, *North/South: A Programme for Survival* London: Macmillan.

### Online resources

The complete archive of *Teaching Geography* is now available online to all subscribers. Go to [www.geography.org.uk/tg](http://www.geography.org.uk/tg) and a link will take you to a fully-searchable archive hosted by JStor where you will be able to find all the articles listed here.

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