

*Denise returns to the 'three lamps' model for exploring place and applies it to a case study of Malawi.*



Accompanying  
online materials

# Illuminating places

The three lamps model (Freeman and Morgan, 2014) suggested a way of teaching about places that weaves together the work of academic geographers and the lived experiences of students (Figure 1). After feedback on the original model, including a workshop at the 2019 GA Annual Conference, we have developed the approach to reflect recent work on the teaching of place and developments in the geography curriculum at post-16 level (DfE, 2014).

## Adapting the three lamps model

The adaptations suggested during our 2019 GA conference workshop included representing the personal geographies of young people using an open window, through which the 'daylight' of their everyday experiences shines on the place being studied. The notion of a kaleidoscope was added to represent the postmodern tradition within geography, which recognises a multiplicity

of ways of viewing places. It was also suggested that the model could be applied to studying a variety of geographical issues, not just places.

It could be argued that separating these three academic sub-traditions, neatly encapsulating each one by a lamp, is over-simplistic; each of these traditions draws upon ideas from various perspectives within the discipline, and often the lines between different paradigms are blurred. However, the lamps can be lit individually, together or in various combinations to reflect different perspectives, and the model provides a useful starting point for teachers to reflect upon how they teach about places. Combining the perspectives from the three lamps into a holistic view may be a welcome approach for those keen to widen the scope of place-based studies in the classroom. Rawling (2017) argues that place study in schools has often been too narrowly focused; that school geography has

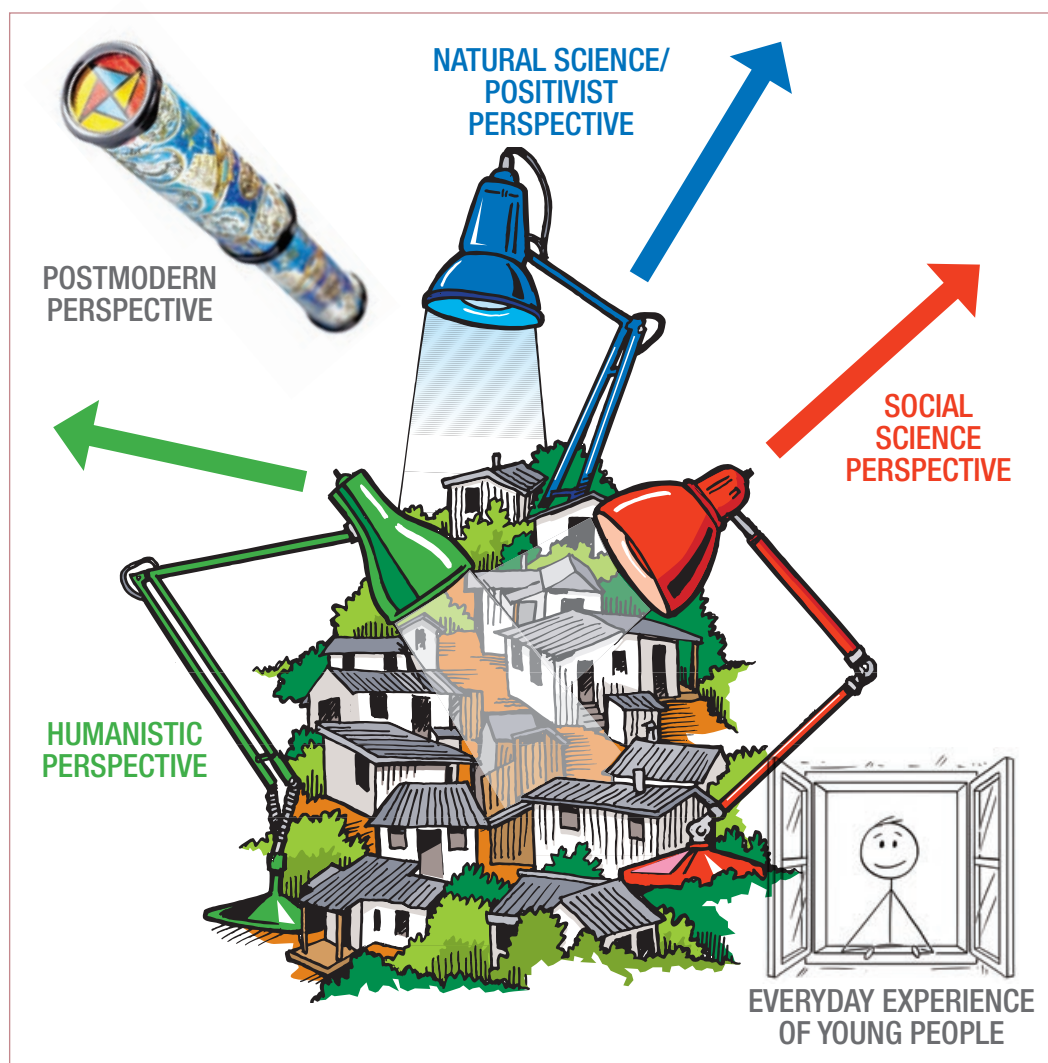


Figure 1: The three lamps model. Source: Freeman and Morgan (2017), p. 122.

tended to focus on traditional regional geography and failed to engage with more recent academic perspectives on place. Recent curriculum reforms are an opportunity for a broader approach to investigating place (Oakes, 2020; Rawling, 2018), and the lamps model can support these changes.

## Lighting up places through powerful knowledge: a study of students investigating Malawi

Since the publication of our original article (Freeman and Morgan, 2014), interest in the nature of knowledge and how it should be taught has grown. There is a strong focus on encouraging teaching and learning that engages with ‘powerful’ subject knowledge; knowledge that takes students beyond their everyday knowledge of the world. Young *et al.* (2014) outline three possible future curriculum models, Futures 1, 2 and 3. Future 1 involves the ‘transmission’ of a given body of knowledge; Future 2 sees knowledge as socially constructed and contested, with students central to the process of constructing knowledge. In Future 3, students are exposed to powerful knowledge, taught by subject specialists; the roots of knowledge are explored, questioned and updated. The three lamps model supports this emphasis on disciplinary knowledge. The different academic perspectives illuminated by the lamps can introduce students to narratives of place outside their experience. In the example in Figure 2 (available to download) students undertake an investigation of Malawi. From a natural science/positivist perspective, they locate Malawi and map its physical environment, placing it in its regional and global context, and explore its climate, landscape and geomorphological challenges. Looking at it from a social science perspective, they consider Malawi’s economic and social development and the processes that have shaped the nation, its colonial links with the UK and the post-colonial influences of transnational corporations (TNCs) and China, as well as Malawi’s industrialisation and the exploitation of child labour. Shining the daylight of their own lived experience on Malawi, they think about what they know about the country, and how they know it. Finally, they explore Malawi from a humanistic perspective, using the video diary of a 16-year-old Malawian girl called Memory and photographs taken by a Malawi-born trainee teacher to represent two views of life in Malawi. They think about the sources of the information – who constructed it, and why.

The rich variety of geographical knowledge about Malawi that emerges from the investigation offers students a new way of thinking about other places. It offers them opportunities to explore questions such as:

- What impact will manufacturing growth have on the local and global environment?
- How is the issue of child labour in the tobacco industry being addressed?
- Is there evidence of climate change affecting the landscape?
- Do wealthier nations have the right to sit in judgement on the industrialisation of poorer nations?



## Future 3 and students' lived experience

Young people are often ‘active geographers’ even if they aren’t aware of it. They tend to be highly connected to other places via technology and some are very mobile, through migration or visiting family. This lived experience provides a context for their learning and is their point of reference when making sense of new knowledge. It can be argued that the powerful disciplinary knowledge advocated by Future 3 needs to build on the existing knowledge that students bring with them to geography lessons, so we must look for what Roberts (2013) calls ‘powerful pedagogies’; pedagogies which enable students to make connections between what they know and what they could know. Such pedagogies should also help students to question what they know and correct misconceptions. There are also opportunities to make connections with academic geography, which recognises the geography of young people as part of the discipline (Hopkins, 2010; Maira and Soep, 2005). Studies in this area have explored how young people experience and understand place, and how their relationship with place shapes their culture and identity.

Figure 2: Applying the three lamps model to the GCSE case study of Malawi.

Drawing upon their everyday knowledge may help students to make stronger connections with the world around them; they may 'arrive at a deeper understanding of why place meaning really matters' (Oakes, 2020, p. 18). An example of a student's work showing a holistic study of Malawi is available to download.

### #nofilter

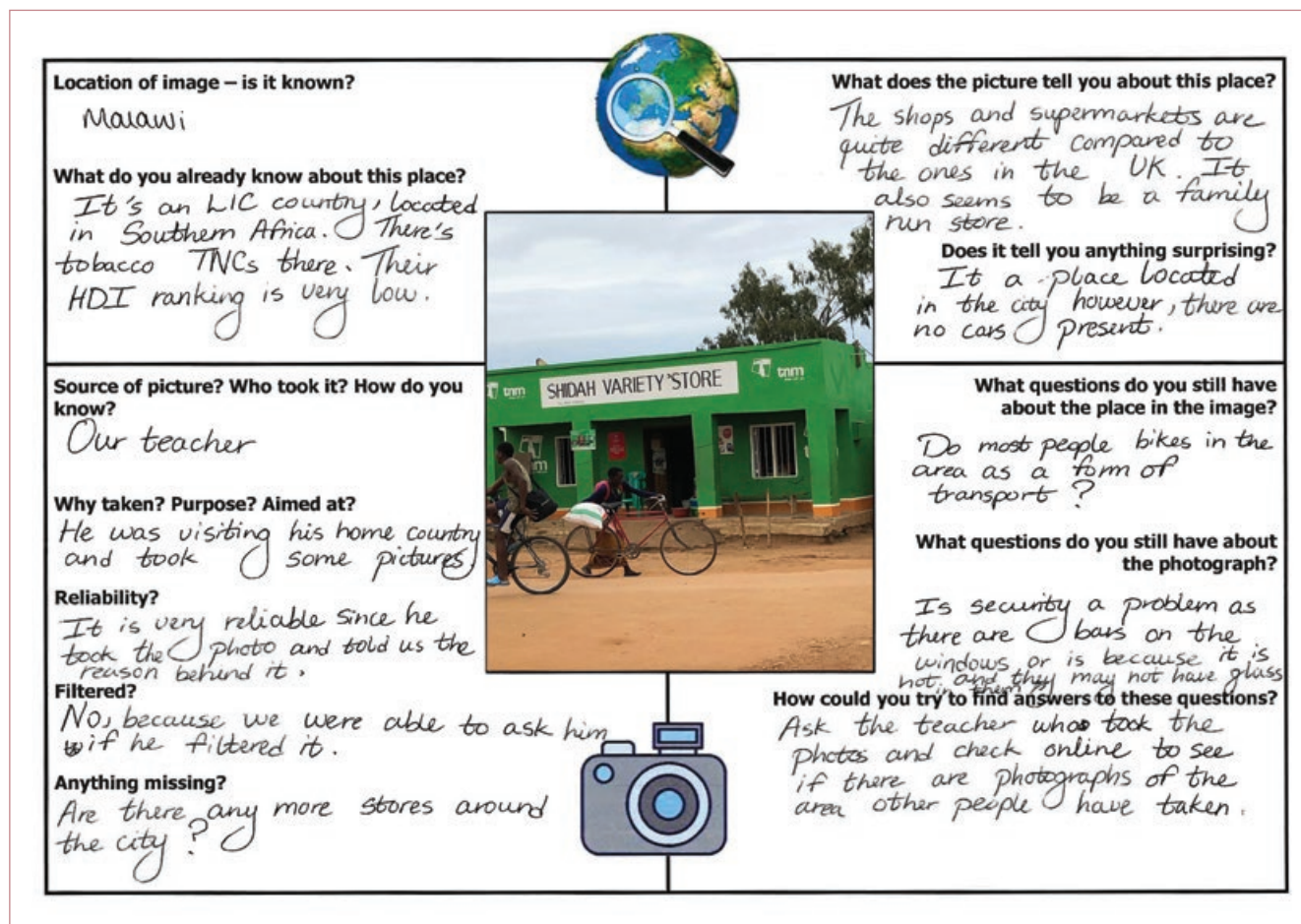
Looking at photographs of Malawi found online, one of my students was convinced that they had been selectively 'filtered' because they presented such an attractive view. This prompted me to consider that as well as illuminating places from different perspectives, the lamps model could also be used to consider the different filters used to

view places. We all have our own personal 'filter' through which we see the world, but we are also increasingly viewing the world through filters applied by technology, particularly smartphone technology. The student's comment suggests there is a degree of expectation when it comes to using filters; that it is the norm. This trend is something to explore with students and is an important part of any discussion relating to the representation of places.

While my GCSE class were studying Malawi we were hosting a trainee teacher who was born there, and he shared some photographs taken during a recent trip 'back there' (Figure 3). The students were asked to analyse the photographs critically and question their reliability and purpose (Figure 4).

**Figure 3:** Two photos of Malawi. **Photos:** © Peter Nkhoma.





The class also looked at a range of photographs of Malawi they found online and tried to identify any 'filters'. #nofilter is often trending on social media. These photo collections claim to be filter-free.

## Conclusion

Recent debates about the role of powerful knowledge in the curriculum suggest that, with its potential for making links to academic geography, the three lamps model can give teachers another way of teaching place in the classroom, and discussing the model at the 2019 GA Conference

gave Alun Morgan and myself useful ideas for further developing its application to place study. It also has the potential to combine students' lived experience into the development of subject-specific geographical knowledge and understanding. Revising Malawi with my GCSE group just before the corona virus epidemic closed schools, students were able to recall a lot of what they had studied and could make connections between their case study and different aspects of geography, suggesting they have developed a rich knowledge of the country and a strong sense of place rooted in the subject. | **TG**

**Figure 4:** Asking questions about images of Malawi – an example of a student's work.

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## Online resources

Larger versions of Figures 2 and 4 are available to download. Go to [www.geography.org.uk/Journals/Teaching-geography](http://www.geography.org.uk/Journals/Teaching-geography) and select 'Summer 2020'.

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