Valuing Places and CPD

GeoVisions: past, present and future

David Lambert, Fred Martin and Diane Swift summarise the achievements of the GeoVisions movement and look to its future contributions to school geography

What is the origin of GeoVisions?

The term ‘GeoVisions’ describes an intriguing past, an interesting and stimulating present and aspirations for an invigorating future. So what is it, and how is it relevant to this issue of Teaching Geography? GeoVisions was originally a project initiated by Birmingham Development Education Centre, now Tide~ (Teachers in Development Education, see websites). The project provided a forum to debate, raise issues and make proposals about the future of school geography. The project was unconstrained by short-term objectives or immediate political concerns.

In 1999, GeoVisions became an official GA Working Party. The Working Party’s objectives and outcomes are illustrated in Figure 1. Over the four years that this Working Party met (1999-2003), it did much to raise the profile of geographical thinking in school geography. Partly through the engagement of speakers, such as Peter Jackson and Philip Stott (see websites), who challenged the group with current ideas in academic geography, but also through the input of Eleanor Rawling who shared her research into the development of geography in schools with the group.

In Changing the Subject, Eleanor Rawling wrote about the significance of the ‘subject tribe’:

It might be suggested that geography educationalists at all levels should now begin to consider themselves as part of a bigger ‘subject tribe’ as an explicit response to the changing contexts of the 2000s (Rawling, 2002, p. 172).

John Hopkin and John Morgan were also members of the tribe contributing to GeoVisions. John Hopkin shared his research on school textbooks; while John Morgan explored issues related to Britishness and geographical education (and has further developed these ideas, see pages 20-23 this issue). An important feature was that GeoVisions was cross-phase – from early years to post-16. In relation to his research on primary-age children, Simon Catling challenged the group to consider the premise that the development of children’s spatial awareness cannot be divorced from their developing awareness of the wider world and from environmental mapping skills and map reading abilities (Catling, 2003). Outcomes from this work have involved members of the GeoVisions group contributing to:

- continuing professional development (CPD) events including the GA’s Annual Conference;
- issues that were also communicated via the GA’s website and GA News, e.g. the ‘dispositions’ shown in Figure 2;
- eight teachers (funded via Best Practice Research Scholarships (BPRS)) to undertake research – their work is to be included in the forthcoming Secondary Geography Handbook (Balderstone, forthcoming);
- ideas emerging from the BPRS work have also informed the Learning activities section of Geography: The global dimension (DEA/GA, 2004);
- the GA’s 2002 Position Statement (which is due to be revised).

GeoVisions objectives 1999

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<th>GeoVisions objectives 1999</th>
<th>Outcomes to 2003</th>
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<td>Identifying shared vision and consensus about geography in the curriculum</td>
<td>A revised Position Statement for Geography.</td>
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<td>Developing an action plan for geography in the curriculum</td>
<td>Providing advice to:</td>
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<td>Identifying levers of change</td>
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<td>Continuing to share ideas and engage with the wider geographical community research teachers.</td>
<td>Numerous workshops, conferences, updates in GA News, websites.</td>
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<td>Establishing a framework for teachers to be creative</td>
<td>A web-based forum to develop the GeoVisions curriculum thinking. Many of the GeoVisions ideas informed the GA’s DfID and Tubney funded Valuing Places project.</td>
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Figure 1: GeoVisions Working Party objectives and outcomes to 2003.
GeoVisions has also facilitated collaborative work within and between various GA committees. One of the real strengths of GeoVisions was that every Working Party member held responsibilities on other GA committees.

During 2002-03, a GeoVisions Sub-group developed ideas for an innovative GCSE Geography. The work subsequently informed the development of the OCR Pilot Hybrid GCSE (see websites). The Sub-group was commissioned by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) to produce both a briefing paper for the new GCSE and a Teachers’ Resource Guide. (Both can be downloaded from the GA’s website.) The GA has since been funded by both QCA and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to provide curriculum support to the centres engaged with the Pilot GCSE and to offer some of the curriculum innovation generated by it to the wider geographical community. This has resulted in significant and worthwhile joint curriculum developments with the Royal Geographical Society (with Institute for British Geographers) (RGS-IBG). One aspect of developments from the Pilot GCSE work ‘Cape Farewell’ is described in more detail below.

**Cape Farewell and the Pilot GCSE**

Fred Martin’s involvement in the GeoVisions GCSE Sub-group resulted in the production of the ‘Cape Farewell’ The High Arctic materials (The Cape Farewell Project and the GA, 2004). These materials exemplify much of the GeoVisions thinking applied to an ‘extreme environment’ locality. It is also possible to teach the theme of **Global Warming** using these materials.

‘Cape Farewell’ forms part of a series of expeditions into the High Arctic. The journey explored the very seas that hold the key to understanding the currents of the North Atlantic Ocean, and the crew included scientists, educationalists, and artists. The expedition, on which the teaching pack is based, centred on the Svalbard Islands. The Svalbard Islands lie about 700km to the north of Norway. Spitsbergen is the largest in the group. The islands are well within the Arctic Circle, reaching up to latitude 80°N. Most of the surrounding seas are covered by pack ice during the winter, though the western fiords can stay ice-free.

The Islands and surrounding seas represent a place at a scale that is large enough to allow for the study of how both physical and human processes interact in a variety of complex and interdependent ways. The Islands’ unique location puts them at the end of the warm North Atlantic Drift where the cold dense salty waters start to sink.

Global warming, though global in scale, has the potential to be intensely local in its impact. The causes of global warming are disputed, but the evidence of melting sea ice is hard to ignore. The sea ice is known to have melted back by about 6% over the last 20 years. This is one reason why an understanding of the albedo effect is important. With a smaller area of white surface, less incoming solar radiation will be reflected back. This will make the land surface warmer, leading to more melting. Once started, the process feeds upon itself. As ice melts, it is released into the ocean, making the water flowing north with the North Atlantic Drift less salty (and less dense). This raises the possibility that the waters of the North Atlantic Drift will stop sinking with the possible effect of shutting down part of the very system that drives it. This is the disaster scenario of *The Day After Tomorrow*, a film that takes a valid scientific idea, changing only the facts, time scales and all sense of credibility in order to create a box office hit. However, the notion that global warming may plunge north west Europe into a new Ice Age is an interesting hypothesis that illustrates the complexity of systems that are so often oversimplified.

The Svalbard Islands lie in an area where, by uniqueness of location, the early signs of global warming may be seen as having an effect on the natural systems, the landscape and on human activities. It is a place to value and one that is worth studying both for its unique local interest and for its global importance. It really is a case of, ‘Watch this place!’

Figure 3: The Cape Farewell expedition to the High Arctic and the situation of the Svalbard Islands. Photos: © Cape Farewell.
climate change using the materials. The teachers’ materials with DVD and student resources with CD-Rom provide an innovative ‘multi-modal’ resource. Although the materials were written using the Pilot GCSE specification as a guide, the materials can be developed as a resource for either key stage 3 or key stage 4, and their emphasis on education for sustainable development is welcomed. The Cape Farewell resource and the expedition itself (see Figure 3) puts renewed emphasis on place and the GeoVisions ‘dispositions’ create challenging and worthwhile geographical thinking.

So, what of the future?

The GA’s intention is that ‘GeoVisions’ be used to describe any creative CPD opportunities which lead to new developments in school geography. Its policy would then be to seek to obtain support for such opportunities as ‘local solutions’ for curriculum innovation. Similarly, Worldwise now encompasses funded GA activities that relate directly to supporting students’ involvement in thinking geographically. Thus, Worldwise for students, and GeoVisions for teachers!

Local solutions is an expanding area of work, underpinned by renewed discussions on the power and relevance of a geographical education (Figure 4). To date the GeoVisions project experience has emphasised teachers’ own abilities, with appropriate stimuli and leadership, to find solutions to challenging curriculum and pedagogic issues. We believe that putting subject specialists together with a shared sense of purpose for their own professional development – literally giving them time to think – provides a fantastic creative resource. Excellent teachers need to engage with their subject and colleagues as well as students. In the GA’s local solutions projects, teachers are given the opportunity to consider in depth the subject’s big concepts and distinctive contribution to young people’s learning. However, time to do so in current circumstances is severely limited because teachers (as with other professionals) live intensive and busy lives. In a sense, GeoVisions is designed as an antidote to the centralised cascade of largely generic advice and guidance that pours into schools on a weekly basis (and which has done little to support the development of geographical participation on these funded projects, or indeed any of the GA’s range of Professional Development Units can be used as the basis for accreditation via the Institute of Education’s online Professional Diploma in Learning and Teaching (see websites). This role may be attractive to individuals who can react swiftly to a request for a substantial piece of work in return for a modest fee. (There will be no guarantee of work and neither could the GA insist on an RTC undertaking any project.) The existence of a list of consultants will greatly assist the GA and broaden the base of activists involved in GeoVisions. Much detail is yet to be negotiated, but RTCs provide an example of how the Association is prepared to evolve in order to take account of changes in the workplace.

What about GeoVisions and the GA in 2005?

Valuing Places, the focus of this issue, offers an excellent example of a GeoVisions ‘CPD-led curriculum development project’, and there are others. In terms of the secondary sector, during 2003-04 the GA offered two ‘Why Argue?’ projects. These focused on the use of dialogic teaching approaches in Geography and English and Geography and Science (see websites). The ‘Where Will I Live?’ project, a collaboration between the Council for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and the GA, will engage 24 geography teachers in deep thinking about ‘settlement’ in two contrasting localities in England. These will become case studies, or more precisely, ‘place studies’ and will include exploring teaching and learning strategies that help students understand the complexity of the housing market (taking in both renewal and growth issues) and the establishment of sustainable communities. The new geography department’s ‘Intranet Project’ is to be led by David Mitchell of the IoE in London.

Additionally, there is work related to the Geography Development Fund (GDF) announced at the GA’s Annual Conference (2004) by Stephen Twigg, the then Schools Minister and Minister with responsibility for geography. Through this initiative the RGS-IBG and GA are to be funded jointly to undertake work on priorities identified by both organisations and Ofsted and QCA. The work is inclusive of education 5–19, but focuses especially on two areas: primary geography and 14-19. Almost half the funds are to be devoted to enabling Marcia Foley to lead a ‘National Primary Geography’ project that will result in (amongst other things) a primary geography quality mark. We anticipate an extension of the GDF in 2005-06 and would be interested to hear from readers of Teaching Geography as to whether they would support the development of a secondary schools department ‘quality mark’ (possibly, initially, for key stage 3).
The Pilot GCSE outlined above is also underpinned by the GDF, and other projects supported by the GDF include contributions to QCA’s Innovating with Geography site (see websites) and an RGS-IBG-led project considering the development of subject specialist community networks between teachers, higher education institutions and local businesses. Some of the Fund will be spent exploring the feasibility of a much larger piece of work that is to consider geography curriculum developments as a whole. In essence, to ensure that they meet the needs of students in the twenty-first century. The issue of progression and continuity in learning geography requires substantial research, and it is hoped that a larger project may contribute to establishing a firmer foundation to curriculum decisions in the future.

The GA and RGS-IBG are confident that the GDF will be taken forward in years to come. One reason to be cheerful is that, by the time you read this, two meetings of the Secretary of State’s Geography Focus Group will have taken place.

A feast of opportunity

All of this indicates the huge amount of activity taking place by and on behalf of your Association. It is worth pointing out the feast of opportunity that is to be available to geography teachers – and, indeed, anyone who believes in the power and relevance of geography education to help ‘future citizens ... think sanely about ... the world around’ (Fairgrieve, 1926). Issues that have implications for geography education to help ‘Future teachers – and, indeed, anyone who that is to be available to geography requirements for the future. They are now resolutely mainstream, and if geography does not carry them into primary and secondary schools, who will? GeoVisions intends to contribute to the thinking and development work required to build on these issues; not least through the GA’s 2005 Annual Conference, which is strong on sustainable development and the global dimension. Through these initiatives we can ensure that geography is about both the ‘here and now’ as well as preparing for the future.

Here, issues such as ‘sustainable development’, ‘global perspectives’ and ‘international understanding’ are no longer to be sidelined or matters reserved for the committed few. They are now resolutely mainstream, and if geography does not carry them into primary and secondary schools, who will? GeoVisions intends to contribute to the thinking and development work required to build on these issues; not least through the GA’s 2005 Annual Conference, which is strong on sustainable development and the global dimension. Through these initiatives we can ensure that geography is about both the ‘here and now’ as well as preparing for the future.

Notes


4. PDUs are leading edge sessions run by highly qualified geography professionals drawn from the GA network. Consult the website or telephone 0114 296 0088 for a programme. The core module on the Institute of Education’s PDIT, ‘Managing a new development’, encourages participants to reflect on their working relationships and to anticipate the sources of challenge and support that can assist in the design and planning of achievable curriculum development.

5. David Mitchell co-ordinates a number of GA projects on the use of ICT in geography classrooms (e-mail: d.mitchell@ioe.ac.uk), some of which are in partnership with the RGS-IBG.

6. Additional funds from the Frederick Soddy Trust are also acknowledged in supporting the National Primary Geography work.

References


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QCA ESD - www.nc.un.uk/nds

QCA Innovating With Geography – www.qca.org.uk/geography/innovating

Philip Stott - www.greenspin.blogspot.com

Teachers in Development Education - www.tidec.org

UN Millennium Development Goals - www.un.org/millenniumgoals

Present Perfect Continuous Tense. Simple past tense. Past Continuous Tense. Past Perfect tense. Past Perfect Continuous Tense. Simple Future tense. Future Continuous Tense. Future Perfect Tense. Future Perfect Continuous Tense. Simple Present Tense. 1. My mother lets me go out with my friends. 2. I prefer my coffee black. 3. She puts the keys on the table. 4. The teacher shouts at us all the time. 5. I have two brothers. 6. Coffee grows in Brazil. Present Continuous Tense. 7. She is listening the music now. Present Continuous Tense: This tense indicates the continuous nature of an act or event in the present and has not been completed. The activity has begun in the past and will be completed in the future. Example: She is preparing chicken sandwiches for breakfast. Present Perfect Tense: This tense is used to describe an action that had begun in the past, continues into the present and has just been completed. The time of occurrence of the action is generally not mentioned. This tense is also used to describe an action happened in the past before another action took place. Example: I have just completed my dinner. Present Perfect Continuous Tense: This tense is used to describe an action, event or occurrence that has begun in the past and continues into the present. The term 'GeoVisions' describes an intriguing past, an interesting and stimulating present and aspirations for an invigorating future. So what is it, and how is it relevant to this issue of Teaching Geography? GeoVisions was originally a project initiated by Birmingham Development Education Centre, now Tidey (Teachers in Development Education, see websites). The project provided a forum to debate, raise issues and make proposals about the future of school geography. The project was unconstrained by short-term objectives or immediate political concerns. During 2002-03, a GeoVisions Sub-group developed ideas for an innovative GCSE Geography. The work subsequently informed the development of the OCR Pilot Hybrid GCSE (see websites).