

More Reflections on Concepts

Each of the concept pages in *Planning Your KS3 Curriculum* (2007) on pp. 25-31 makes clear that the big key concepts are really only the tip of the iceberg. They may be thought of as standing at the top of a hierarchy of ideas in geography. Concepts like space and place are the most abstract and generalised and upon them hang webs of more concrete and more specific ideas. The key to using big concepts in a teaching and learning situation is first build a thorough understanding of the simpler ideas in a variety of contexts. To understand place, for example, it is useful to have first understood some ideas about home, community, neighbourhood, region, physical/human interaction, identity and to have studied these ideas in the context of a variety of different places in varied environments and locations. The Geography 16-19 Project encouraged this cumulative approach to concept development. It also made a useful and direct link between the route for enquiry and the process of developing conceptual understanding. (Naish, Rawling and Hart 1987) For instance, when asking the questions 'Who lives here? What is this place like? How do people perceive and relate to it?' study is most likely to lead to an understanding of the big key concept of 'Place'. (Geography 16-19 called them guiding concepts). When asking how things happened and why did situations occur, it is more likely that the key concepts of 'Process' and 'Environmental interaction' will be accessed. For further development of this idea in the context of the current PoS, see page 25 in *Planning Your KS3 Curriculum*.

Finally, it should be noted that this list of seven key concepts in the KS3 PoS only represents one view of what the important ideas are for geography. Most geographers would probably agree that Place, Space, Scale and Environmental Interaction are fundamental to geography at a high level, but they might not agree so easily about the other three. A recent academic geography book (Holloway, Rice and Valentine, 2003) highlights space, place, time and scale as being applicable across physical and human geography whilst social formations, physical systems, landscape and environment are referred to in a more restricted way in distinct branches of geographical research. Peter Jackson, a human geographer, (2006) referred to pairs of concepts – space and place, scale and connection, proximity and distance, and relational thinking.

Process and Interdependence are such big ideas that they are overarching to many disciplines in the sciences and the humanities. Cultural diversity is at a more specific level than the other two – it might even be thought of as a sub-concept of Place as far as geography is concerned. In fact, all these concepts are shared with other subjects (e.g. literature and poetry are also involved in representation of place; mathematicians study space; scale is fundamental to the sciences and economics, environmental interaction is crucial to biology). Also some of these ideas are so big that you cannot envisage their meaning sensibly unless you link them with other concepts e.g. Interdependence, Process, Scale. What you need to remember is that the explanation of the concepts given in the PoS is in the context of geography. So Process is explained in terms of physical and human geography whereas it might refer to monetary policies and flows of capital in economics; interdependence is explained by reference to people and places, whereas in biology it might refer to relationships between the functioning of various organs in the human body.

You might think there are other key concepts which should be highlighted – for instance, globalisation. Though it is implied by interdependence, some other PoS references and highlighted as a curriculum dimension (sustainable futures and the global dimension), it is not listed separately. The pilot geography GCSE highlights five big concepts – uneven development, globalisation, futures, interdependence and sustainability. It was not that place, space, scale and environmental interaction were considered unimportant when this course was developed. Quite

the contrary! It was assumed that these key geographical concepts were automatically involved because of the choice of content and the follow-on from KS3. The idea behind listing the five was to give a flavour of the kind of course this was intended to be i.e. a strong slant to global citizenship, building on the more basic geographical understanding already assumed at KS3.

So the key concepts provide you with the structure or skeleton on which to hang your KS3 curriculum flesh. They also give a clear hint (because of the focus on big accepted geography ideas) that the geography curriculum at KS3 is to be concerned with ensuring some basic geographical understanding and competence, as a platform for GCSE and A level work. But most importantly, the key concepts are liberating tools for you to use in a creative way when developing your own curriculum.

References

E, Rawling. (2007) *Planning Your Key Stage 3 Curriculum*. Sheffield: Geographical Association

Naish, M., Rawling, E. and Hart, C. (1987) *Geography 16-19: The Contribution of a Curriculum Development Project to 16-19 Education*. London: Longman for School Curriculum Development Committee

Holloway, S., Rice, S. and Valentine, G. (2003) *Key Concepts in Geography*. London: Sage.

Jackson, P. (2006) 'Thinking Geographically', *Geography*, 91, 199-204. [Download](#).