

The Pilot

Welcome to the new issue of *The Pilot*. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Phil Wood and his team for the previous editions of the newsletter and for all his hard work towards the Pilot GCSE; we are delighted that Phil's work is continuing through the Action Plan funding.

In this issue:

- Introducing the sounding board
- Useful Resources – link to GTT (and brief action plan promotion)
- Blogging your lessons, involving teachers and students in teaching and learning
- My Place – Prof. Noel Castree writes on My Place and the potential links with academic geography
- Links to VLE
- Student Voices provided by students at Deacon's School
- Sustainable fashion: A 14-year-old student at Bedales School has created a 'fashion statement' on the global reach of the fashion industry that has attracted national attention
- Mary Fargher from the Institute of Education offers a GIS research opportunity for Pilot GCSE centres

The Sounding Board

The Pilot Geography GCSE sounding board has been formed through the DfES funded Action Plan for geography. It will endeavour to support the Pilot Geography GCSE and to have an ear to the current developments in school, academic and governmental planning in relation to geography.

The Sounding Board members will

- Help to narrow the gap between school and academic geography
- Help, advise and create teaching and learning resources. They will also be seeking new materials and ideas. This could involve you too! Please do send us any ideas that you are happy to share with others. (NReckless@geography.org.uk)
- Share national developments

Members of the Sounding Board represent a cross section of geography educators. They include: Di Swift (chair); Nicky Reckless; Professor Noel Castree; Eleanor Rawling; Justin Woolliscroft; Phil Wood and Alan Parkinson.

Information from the Sounding Board meetings is shared with David Gardner, QCA, and Leszek Iwaskow, HMI. The Sounding Board meets three times a year.

Useful Resources

The Action Plan for Geography is jointly and equally led by the RGS-IBG and the GA. The Pilot GCSE support work is part of the GA's contribution to this DfES funded initiative. There will be several different types of support on offer. These include

- A **free** one-day conference each year on 10th July 2007 and 10th July 2008. These will both be held in Birmingham. At these event teachers will have the opportunity to participate in workshops and lectures. These will be open to centres teaching the Pilot GCSE and involve those who want to include some of the Pilot Geography GCSE ideas

in other specifications. To book a place on the event please contact Lucy Oxley at the GA (loxley@geography.org.uk) or use the online booking form at www.geography.org.uk/apg

- There are resources and support on the Geography Teaching Today website www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk and a 'Talk' section in which teachers can share ideas, get help and build relationships.
- To coincide with the termly newsletters the Pilot VLE will once again be available and you are invited to participate in the VLE to share comments and gain further resources surrounding the themes of each of the newsletter issues.

Pilot GCSE Blogs

Students and teachers alike are beginning to blog. Some of you may ask what a blog is. Others will be familiar with the media and may already be using them in your teaching.

A blog or weblog is a journal or newsletter that is frequently updated and for general public viewing. A blog will generally represent the author's personality and interests. Blogs allow for information to be instantly published and usually include reflection, opinions and comments on topical issues. A blog is not the same as MSM or My Space sites. Information on a blog is not of a personal nature, but factual. A blog is not the place in which friends socialise but a space that allows opinions to be expressed and discussed, or for information to be gathered and shared.

The use of blogs within the Pilot Geography GCSE has provided a number of centres with a platform upon which teachers and their students can plot and develop their progress. Alan Parkinson and Tony Cassidy shared their pilot blog sites during the VLE conference. Many of you will have visited these sites, if not, you can find them through the following links:

www.pilotgcseradicalgeography.co.uk
<http://kspilotgeography.blogspot.com>

For colleagues who may like to find out more about blogging and the use of blogs within the geography classroom, Alan Parkinson has written an excellent article that can be found through the GA journals archive (www.geography.org.uk/journals) or alternatively you can access the article and have a go at setting up your own blog by participating with the curriculum making resources on the GTT website, by following this link:

<http://www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk/ks1-3-courses/course/secondary-geography-and-ict/>

My Place

Many Pilot GCSE Geography colleagues have commented on both the excitement and challenge of the "My Place" unit. Reminding both ourselves and our students of the geographical significance of this unit can be demanding. Here, in a fascinating piece, Professor Noel Castree from Manchester University writes about "My Place" and in doing so, helpfully links academic and school geography

My Place

It is a truism (among geography educators at least) that people make places and places make people. But what is place and how should we understand it? The My Place core unit seeks to answer this fundamental question in a way brings living in, and learning about, place to life – quite literally. The unit, beginning with each student's home area, addresses several misconceptions about place currently abroad in society. One is that the 21st century marks 'the end of geography' as new communication technologies supposedly do away with geographical difference and distance. Another – very common among students with little or no prior geography education – is that places are simply bricks-and-mortar: the local configuration of buildings, roads, green spaces

and what-have-you. A third misconception about place is that it is synonymous with the local scale, as if other scales can somehow be ignored or at least bracketed-out. Through its focus on material forms and representations, and its emphasis on the concepts of uneven development, interdependence, sustainability and futures, the My Place unit allows students to understand that globalisation involves not the 'end' of place but its incessant remaking – in the connected realms of the imagination and human practice. As Doreen Massey – the Open University geographer whose ideas are often cited in relation to the My Place unit – has put it, 'places may be imagined as particular articulations of...social relations, including local relations "within" the place and those many connections that stretch way beyond it...This is a notion of place where specificity (local uniqueness, a sense of place) derives not from some mythical internal roots nor from a history of relative isolation – now to be disrupted by globalisation – but precisely from the absolute particularity of the mixture of influences found there'.

My Place is a core element of the concept-led Pilot GCSE. It's immensely important, in my view, for three reasons. First, it encapsulates what modern geography is (and should be) all about – and I mean this in the double-sense of capital G geography education and small g geography as lived and learnt by students. One of the hoary complaints about geography as a subject made by critics is that 'geography is everything and everywhere': the totality of the human and biophysical worlds separately and combined. Like many geography educators I prefer to turn this apparent negative into a positive: geography focuses on process, connection and change so that we can understand how the local and the global, the human and the physical *constantly remake each other*. But such abstract arguments about geography as the discipline of 'synthesis' are no substitute for using student experience to make these arguments flesh and in so doing change students' sense of their own and others' geographies. In this sense the My Place unit is pedagogically formative as well as simply informative for students. It has the potential to let students discover for themselves the tapestry of life – along the way gaining cognitive, moral and technical skills.

Secondly, the unit is a key part of a Pilot that is helping to close the 'divide' between university and pre-university geography. Long gone are the days when that divide was non-existent because university teachers were central to the old examination boards. The nature of current GCSE and A level syllabi mean that many Geography undergraduates get a shock (unpleasant or otherwise) when they begin their degrees. But for those students involved in the Pilot, the My Place unit is providing a way of looking at the world that is now commonplace in geography degree teaching. Place is here, metaphorically speaking, seen less as part of a mosaic and more as a node or a switching point depending on whether one prefers biological or circuit board metaphors.

Finally, the My Place unit is a vital part of citizen education, even if many GCSE students never do any more formal geography training after the age of sixteen. Britain has a long tradition of geography education when compared to many other countries (such as the USA). Many of the challenges we face today are profoundly – which is to say *constitutively* – geographical. Think of global warming, immigration, the 'overheating' southeast region of England, the Iraq war, and the actions of global governance organisations like the WTO. These and other issues are all about multi-scalar connections, about flows and boundaries, about realities and perceptions, about local lives and global forces. The My Place module seeks to hold all of these things in focus simultaneously. With proper facilitation, students can genuinely understand – feel even – the translocal nature of their place-based lives. And with this comes the capacity not simply to acknowledge that all of our local actions have extra-local effects – and vice versa. As importantly, we come to understand the profound and complex value questions that arise: questions of rights, responsibilities, entitlements and justice.

Ultimately, of course, the My Place unit – like the whole Pilot – is not a fixed and frozen thing: a set of stern prescriptions for teachers and students to follow. It is given life through the intelligence, experience and creativity of students and teachers together. And I use the word 'life' again because the ultimate value of the unit is that 'divide' between 'the real world' and 'teaching about it' should dissolve. My Place is precisely about the *self*-education of students since its topics are everyday ones. The point is that the 'everyday' is shown to be connected to the immensity of national and global forces in a way that students might not have appreciated before.

Student Voices

Students from Deacon's School, Peterborough, (www.deconsschool.co.uk) have kindly contributed their opinions on studying the Pilot Geography GCSE. They make for inspiring and interesting reading. If you have any student work that you would like to contribute to the next issue of the newsletter please email me (NReckless@geography.org.uk).

Comments from students on the Pilot Geography GCSE – Deacon's School

Year 10 (Second year of the course)

"... Helps me in realising what we are doing to the world and how it will affect future generations. Geography is useful for understanding how the world works as a whole and how everyone is affected by minor (and major) issues ..."

"... It helps me understand the world and events happening and why they happened ..."

"... I have enjoyed doing the GCSE course because it is more 'active'. For example in the course we do more independent learning... the course has helped me think more about Geography in everyday life ..."

"... Geography is an extremely useful subject as it helps the younger generation understand the present world... Each topic we looked at was relevant and would help me in the future ..."

"... Geography has helped me with knowledge of the world because whenever I look outside I'm like, ooh, that's what I learnt!!! ..."

Year 9 (First term of course – My Place)

"... I think working in groups helps... the topic chosen was a good topic because it was very relevant to us ..."

"... I have learnt that My Place is different to other places around the world ..."

"... The topic My Place has helped a lot because it has taught us a lot about Peterborough and where others live... compared our place to others and I have got to know them (other places) a lot more ..."

"... I think the work we have been doing links to the rest of the world because the issues in Peterborough – crime, immigration, sustainability etc are the same in loads of other cities around the world ..."

"... It is interesting to learn about what the big issues are in your area – natural elements, housing, industrial use, economic use and how Peterborough affects other places around us ..."

Sustainable Fashion – Student work from Bedales School, Petersfield, Hampshire.
www.bedales.org.uk

Global fashion statement

What the rich world wears, the poor world makes: fashion is a business that affects resources and people across the globe. One student thinks that we should be more aware of the spatial impact of 'fashion'

Instead of writing a conventional essay for her Geography studies, one student presented her findings as a couture creation: a bodice and long train, with appliquéd panels of text and fashion illustrations: a 'fashion statement' in every sense of the word.

She said, "It was trainers that started me thinking. We buy them, and when they go out of fashion we just throw them away. We don't care – and the manufacturers don't care, as long as they can get them made cheaply enough. We should think more about the waste of resources, and about the people who make the things we wear."



Two national organisations have expressed interest in using this particular student's work in their educational resources, bringing her ideas to the attention of a wider audience, even an international audience: *Reading International Solidarity Centre (RISC)*, which promote international issues and sustainable development, and *Labour Behind the Label*, a campaign that supports garment workers' efforts worldwide to improve their working conditions have both commented on the work.

Dave Richards of RISC judged the investigative projects of Bedales students who had completed their first year of Geography in the senior school. He said, "This work not only summarised the issue of sweated labour in the clothing industry in a clear and balanced way, but also presented the arguments in an attention-grabbing style. It is very advanced work for her age – I thought at first it was a project for AS-level. The dress was the perfect medium to communicate serious issues accessibly and effectively. There's a future for her campaigning for trade justice!"

The Bedales' student commented, "A lot of American factories have already closed because it's cheaper to make trainers and clothes overseas. A sewing-machine operator in Bangladesh only earns £10 a month – that's the minimum wage – but as soon as the manufacturers find somewhere cheaper, those jobs will go as well.

"I'm hoping my 'fashion statement' will make people think more about what they buy."

Opportunities for schools to participate in research and GIS

GIS research

Many Pilot Geography GCSE centres are finding themselves using geographical information systems or GIS regularly as part of their teaching and learning. If you are interested in developing/sharing ideas about GIS then here's an offer that you can't refuse! Mary Fargher is a teacher/research student interested in working with colleagues to collect data on:

- how students interact with GIS
- developing effective GIS-assisted curriculum materials and teaching strategies

Whether you are an experienced user or a total beginner, Mary is very keen to hear from you. She can be contacted via her email address at the Institute of Education mfargher@ioe.ac.uk.

Those of you who are GA members will also have seen the recent leaflet produced by David Mitchell about getting started with GIS. It is wonderfully accessible and comes highly recommended. Download a sample from the GA website or login to download the whole thing. www.geography.org.uk/projects/spatiallyspeaking/inthenews/

OVER TO YOU

The next edition of *The Pilot* is scheduled for April 2007. Please email me with your resources or ideas as to what should be included. We would also very much welcome your feedback on the Pilot Geography GCSE section of the Action Plan for Geography's website. Have a look at <http://www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk/pilot-gcse/introduction> and tell us what else we should be doing.

Looking forward to hearing from you!

Nicky

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