



Introducing National Curriculum Geography to Australia's Primary Schools: Lessons from England's Experience

Simon Catling

Professor of Primary Education at Oxford Brookes University

Abstract

This article provides an insight into the development of primary geography since the inception of the national curriculum in England in the late 1980s. It is hoped this is informative as the *Australian Curriculum: Geography Foundation to Year 12* is introduced to and implemented in primary schools. It draws out various matters which have affected geography in primary schools in England for good and ill and indicates that developing primary geography to a good and high level of teaching and learning is as yet an unfinished project, after two decades of development. Among the matters which affect good geography teaching are teachers' understanding of geography, their focus on subject teaching, access to useful resources, and the impact of government changes in policy and practice. Effective support in their school and opportunities to develop their geography teaching skills will make a positive difference. The active engagement of children in their geographical learning through their experiences and awareness can be used to take their learning beyond both the immediate and their current knowledge and understanding. In good primary schools geography is evident and enticing.

Keywords: primary geography, national curriculum, Australian curriculum, teaching and learning, high quality geography, children's engagement.

Introduction

The introduction in 2013 of *Australian Curriculum: Geography Foundation to Year 12* (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2013) with its detailed year by year descriptions of content mirrors the initiation in 1991 of England's National Curriculum Geography programs of study which was structured in four age phases: the 5–7, 7–11, 11–14 and 14–16 age ranges, known as key stages 1 to 4 (Department for Education and Science (DES), 1991). In both nations geography became a required subject for children to study, in Australia's Years F to 10 and England's Years 1 to 11 (5–16 year olds), though in England this

was soon revised to be compulsory only for Years 1 to 9 (5–14 year olds). What was new, and exciting, was the inclusion of geography as a named foundation subject in the curriculum for all primary children in England from their first year in school¹. While geography may have been an aspect of young children's curriculum between 5 and 7 years old before, it was not necessarily the case. This was an important change for the youngest school children; it extended their geographical learning beyond the local to other places and the wider world and began to engage them in studies of geographical themes, such as environmental concern. Since 1991 the primary elements of England's national curriculum geography have been through two revisions, both implemented: in 1995 (Department for Education [DfE], 1995) and 2000 (Department for Education and Employment/Qualifications and Curriculum Authority [DfEE/QCA], 1999). These did not substantially change the focus of primary geography, though there were reductions in what was included in the programs of study. A review of the primary curriculum in 2008–2009 (Rose, 2009) led to a redrafted curriculum proposed for schools to follow from 2011 (Department for Children, Schools and Families/Qualifications and Curriculum Development Authority [DCSF/QCDA], 2010), but it was withdrawn on the change of national government in the UK in 2010. This revision took a more integrated approach to the primary curriculum, linking geography in an *area of learning* entitled *historical, geographical and social understanding*. [It had already been distinguished from secondary geography, which had been revised for its third time in 2007 (QCA, 2007).] A fourth rewriting of the geography programs in 2012–2013 for introduction from 2014 led to reshaping geography in a more knowledge-focused curriculum (DfE, 2010, 2013a). This knowledge-turn has been one of the reasons behind the subject's developments in Australia, though it is not without its critics (Ewing, 2012), as in England in relation to primary schooling (Alexander, 2010). Discussion of these changes and the knowledge-turn in geography (Lambert, 2011) is not the focus of this paper, nor is a review of the changes to geography in the

primary curriculum. However, a couple of matters are worthy of brief note before other lessons are drawn from the English experience of the 1990s and 2000s.

The 1988 Education Reform Act in England (Her Majesty's Government [HMG], 1988) set the national curriculum in place from 1989, though the development of the programs of study for each of the subjects followed in a staged process from 1990 to 1993. As in Australia, geography was not among the first tranche of subject programs, which for both nations were English, mathematics and science (1990 in England and 2011 in Australia). In England in 1991 geography, with history, appeared in the second set of subjects, whereas in Australia history had preceded geography as part of the first set in 2011. That science in England was published before geography meant that aspects of earth science – or physical geography – appeared already to be claimed in the science curriculum (DES 1990), which constrained what was finally included in the geography programs of study, though there was overlap in such aspects as rocks and soils, weather and the water cycle (DES, 1991). This overlap was heavily trimmed by 1995 and virtually non-existent by 2000, reducing studies in physical geography in primary education to a particularly weak level. Two lessons can be drawn initially. One lesson, arising from national curriculum developments in England, is that this is a process of continuous, if not consistently timed, revision linked with government reviews, related in part to concerns about the over specification of and overload in the curriculum (Dearing, 1994) but also to government interests in what a curriculum specification should be for (DfE, 2010, 2013a). Across the years this has affected geography as much as the other subjects in primary education (Hopkin, 2013). A further lesson is that the sequencing of national curriculum drafting can affect the school curriculum content of a subject, its interrelationships with other subjects and its future revisions.

The introduction of geography as a compulsory subject in the primary school curriculum brought a number of challenges for primary schools and teachers. It seems the case that similar challenges face geography's introduction in Australian primary schools. This paper considers a variety of these, noting the developments and concerns which occurred over the subsequent two decades for geography in England's primary schools. Inevitably the focus is on England. To draw positive lessons, those aspects of primary geography teaching which seem to foster high quality experiences and learning for younger children are identified. None of this is to infer that such high quality teaching and

learning in geography has not been in place in many Australian primary schools. Rather, the purpose is to identify what lessons can be learnt and applied from implementing geography in England's primary schools over the 1990s and 2000s, anticipating that some of these are of interest and value to teachers and head teachers in Australia's primary schools.

The State of Primary Geography: England and Australia

The teaching of geography is and was not new to primary schools in Australia and England (Walford, 2000; Marsh, 2001), though it has had a chequered history. In the twenty years leading to the introduction of England's national curriculum, geography tended to be subsumed within a broad-based topic-work approach in primary schools and often linked with local environmental studies (Her Majesty's Inspectors of School (HMI), 1989). In Australia, geography since 1991 has been a subject in what are variously called studies of society and environment (SOSE), humanities or social studies in different States, where the focus has been strongly on place studies and education for sustainable development; it has an evident environmental focus (Reynolds, 2009, 2012).

Introducing National Curriculum Geography

When geography was introduced as a compulsory subject for all primary school children in England in 1991, it faced several challenges. Historically schools in England had been subject to visits from HMI, who published reports periodically about the state of subject teaching. Their overview of geography in primary schools was published as work began on drafting the geography national curriculum programs (HMI, 1989). It made salutary reading, its opening statement reading: "overall standards of work in geography were very disappointing" (p.11). It was noted that children's work was satisfactory or better in just 25% of primary schools. Geography was rarely taught as a separate subject; it was integrated with other subjects in topic work where it often lost subject distinctiveness. In a minority of primary schools it was not taught at all. Where it was included it tended to have a lower allocation of time than comparable subjects. Geography was often inadequately planned; indeed, only half of primary schools had curriculum policies for geography. Where HMI saw geography taught across primary schools, they noted that it tended to be of better quality with the youngest children. In many schools there was limited, if any, work on the UK or other countries and parts of the world; there was a sense of too parochial a perspective in its teaching. Equally, there was little sense of

the key ideas of geography, such as place and spatial understanding. Yet, when there was a teacher who coordinated geography across the school the quality of continuity and progression in teaching and learning frequently was better. Where geography was well taught, studies of the locality developed children's ideas about places; they undertook fieldwork and considered topics such as pollution and conservation; they investigated other parts of the world exploring cultural diversity. Such studies were noted to be motivating across the age ranges, particularly when children engaged in practical, investigative learning. These studies tended to be well recorded by the children using a wide variety of approaches, from photos and maps to sketches, diaries, drama and 3-D models. However, teachers' record keeping of their learning and achievements was rare. In such schools there was usually a good range of appropriate resources which enabled better quality geography teaching and learning.

These findings were reinforced by a range of sample studies across England (Naish, 1992), which also identified the pressures that the introduction of the geography programs of study for key stages 1 and 2 (5–7 and 7–11 year olds) placed on primary teachers. Given the introduction of ten subjects to the primary curriculum between 1990 and 1993, primary teachers were noted to be suffering from *innovation fatigue* after the introduction of six (p.44). They needed to understand and interpret the new requirements and to revise or, more likely, develop new curriculum plans for classes and across schools in every subject, not only geography. There were few specialist geographers in primary schools to help in this process, with the geography coordinator not usually a geographer (HMI, 1989). A very real need for professional development in geography was noted. But it was found that, as the new geography programs were introduced in 1991, more geography was being taught and teachers were making strenuous efforts to provide and resource their geography teaching, a point noted in the restructured inspection system for schools (Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), 1993); but this early report indicated the demanding challenge most primary schools had to meet to provide better than satisfactory geography for their children, a situation similar for other subjects, including history (Ofsted, 1994).

The 2008 study of geography teaching in Australian schools in Years 3 to 10 provides an interesting comparison (Erebus International, 2008). Its basis is very different from the schools' inspection system in England, which was based on school visits; it drew on a literature review, State/Territory curriculum documents

and interviews with stakeholders, including the Australian Geography Teachers' Association (AGTA) and others involved in geographical education provision. While the report provides a view across Years 3 to 10, it is possible to extrapolate a number of the challenges which face geography in Years 3 to 6 in Australian primary schools as the subject became compulsory in 2013. It is clear that many, but perhaps only a minority, of primary schools have been developing geography in their primary curriculum within the context of studies of society and environment. Indeed, one challenge is to disentangle and make geography clearly evident from or within a SOSE or humanities structure. This involves, as in the English context, a primary school's leadership and staff in recognising and valuing geographical learning for their children and in giving geography demonstrable status in the primary curriculum. Whether integrated with other subjects or not, the report noted the need to focus on the key ideas, knowledge and skills of geography, as well as to ensure adequate time for its teaching and learning. It was noted that there was a need to provide more engaging learning, in which children recognise and understand the geography they are taught. It suggested that this would be helped by having a teacher responsible for the geography curriculum in the primary school, as well as the provision of in-service professional development in primary geography for teachers. This reprises the situation in England in 1991.

The report identified several ways in which children's geographical learning could be promoted (Erebus International, 2008). The key point was that teachers needed to show they enjoyed teaching geography and were positive about the subject. In this context, they needed to be informed about the subject and to be up-to-date. As vital was developing in geographical studies – or cross-curricular studies in which geography was evident – connections which children could see to their own lives, experiences and futures. Such studies could well involve local investigations and community contributions. The need for fieldwork was stressed as one of a variety of teaching approaches to use, including problem solving and thinking skills approaches and new technologies. Working through the *Australian Curriculum: Geography Foundation to Year 12* primary years requirements, teachers should develop in children a sense of local and national identity, linked with global knowledge and an appreciation of their interconnectedness with the world, in part by investigating physical and human features and processes, the impacts they have and people's responses to these, alongside place studies. Doing this required schools to allocate adequate teaching time for geography.

Developments over Time: England since 1991

Since the introduction of national curriculum geography in England in 1991, there have been a number of developments. During the following two decades children's standards in geographical learning improved markedly. By 2002, it was clear that while geography was taught satisfactorily across the large majority of primary schools, good and high quality geography teaching and achievement was evident now in a third of primary schools (Ofsted, 2003). By 2010, this had improved to children's achievement being at good or excellent standards in almost half of primary schools (Ofsted, 2011), with overall improvements in geography teaching good or better in two-thirds of schools by 2012 (Iwaskow, 2013). This compared well with other subjects, with which geography had been playing catch-up for most of its first twenty years. It had tended to be the most satisfactorily taught subject, with lower good and outstanding teaching and learning. The differences with subjects such as design and technology and RE were quite small, though they were greater with history and PE (Catling, Bowles, Halocha, Martin, & Rawkinson, 2007). It was easy to attach more significance to the apparent gaps than they warranted and to indicate that concerns about geography were greater than reality indicated. It was more complex than this. A reading of the various subject reports over the 1990s and 2000s indicates that many of the same issues affected the other foundation subjects, just as many of the positive developments in these subjects were similar to those in primary geography (see: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/ to read copies of subject inspection reports from the later 1990s to the present). This tends to belie the impression that geography was the hardest subject to teach and that subjects such as history or art were more straightforward. Quite often teachers' confidence in their subject knowledge and teaching skills in the range of foundation subjects, including geography, were equally of concern to school inspectors and equally praised where good.

There had been a marked rise in good quality geography teaching in 2005 (Catling et al., 2007), which has continued since, though outstanding geography teaching remains low, at less than ten percent (Ofsted, 2011). This rise in standards related to improved teaching quality in studies in local and other environments, as well as to a focus on sustainability and on map work skills. But it was largely enabled through primary teachers' good *general teaching skills*, rather than by specific skills for geography teaching or by primary teachers necessarily having good geographical knowledge (Catling & Morley, 2013). The evidence indicates that where geography is

valued in schools it has and continues to improve. This is underpinned by teacher development and subject monitoring across the school. It has taken twenty years to reach this point, yet a number of concerns remain. These underpin the challenges to improving satisfactory geography teaching and the consistency of good practices.

A key weakness for many primary teachers is their limited understanding of geography, both of its key ideas and their knowledge of its content and information related to this, such as about environmental processes and their locational knowledge. Primary teachers appear to be more secure teaching geographical skills than concepts and information, and what they teach may well link more to their personal preferences than to developing children's sense of the subject in a rounded way. This lack of embedded geographical knowledge undermines confidence in teaching geography, inhibiting the capacity to respond effectively to children's questions and to use questioning, for instance, more effectively to develop children's learning. It also inhibits high quality teaching about real and topical issues, in that these are not often based on good case studies. It can be an issue in map teaching too, when children do not use good maps of real places, and is a reflection that many primary teachers are uncertain as to what good geographical examples and resources are. Limited confidence in teaching geography affected the assessment and recording of children's learning; this was a widespread weakness, with children given little guidance on how to develop or improve their geographical understanding and skills. Where effective assessment occurred, it focused on geographical skills, which teachers felt more comfortable in doing. There are, however, well informed and thoughtful primary teachers who keep effective records of children's geographical achievement, though this practice relates to their approach in all their teaching.

Yet, while many children's geographical vocabulary and their understanding (for instance, of geographical patterns and processes), have developed, progress in their learning is often uneven across classes in the same school. All primary schools have long and medium term geography plans, but it seems that too frequently the medium term plans are dipped into rather than developed well. In many classes, such plans are not developed or adapted by the teacher but taken *off the peg* from commercial or other sources. They lack good local reference points which take account of the school context and the children's lives and experiences, and they are not informed by local and community connections. In part, this relates to a move towards more cross-curricular approaches to the curriculum (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2003; Ofsted, 2011),

though such approaches may retain discrete subject elements rather than be fully integrated topics. Where planning in geography is limited to skills development, much of the knowledge dimension of geography is lost. Indeed, in too many schools medium term plans are incomplete or poorly thought through (Iwaskow, 2013). Even in skills focused geography, fieldwork is less well developed, though working outside the classroom has been strongly encouraged for a number of years (Waite, 2011), and fieldwork has been and remains a requirement in England's geography programs of study since 1991 (DfE, 2013a). The government has recognised that too often demanding form-filling has constrained taking children out of school to study and is encouraging field trips and other out-of-classroom working by reducing the paperwork and other demands which appear to inhibit teachers (DfE, 2013b).

In classes and schools where there is good or outstanding geography teaching, this is sustained by a well developed geography curriculum. The teaching emphasises active, practical approaches to learning, involving fieldwork, problem solving, using digital technologies in and outside the classroom, and the evident engagement of the children in developing their geographical inquiries. Yet in 10% of primary schools, geography teaching is hardly present or is non-existent (Ofsted, 2011). The contrast is startling, as is the continuing difference in the standards of teaching and learning between 5 to 7 year olds and 7 to 11 year olds. Quality remains higher for the younger children – first noted in the late 1980s – and it appears to be linked to making increased and better use of geographical studies outside the classroom (Ofsted, 2011).

During the 1990s, a key concern was the considerable demands which it was felt the geography programs of study in key stages 1 and 2 made on the timetable: it simply could not be taught. This led to revisions to the geography requirements and apparent reductions in their content between 1991 and 2000 (DfE, 1995; DfEE/QCA, 1999). While this has seemed to create a less demanding curriculum, there remain problems in teaching it fully in many schools, not least related to cross-curricular approaches gaining ground, which has led to increased selectivity from the geography programs (Ofsted, 2011). A heightened focus on literacy and numeracy in the late 1990s led to a drop in the time given to geography (Ofsted 2001), which in some schools has never been regained. Yet as teachers became increasingly familiar with the geography curriculum, improvements in the 2000s emerged. This familiarity may well have been supported with a stillborn redraft of the primary curriculum in 2009/10 (Rose, 2009; DCSF/QCDA, 2010). This revision

never materialised since a change in the UK's government moved the rewriting of the English curriculum subjects to strongly knowledge-focused statements of content (DfE, 2010, 2013a). The revised knowledge requirements for key stages 1 and 2 make new demands on teacher's knowledge of the geography involved, for instance in relation to North and South America and climate, aspects about which they are less well informed. This issue was recognised in 1991 with the development of government funded in-service programs in geography for primary teachers. These lasted for six years during the mid-1990s before the investment was redirected to literacy and numeracy professional development. As school inspectors noted, this in-service programme had a very positive impact on raising the quality of the teaching of geography (Ofsted, 1998), though it reached only about a quarter of primary schools nationally. Given the changes being undertaken in England in the 2010s, this need has arisen again. But many primary teachers start from a weak background in geography. Some fifty percent of primary teachers recruited in recent years gave up geography at fourteen. In initial teacher education courses there is very limited time to introduce novice teachers to teaching primary geography. It is often linked with history and other subjects in the same course module. Between 2006 and 2013 contact time for geography, for instance, in primary initial teacher education postgraduate courses in English universities, was reduced by twenty-five percent; a geography unit averages just under 8 hours tutor contact time, while varying between 2 and 16 hours (Catling, 2006, 2013a; Willy and Bowles, 2013). During the past two decades, there has also been a marked reduction in initial teacher education primary courses for specialist geographers, limiting primary schools' capacity to appoint them, and inhibiting the potential for good advice for their staff.

Emergent Lessons from the English Experience

There are a number of lessons to take from this review of the English context for primary geography over the past two decades which may be pertinent to the future for geography in primary education in Australia. There are several positive points which are vital to note and keep in mind. The introduction of geography as a compulsory subject in English primary schools meant that schools had to develop long-term plans for the subject and implement them, as well as appoint geography or humanities subject leaders; this happened. It had the effect that publishers produced a wide range of new resources for schools, which were

revised, dropped or added to during the 1990s in particular. While the government provided additional funding to support new purchases and primary schools budgeted to improve resources across the curriculum during the 1990s, such funding has declined since 2003. The inclusion of fieldwork led to an increase in out-of-classroom investigations, and in many schools geography became better monitored by staff and progress in children's learning improved, such that there were good standards in two-thirds of schools by 2012, though assessment and recording remain concerns (Iwaskow, 2013). While this was uneven across classes and schools, the quality of teaching and learning had risen overall, though in a small minority of schools it fell or was lost. There was provision for teachers' professional development in the initial phase of development in the 1990s, though this reduced afterwards and has been further undermined by the reduction of local authority support services in the 2010s. Yet the Geographical Association (GA) and Royal Geographical Society have worked to provide new lines of development, such as through the government funded Action Plan for Geography between 2006 and 2011 (GA, 2011), which spawned a number of supportive development projects in primary geography of value for online professional development (GA, 2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d).

However, a number of problems remain. A core issue is teachers' confidence in their knowledge and understanding of geography, compounded by its introduction and its most recent and drastic revision (Catling & Morley, 2013; DfE, 2013a). Another is the issue of equitable time to teach geography compared to other subjects, in part compounded by an integrated curriculum approach in which geography's distinctiveness is lost (Ofsted, 2011; Iwaskow, 2013). A third concern is the decline in access to good quality professional development for primary teachers, though this may begin to improve as teachers and schools rebalance their in-service approaches to undertake face-to-face work with geography specialist colleagues in secondary schools and make use of increasing online provision, such as that through the GA's website. This involves investment, which is problematic in a tight resource environment for primary schools; but a key to this is joining the appropriate subject association, such as AGTA, to gain access to advice, support and resources, for instance through its *GeogSpace* website (AGTA, 2013). Additionally, in many schools, there is a need to redraft long and medium term plans for geography, not least to enable getting to grips with the new requirements and identifying where staff development and teaching resource needs are. These are all concerns for Australian primary schools.

The case for introducing subject specialists to work alongside, or in place of, generalist primary teachers has circulated for some time in England (Alexander, Rose, & Woodhead, 1992) and has been raised in Australia (Ardezejewska, McMaugh, & Coutts, 2010). It relates particularly to the concerns about the nature and quality of primary teachers' subject knowledge and specialist teaching approaches. Given the concerns about many primary teachers' subject knowledge in England and in Australia, it is a reasonable topic to raise, and there is a fair case for improving access to knowledgeable and capable teachers for subjects like geography through the use of specialists, particularly with older primary children. However, there are some very real constraints which inhibit taking this route. These include, first, the current and foreseeable lack of geography specialists who might be available to work in primary schools. Second, the size of and resources available to smaller primary schools prohibit employing enough teachers to cover the range of specialisms needed. Third, the perspectives held by very many primary teachers and headteachers about the nature, value, benefits and primacy of generalist class teaching appear to inhibit very many schools from appointing a balance of subject expertise across their staff on whom they can draw for guidance (Alexander, 2010). It assumes that the use of specialists to teach a subject like geography to younger children solves the knowledge problem, that it is the same sort of need for geography as in a subject such as music. Yet the evidence from England is that too often students in their first two or three years of secondary schooling are taught by either non-specialists, or by teachers who have less interest in quality geography teaching than their other responsibilities, and the students are frequently not well taught (Ofsted, 2008, 2011). Subject specialist teaching, *per se*, does not resolve the problem. There are similar issues in Australian secondary schools (Erebus International, 2008). The appointment of primary teachers with geography expertise, then, appears not to be a practical solution, except perhaps in very large urban primary schools, though in England this solution has rarely been adopted in such schools. The lack of appointments might reflect the limited standing of geography and other non-core subjects (except for music and in few cases art and aspects of PE, where the argument is for very specific and well honed skills and knowledge) in those primary schools, but it is more likely because the view is that the vast majority of primary teachers can or should be able to teach geography perfectly satisfactorily and better. There seems to be an implicit view that teaching geography to younger children does not require specialist or even well-honed teacher capability. Appointing primary teachers with a strong

geography background seems particularly unlikely without access to a large and high quality pool of primary geography specialists, and this is not a reasonable possibility though for some it might be desirable. It is not being pursued in England, though concerns about teachers' knowledge of geography persist (Ofsted, 2011).

Geography in England's primary schools has come a long way since 1991, but the journey is not over. Not all children yet receive a good quality geography education; indeed, for a small minority it remains poor. However, considerable progress has been made. The lesson for Australian primary schools is that there is no *magic bullet* which provides a sudden shift to high quality primary geography teaching. It will take resolve, effective school and subject leadership, in-service development for teachers to develop knowledge and confidence, investment in new resources, and clarity about and enthusiasm for geography in the curriculum. Where there are good local outdoor geographical and environmental studies, where the State/Territory and national context and the wider world are aspects of children's learning, where children engage with environmental concerns and sustainability, and where children are introduced to and have developed their understanding of the physical and human aspects of geography by informed and enthusiastic teachers, Australian primary schools will be able to make strong progress; where this is lacking schools will need to develop these aspects of their geography provision.

In England, this challenge has largely been risen to and in many schools it has been a success, though it has taken many years for some to achieve this. In this sense the *Australian Curriculum: Geography Foundation to Year 12* is an aspiration for which to aim high. It is clear that well taught geography is highly motivating and stimulating for primary age children (Ofsted, 2008, 2011; Erebus International, 2008). There is no reason why the Australian geography curriculum should be any less invigorating and exciting. There will be much to learn in developing provision and practice. Some of the travails and challenges that have occurred in England's primary schools and geography curriculum will, no doubt, be part of that experience. What is vital is to respond and make progress, addressing issues and building on successes, sharing concerns and achievements. In this way Australian primary children's geographical learning will be of real value for their own and the nation's futures.

Aiming for High Quality Geography

Essential to developing geography's place and quality in primary schooling is the development of a clear geography curriculum and high quality practices in teaching and learning. Underpinning good quality primary geography in England lies a variety of characteristics of good teaching and leadership (Catling et al., 2013; Ofsted, 2008, 2011; Iwaskow, 2013). At the heart of strong geography teaching lies the geographical understanding of the teacher. This is often stated in terms of the teacher's geographical knowledge, but the teacher's strength may more lie in knowing where to seek and how to direct children to investigate geographical topics, while exercising a clear criticality in considering and checking information and concepts. This is not to diminish the *need to know* about geography and for the teacher to have a good sense of what geographical questions, information and ideas are; rather it is about the expectations a teacher holds of herself in terms of her preparation for her geography teaching, whether in a subject context or in integrated studies, so that she is able to explain effectively geographical knowledge, to direct the children in their geographical questioning, and can anticipate misconceptions and misunderstandings. Key to this attitude is the teacher's enthusiasm for geography and her commitment to children learning the subject effectively; this tends to rub off on the children! There are concomitant aspects which support this. Teachers need to hold high expectations of their children, planning for their strengths and needs in geography. This links essentially to knowing their children's background in geographical studies and in making effective connections to children's lives (Catling and Martin, 2011), which means moving beyond the local and parochial to their foster their understanding of the wider world and geographical themes, topicality and issues. This is about enabling children to see meaning in their studies and to explore the relevance to themselves and their communities. It relates, also, to escaping parochialism and to embracing, being fascinated by, wondering at, appreciating and valuing the world at large.

Essential here is teachers' planning of their geography teaching. Well planned and linked activities in and between lessons, effectively sequenced to enhance understanding, using a good range of resources, are vital. It is important that children have a clear sense of the focus of their learning through the topic, their lessons and the activities they do; valuable in doing this is their involvement in discussing and developing the lines of study, and fostering their ownership of their work. Good teacher planning engages with flexibility, rather than eschewing opportunities and children's contributions. The key is to focus

learning through inquiry and investigation, whether through fieldwork, using published desk-based materials or through the internet. This must involve children in seeking information in response to their questions, with the teacher critically engaged, challenging and seeking reasoned explanations, and providing taught inputs as necessary. In doing this, geographical studies will involve integrated approaches to applying skills to gather knowledge, placing them in meaningful contexts. This does not imply that a geographical skill cannot be disentangled and focused on appropriately, but it infers that using maps, photographs and fieldwork, for instance, are means to work through, not ends in themselves. Well developed geographical topics use a variety of approaches in teaching and learning such as those already noted, as well as opportunities for discussion to reflect on and deepen understanding, role play, modelling, re-enactment, challenges such as information to gather for a later activity, and oral, textual and visual displays and presentations. High quality geography needs to be purposeful, to be problem oriented, a puzzle, topical or issue based, to be structured through inquiry, involve active engagement with the world, with children working cooperatively in their investigations, and being stimulated by good quality resources, among which is the outdoor environment.

The quality of leadership in geography in a primary school is vital to its success (Catling et al. 2007; Ofsted, 2008, 2011). The head teacher's support for geography throughout the school and, in particular, for the geography subject coordinator is paramount. It gives status and a higher profile to geography. High quality coordination requires time, and a time allocation to undertake the role effectively, that impact being monitored by the head teacher. Subject leaders need time to bed into their role and to build their experience and confidence in working with colleagues; to be effective this role is not a quick-fix or short-term responsibility. Geography coordinators do best when they have built up their personal subject knowledge and understanding, supported by professional development courses in primary geography, for instance by attending subject association workshops and conferences. Their approach to their responsibilities is fundamental. It must include auditing the state of geography, its teaching and learning and resources through the school, so that the coordinator knows the state of play, in particular colleague teachers' competence and skills, strengths and weaknesses in teaching geography. They will have considered their school's geography policy and whole school long-term plans, perhaps revising these in discussion with colleagues periodically, learning from their practices. They

will monitor and evaluate regularly the nature and quality geography throughout the school and should involve colleagues in sharing views and aspirations about the quality of the children's work and ways in which to improve plans, topics, resources, teaching and learning, and assessment and recording. Where they identify matters to address they will work with colleagues to develop strategies and actions to redress limitations in learning, such as about knowledge of places around the world or the quality of children's geographical questions. They should periodically provide whole school, or group or individual, staff development to develop progress.

Running parallel to the introduction of the national curriculum in England in 1987–1988, the GA, the UK's equivalent of AGTA, set out to support and attract membership from primary schools and teachers. The result was the publication of its third subscription-based journal, *Primary Geographer*, specifically aimed at the primary education market, which first appeared in 1989. Both its readership and the membership of the GA expanded rapidly, such that by the mid-1990s the association had more than 11,000 members, the majority of whom were in the primary membership category. The GA's provision of teaching advice to inform and enhance geography in primary education over the next decade and a half continued to provide high quality guidance for primary teachers, such as through its primary handbooks (Carter, 1998; Scoffham, 2004, 2010). As developments occurred in digital media and with the World-Wide-Web, the GA added CD-ROMs to its products and created web support for primary teachers. Additionally, it supported primary geography teaching through conferences and courses to develop teachers' understanding of the curriculum requirements and to show-case resources and good practices and approaches which primary teachers were using. It provided posters elaborating activities for Geography Week, engaged primary teachers in participating in and sharing the outcomes of funded primary practice projects, and through publishing and promoting new classroom resources to use with children. The GA website, www.geography.org.uk, is an excellent source for ideas and new developments which might be adapted and extended by AGTA and state and territory geography teacher associations. The GA has also worked on helping primary schools to help themselves. Nonetheless, it is worth bearing in mind that school and teacher commitment to membership of the GA after the initial impetus of the national curriculum declined, as has membership overall, though the revisions for 2014 sparked new interest and a rise in primary membership. For a subject association it might be argued that constructing and reconstructing a national curriculum brings benefits. The GA's open access services and

publications have proved resilient and attractive. This is a positive and important message for AGTA's members and non-members. One particular initiative by the GA is worth looking at more closely. To participate, it is necessary to become a member, and this is happening to the benefit of the association, teachers, children and schools.

To encourage schools in England, the GA developed the *Primary Geography Quality Mark* (GA, 2013). Its purpose is to provide a means for schools to benchmark their geographical planning and teaching while aspiring to improve children's experience and learning in and of geography. In that it offers a gradation of awards, it is also a way to recognise a school's progress and achievements. A number of questions to guide Australian primary schools are prompted by the approach of, and criteria employed in, working towards and evidencing achievements for the Quality Mark. These are an appropriate and strong focus for setting clear directions to develop primary geography, which can be well supported by the GA's guidance for developing geography subject coordination across the school (GA, 2010d; Owens, 2013).

- Has the school a clear *vision* for geography, which influences the way it is planned for and taught? Is there in place a whole school long-term plan for geography, covering Years F to 6? In which ways does this enable geographical inquiries? How does this support curriculum making in primary geography and enable teachers to take responsibility for their medium term planning, from which to develop good lessons?
- What evidence is there to show that the school values geography? Is it clear that the children enjoy and value their geographical experiences and learning through the school? How do teachers articulate their enthusiasm for geography? In which ways is this clear to parents and others who visit the school?
- How are high expectations for, and achievements in, children's geographical learning shown in relation to their age, ability, strengths and previous experience? How does teaching positively influence children's geographical learning through its approach and their engagement with distinctly geographical experiences and activities? How are children's achievements in geography assessed and recorded, and in which do these involve the children?
- Is there a good range of up-to-date resources for teaching geography, including digital technologies, which are used effectively by teachers in children's learning? How is work

outside the classroom used and integrated meaningfully into geographical studies?

- Is there clear school leadership for geography teaching and learning throughout the school? How does the geography subject coordinator positively influence geography's teaching across the classes?
- Is there effective staff development in geography? In what ways does it have an impact on geography teaching and learning which directly affects its focus and improvement?

Conclusion

An implicit theme throughout this article has been the notion of *curriculum making*. It is fitting to use it to draw together a number of influences on the development of high quality geography teaching and learning. In Australia, teachers' curriculum making will be supported by the guidance and resources provided particularly by AGTA on its *GeogSpace* website (AGTA, 2013). Other useful guidance and examples of good practice can be garnered from such initiatives as the Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative, www.environment.gov.au/education/aussi/, and advice provided on planning and teaching geography in primary schools by the states and territories.

While not a new approach, the GA has promoted curriculum making as the way forward for teachers of geography in primary and secondary schools to act in their full professional role. Curriculum making emphasises the role of class teachers in planning their class geography topics, derived from their whole school geography plan, as the basis for their lesson plans (GA, 2012; Catling, 2013b). It provides the opportunity for teachers to take creative action in their planning, in topics which are true to geography, providing purpose and focus for their geography teaching, while bringing to bear children's geographical experiences, attitudes and understandings. It uses teachers' pedagogic knowledge, skills and choices to provide motivating and engaging geography, in which the children are directly involved. Its explicit intention is to take children's learning beyond their current experiences and understanding through increasing the breadth and depth of their knowledge, while connecting with their lives and interests. It may well involve challenging and even reshaping children's perceptions and ideas and leading children into uncharted waters, opening their eyes to new possibilities. An example is a study planned in outline by a teacher of 6–7 year olds focused on the local area in which the children lived. He planned to introduce them to concerns about their locality, explore the idea of environmental hazards, and awaken their sense of place and

recognition that geography explores issues and environmental themes, while using maps and technologies (Catling, 2011a; GA, 2008). Through a local study, based around making a film of a local journey which encountered various dangers in the local environment, these young children extended their perception and understanding of their place, developed their skills in using maps for recording, and recognised and expressed their views about real concerns, while working together on fieldwork, in deciding on the route and key sites to use in their film making, and in appreciating the dangers hazards, such as broken glass, can play in our environments. Their study of the area, realisation about its hazards and focus on pointing out local dangers influenced the development of this investigation and its outcomes. With their teacher they participated in its curriculum making.

This living geography project was one of several undertaken in the GA's *Young Geographers Project* (GA, 2008). The project's evaluation identified several dimensions in curriculum making which were important to the success of the various class studies (Catling, 2011b). One dimension was the underpinning attitudes of the teachers; the other was their decision-making and organisation in curriculum making (Catling, 2013b). The key underpinning *attitudes* to emerge involved teachers' self-confidence:

- in their capacity to create their geography curriculum;
- in themselves as teachers of geography;
- in the children as *knowledgeable learners* and in their being inclusive of the children; and
- as active developers of their own geographical understanding.

Alongside these attitudes were capabilities in *decision making and organisation* which enabled the teachers to:

- be clear about the purpose of their geography topics;
- limit their planning of their geography topics so as to provide leeway and opportunities for in-topic development, while also giving the geography topic an evident focus and direction;
- recognise and draw upon their children's geographical experience, potential and engagement during and in developing the topic;
- use and extend their range of geography teaching approaches and skills;
- provide active and experiential geographical learning for the children; and

- be open to discussion and debate about the development of the topic and approaches to inquiry within it with the children.

The teachers involved in the *Young Geographers Project* and a number of other projects and professional development activities led by the GA (GA, 2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c) were not all geographers by background. What they brought to their individual class topics was their enthusiasm for the subject, a desire to learn through active teaching, an openness to risk-taking and trial and error in their teaching, and their sense that children had a core role in their own learning. One reflection by several of these teachers was that they had not realised how much the children could bring and apply to the geography topics from their own experience and understanding, how they would become involved and enthusiastic, and how their geographical learning would be shown by their increased confidence to others in their schools, positively affecting other classes. While there may be tribulations ahead in developing *Australian Curriculum: Geography Foundation to Year 12* in the primary years, perhaps the lessons from the *Young Geographers Project* are the ones to focus on, underpinned by the questions implicit in the *Primary Geography Quality Mark*. Implementing the geography curriculum is likely to be a bumpy journey in the years to come, replete with debates, concerns and modifications; but there is real value in this for teachers and children, great stimulation, and vital learning about our world and its future, essential to and for the lives of young Australians.

Endnotes

- 1 In the English National Curriculum, from 1989, the core subjects have been: English, mathematics and science; and the Foundation subjects have been: art and design, design and technology, geography, history, information and communications technology, music, and physical education.

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A Note about the Author

Simon Catling is Emeritus Professor of Primary Education at Oxford Brookes University,

UK, though he is still employed there. A Past President of the UK's Geographical Association, he is author of many books, chapters and articles on primary geography, having written classroom materials for children and teachers and published many professional articles and research papers. He has been engaged with national curriculum developments in England since the late 1980s and has run primary geography in-service courses across four decades. His particular fascination is with maps published as postcards, which provide much insight into places, geographies and cartography and are a fun teaching resource!