

**UNDERSTANDING
and TEACHING
PRIMARY
GEOGRAPHY**

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UNDERSTANDING and TEACHING PRIMARY GEOGRAPHY

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SIMON CATLING

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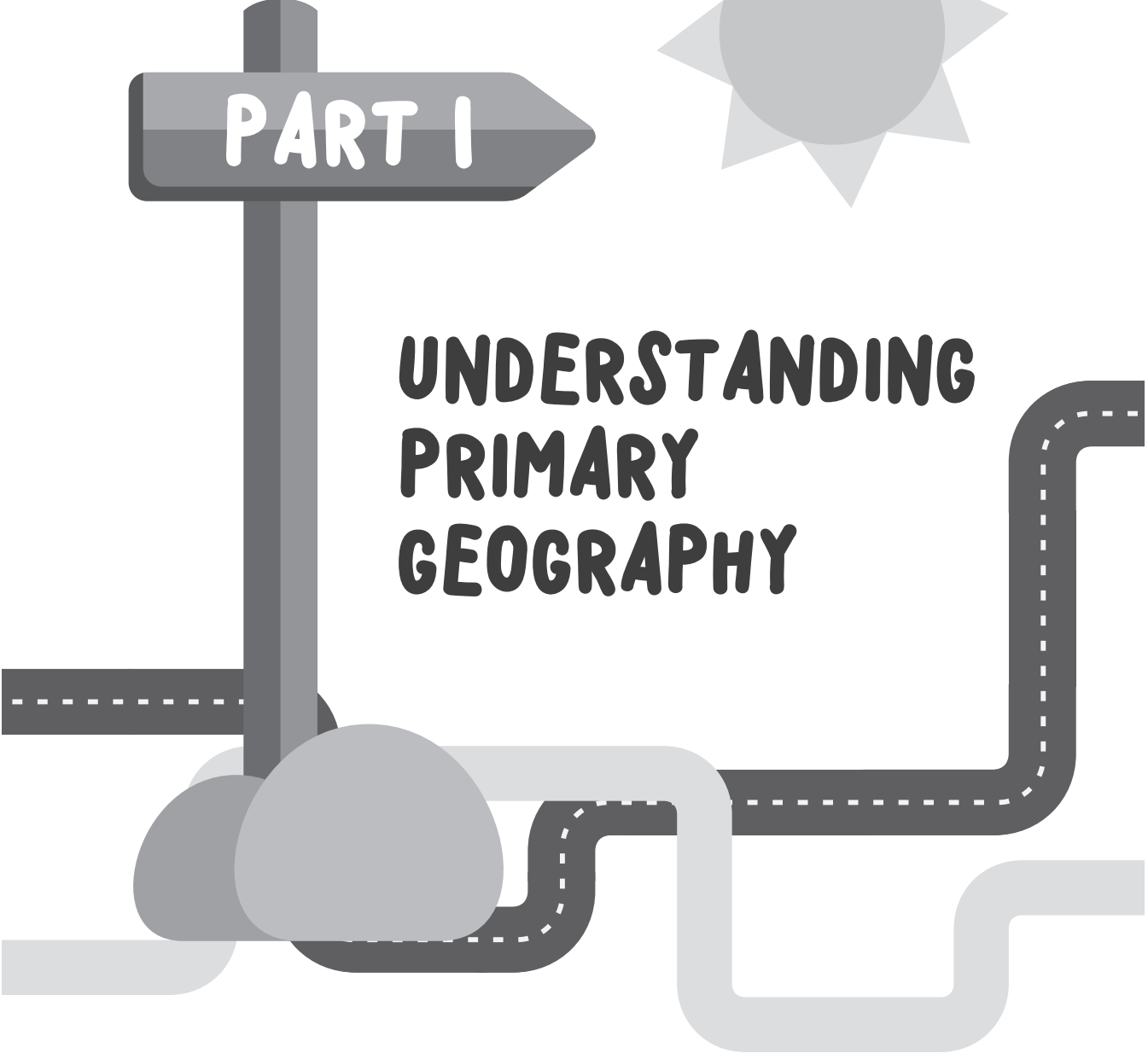
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PART I

**UNDERSTANDING
PRIMARY
GEOGRAPHY**





CHAPTER 1

GEOGRAPHY IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS



Chapter objectives

This chapter enables you to:

- develop an understanding of the situation of geography in primary schools;
- recognise some of the challenges and opportunities for primary geography;
- become aware of how primary geography's teaching and learning can be of high quality and enjoyed;
- reflect on your own experiences in learning geography;
- appreciate various contexts and influences affecting primary geography.

Introduction

Geography is 'the world discipline'.

(Bonnett, 2013, p. 7)

Geography is a fascinating, invigorating, inspiring and exciting subject to teach and learn (IGU-CGE, 2016). Understanding geography makes a difference to ourselves and others (Catling, 2012b). It is fundamental to our appreciation of and knowledge about the world in which we live, including our daily interactions and through the ways the world impacts on us, whether the causes are nearby or occur far away (Dorling and Lee, 2016). Geography studies the world as our home, from the local to the whole planet, and people's lives, activities and events across it; it examines what happens in the natural, physical environment, in human society and the interactions and impacts between the two. It concerns places, what they are, where they are, what happens, how they change, what the effects are – and above all, *why* and *where* and *what next?* It is descriptive, analytic and predictive. Geography investigates causes, influences, consequences, changes and short- and long-term impacts in our environments. It seeks to understand locations, distributions, patterns and processes to help us make sense of the world and to enable us to improve our decisions about what we do that will affect our planet both in our neighbourhood and globally.

The International Geographical Union Commission on Geographical Education's *International Charter on Geographical Education* (IGU-CGE, 2016, pp. 4–5) expresses the nature, importance and significance of geography for all of us at all ages in the following words.

Whether it is through appreciating the beauty of the Earth, the immense power of Earth-shaping forces or the often ingenious ways in which people create their living in different environments and circumstances, studying geography helps people to understand and appreciate how places and landscapes are formed, how people and environments interact, the consequences that arise from our everyday spatial decisions, and Earth's diverse and interconnected mosaic of cultures and societies.

Geography is therefore a vital subject and resource for 21st century citizens living in a tightly interconnected world. It enables us to face questions of what it means to live sustainably in this world. Geographically educated individuals understand human relationships and their responsibilities to both the natural environment and to others. Geographical education helps people to learn how to exist harmoniously with all living species.

Geographical investigation both satisfies and nourishes curiosity. Geographical perspectives help deepen understanding of many contemporary challenges such as climate change, food scarcity, energy choices, overexploitation of natural resources and urbanisation. Teaching geography serves several vital

educational goals. Building on people's own experiences, learning geography helps them to formulate questions, develop their intellectual skills and respond to issues affecting their lives. It introduces them not only to key 21st century skills but also to distinctive investigative tools such as maps, fieldwork and the use of powerful digital communication technologies such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

Geographers investigate the Earth's human and physical environments and within these explore what different places, areas and peoples have in common as well as the diversity of our world. Geography is interested in similarities and regularities, looking for patterns to explain what is distributed where, what happens and why, and it is stimulated by differences, what these are, where they occur, why they arise, and how they give us value – just think of the many different places, environments and communities you have been in and are involved with. Difference is a relational concept for geography (Martin, 2012). This means that in order to understand or appreciate similarities and differences we need to be able to relate features, lives, cultures, events and activities to others. What geography recognises is that the consistencies and the variety across our planet and its peoples and ecology are what provide such rich environments for our lives and for exploration and investigation. Relational understanding is vital for informative and transformative geographical learning. It is this that is fascinating and provides such stimulating opportunities for living and learning for us all.

From their earliest years children experience the world about them and begin to build an understanding of it. We have all done this. Both in their local neighbourhood and community and through their encounters with the wider world, each child's 'personal geography' amazes, enthralls and engages them from their first years – the constant encountering of the 'new' and the revisiting of familiar sites that fascinate, entice, or just provide what is wanted at particular times – because of the opportunities and the relational comparisons encountered. As we grow, explore for ourselves and encounter through many sources the 'wider world' – a little further locally or different places altogether, through television, the Internet, stories and travel – we discover the possibilities, the *affordances*, that places offer: We interrelate these and we make use of them in myriad ways. Geography is an aspect of our lives whether we realise and recognise it or not. It is always part of us and always affects us, from the places we love, to the food we eat, to where we want to go and how we feel about the concerns and issues that affect different environments, ourselves and everyone else. Geography is an amazing, essential and fundamental subject.

Throughout this book we provide a variety of insights into ways in which the teaching and learning of geography in primary schools can develop children's geographical awareness, understanding, knowledge, interest and enthusiasm. We begin by considering geography's situation in primary schools and what makes for stimulating and enjoyable teaching and learning.

The chapter concludes by noting that various initiatives and interests provide opportunities for geography's role and development. Some of these are generated by geography educators; others have arisen from emergent and preferred teaching practices, opportunities for development and government policies and priorities in different parts of the world.

Geography in the primary curriculum

Geography appears in one form or another at some point in the primary school curriculum in almost all countries. In some nations it is a named single subject, as in England and Ireland (Catling, 2013a; DES/NCCA, 1999; DfE, 2013; Pike, 2015). In very many countries geography is contained within a humanities and/or social sciences curriculum area, as in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa (Australian Curriculum, 2015; Lane, 2015; Maude, 2014; NZC, 2014; Wilmot and Irwin, 2015; Wassermann, 2017) or included in a social studies curriculum, as in Scotland, the USA, South Korea, Singapore, China, Brazil, Japan, Turkey and Oman, to name just a few (Al-Nofli, 2013; Bednarz *et al.*, 2014; Boyle-Baise and Zevin, 2014; Chang, 2014; Education Scotland, 2009; Halvorsen, 2013; Incekara, 2010; Lastória and Papadimitriou, 2012; Lee and Butt, 2014; Morgan, 2014a; Murayama, 2015; Shimura, 2015; Singapore Ministry of Education, 2012; Xuan *et al.*, 2015; Yoshida, 2015, 2017). It may be linked with one other subject, often history or science, as in Chile, Finland and Germany (Salinas-Silva *et al.*, 2015; Schmeinck, 2017; Tani, 2014). While in many countries geography may not appear in the primary curriculum until children are seven or nine years old, in some it is part of children's curriculum from age five or is initiated in their pre-school years, as in England (DfE, 2017). This presents a very mixed picture of geography in primary school curricula across the world. As an illustration of the variation in geography's curriculum provision in just one nation, in the UK geography appears differently in its four constituent jurisdictions: a named subject in England; an element in the humanities area of learning in Wales; in the social studies grouping in Scotland; and in Northern Ireland in 'The World Around Us' curriculum area (DfE, 2013; Donaldson, 2015; Education Scotland, 2009; CCEA, 2007). What is important to note, though, is that in each of the four UK contexts geography is an element of children's primary education.

Although geography is an element in primary curricula, there is little evidence around the world about the quality of its teaching. It is acknowledged in the USA, for example, that little is understood about how geography is taught, the contexts in which it is taught successfully, what children do and learn, and what understanding of geography teaching and learning elementary school teachers have (Battersby *et al.*, 2013). This has been recognised similarly as a concern in Australia (Erabus International, 2008). More research is certainly required into the nature, extent and quality of

primary geography teaching globally (Catling, 2013b). However, there is one country that has a long, but irregular, history of evaluating the quality of geography teaching in primary schools from the 1960s to the present. That country is England. It is worthwhile drawing on the evidence that has been gathered by school inspectors in recent years about good quality teaching and what some of the concerns are.

Characteristics of good quality geography teaching

Well-taught geography is stimulating and enjoyable, uses a variety of approaches to teaching, engages the children through topical matters and issues of interest that often relate to their experience, challenges their thinking, introduces them to new themes and ideas, and holds high expectations of them. These three scenarios for topics illustrate aspects of and approaches to primary geography that have been used in primary classes.

Children examine local planning issues and put forward development plans of their own.

The initiation and use of links with schools elsewhere, nationally and in other countries, involves children in exchanging local information and gaining insight into each other's lives and communities.

Investigating topical events when they occur (perhaps even suspending the current topic of study) – e.g. the earthquakes in New Zealand and Italy in 2016, cyclones affecting Queensland, Australia, and the Philippines in 2017, and the East African famine of 2017 – enables children to explore the natural processes involved, their impacts on people, and the responses locally and elsewhere to them.

A vital motivating factor for primary children is gathering material at first hand, using learning outside the classroom. This involves undertaking fieldwork in the school grounds, in the local area and further afield. The first quotation in the box below reinforces this approach and its value. Equally motivating is exchanging information with children elsewhere about their own localities. Children are fascinated and energised by investigating topical and dramatic events and issues, such as earthquakes, dramatic weather events and planning developments and disputes. Such investigations involve undertaking geographical enquiries and engage children in active learning. These practical approaches are indicated in the fourth quotation in the box, which notes children working independently, taking their own lines of investigation within a common topic. The second and third examples reinforce that there are alternative approaches that can be used to examine issues and investigate other places with primary children. The development of positive attitudes to learning in geography is evident.

Examples from England's school geography inspectors' perspectives on stimulating primary geography

During the first half of the autumn term, work in geography for [a class of 5–6-year-old] pupils was based on fieldwork in the local environment. They explored the human and physical features in and around the school and local area. Work on aerial photographs, Google Earth and digital photography determined which features were most common. They studied the advantages and disadvantages of human and physical features, discussed which were most prominent and whether it was better to live in an area with more human or more physical features. The unit culminated in the pupils selecting and improving a derelict local shop which formed the focus of their fieldwork. The fieldwork and the subsequent activities provided opportunities to explore environmental issues such as recycling, sustainability and graffiti and gave pupils the opportunity to learn about individual actions on the local area as well as the global community.

(Ofsted, 2011, p. 42)

In the last few years, more pupils had joined the school from different countries. [For a class of 6–7-year-olds] it was decided to study life in a Turkish village, as a child had recently arrived from there. The pupils interviewed her and used photographs, maps, atlases, weather forecast and clothes effectively to explore similarities and differences between their own locality and a locality in Turkey. The pupils had very specific knowledge and understanding. They were enthusiastic, interested and respectful of differences. They were also able to recognise that they had changed some of their views about Turkish weather, lifestyle and religion.

(Ofsted, 2011, p. 46)

[8–9-year-olds] pupils used drama to consider the impact of loggers and tourists on the native population of the Brazilian rainforest. Small groups of pupils presented their cameos and others listened carefully to the viewpoints.

(Ofsted, 2011, p. 46)

[A class of 10–11-year-olds], as part of the 'Blue Planet Unit' which focused on water and rivers, pupils were given the opportunity for self-directed learning, although the teacher provided an outline of the task. This set out clearly what pupils should do and ensured that it had a suitable geographical focus. The pupils were given about six weeks to complete the project.

This was done mainly in their own time, but if they finished work in lessons they were allowed to work on their project in school. The pupils were allowed in discussion with the teacher, to choose the area to research and report upon and the style in which they would produce the work. Examples seen included:

- *a standard report of European rivers including computer-generated data and descriptions and explanations related to the differing characteristics of these rivers*
- *a standard report on a single river*
- *a large poster display of the River Thames from source to mouth including details of flooding and river management*
- *a report on the River Danube which included a contour model of the centre of Budapest*
- *A DVD and note cards of a simple experiment made at home to produce a hydro-electric power machine and a written report setting out the advantages and disadvantages of hydro-electricity.*

The pupils spoke very enthusiastically about their projects and had very good understanding about their chosen topics. They really appreciated the freedom to decide what they wanted to learn within the framework given.

(Ofsted, 2011, pp. 15–16)

These examples illustrate several characteristics of high-quality primary geography teaching identified from England's primary school inspection reports (Bell, 2005; Catling, 2004a, 2013c; Iwaskow, 2013). These are that:

1. Geography teaching must be *purposeful*. This means that the children know and appreciate the point of what they are studying, recognise its relevance and value, and have their curiosity whetted and engaged.
2. Their geographical studies need to be *problem* oriented. Children are not to be limited to information gathering and description, but must be involved in investigating, analysing, evaluating and proposing possible, even most likely (if not always preferred), solutions.
3. Their geographical learning should be undertaken using a *geographical enquiry* approach. This involves children in asking, selecting and

structuring questions, working out how to investigate them, undertaking investigations using a variety of sources, and in drawing conclusions based on evidence and rigorous thinking.

4. Children undertake their geographical studies *cooperatively*. This should involve them in contributing independently pursued studies of a chosen problem or issue to a common topic, in which the focus is on learning with and through each other in paired and larger team investigations outdoors and in class.
5. Children's geographical enquiries must involve *active engagement with the world*. This may be through fieldwork locally or further away, involve investigations of topical issues, or by engaging with experts and invited visitors to school from whom they seek information, insight and understanding.
6. Children are stimulated by *engagement with good quality resources*. Such resources will be the stimulus of the outdoor environment, and opportunities to use photographs, maps, leaflets, postcards, rocks, newspapers, artefacts, news websites, resource packs, and the many other sources that can be drawn on, including through the Web. Along with high-quality geography teaching, informative resources can be the catalyst that makes the difference between satisfactory learning and high achievement by children.

Geography curriculum making

A further feature of the ways in which good and better quality teachers teach geography is their use of *curriculum making*. Curriculum making describes a 'liberated' approach to planning a geography topic that may last a half or a full school term (Catling, 2013c). The word *liberated* describes how teachers feel about and view their responsibility for planning their curriculum; it refers to teachers feeling re-energised to make decisions about what to include and how to organise their geography teaching, whether in a single subject or a cross-curricular context. Curriculum making endorses primary teachers to reclaim their *agency* in determining and managing their teaching – that is, they have control in their classroom decision-making. Underpinning this practice are several other features of good quality teaching. These concern their attitudes and organisational responsibility. The essential attitude of curriculum makers is that they are confident in themselves as teachers and as curriculum organisers and managers. They are equally confident in their children as learners and engage them actively in developing the class geography curriculum. This means that while the particular geography topics, and their sequencing, may be school plan or year group directed, the particulars in a topic's study are not closely

structured but developed by the teacher with the children's involvement. To enable this approach to be effective requires that primary teachers are committed to maintaining their professional development to enhance their subject and pedagogic understanding in geography (as well as in the other subjects they teach).

In making decisions about their geography curriculum, its topics and the approaches to study, teachers as curriculum makers recognise, draw on and engage their children's geographical experiences and awareness to develop their understanding, and in so doing help their children to enhance and extend what they already know, through engagement with new geographical knowledge and considerations. By involving children in developing their geography topics, these teachers ensure they construct their medium-term plans so as to take opportunities that arise during a topic. They are clear in their intentions and sense of direction. Their mapping out of a topic enables them to adapt content and approaches to develop children's geographical learning as the topic develops. These teachers make very effective use of their range of teaching skills and look to ways to extend and enhance these. Curriculum makers are open-minded but also rigorous, using discussion and debate through active dialogue to challenge children's ideas and proposals for lines of study, to question children's ways of working and the decisions they make about evidence and proposals, and to engage them in self and shared evaluation of their learning. This is reflected in the GA's primary geography quality mark awards in England and Wales (Owens, 2013) and in high-quality primary geography in Ireland (Pike, 2016).

These characteristics are supported by other findings (Catling, 2015a, 2017a) from an examination of high-quality teaching and learning identified by school inspectors across the humanities subjects (geography, history and religious education) in UK primary schools. This refers to the very best humanities teaching and learning found only in some five to ten per cent of primary schools. From an analysis of inspection reports, it was evident that teachers' subject knowledge was influential, particularly in terms of their appreciation of their pedagogic content knowledge, that is, their understanding of the geography they were teaching and their effective decisions about their approaches to its teaching. This analysis noted teachers' involvement of their children in identifying good lines of enquiry, the high expectations they hold of their children, and how they recognise and help children develop their understanding into new areas and more deeply. At the heart of this are the ways teachers convey enthusiasm for the subjects they teach and how they draw the relevance of what is studied to the children's attention. In such ways teachers develop children's geographical engagement, interests and deep learning (Eaude, 2018).



Reflective task

Consider some teaching of geography that you have seen in a pre-school or a primary school, whether taught in cross-curricular studies or as a separate subject. In pre-school this may have included looking at some aspects of local life and the area nearby.

Which *characteristics* of good quality geography teaching are you able to recall?

If the lesson was not of good quality, what would you want to improve? Consider how one or more of the *characteristics* in this section might be used to make such improvements. Why have you selected those ones?

Which *characteristics* you would like to apply to and develop in your own teaching of geography?

Geography in primary schools: limitations and opportunities

We have a very limited understanding of the state of geography teaching, learning and curriculum in primary schools around the world because there are few recent sources of evidence that provide a picture of the range and quality of geography in children's primary education. In the USA there is negligible evidence about geography's teaching during social studies lessons (Battersby, 2013; Boyle-Baise and Zevin, 2014; Segall and Helfenbein, 2008), just as little is known in Northern Ireland (Greenwood, 2013). Evidence about practices in primary school geography is important because it provides insight into those aspects of geography that are taught, how well taught the subject is and how children engage with it. The most informative reports that we have are found chiefly in school inspection reports in three of the UK's jurisdictions: England, Scotland and Northern Ireland (Education Scotland, 2013; ETI, 2014; Iwaskow, 2013; Ofsted, 2008a, 2011). In addition, there is limited evidence from Australia (Erebus International, 2008; Catling *et al.*, 2013). We need to be aware, though, that this evidence is not directly up to date; the need remains to seek the latest reports on the quality of and concerns about primary geography. There have been various studies of primary teachers' perspectives on their teaching of geography, and these provide some insight into the subject's teaching but they do not give independent insights into classroom practices (Bent *et al.*, 2017; Pike, 2015; Salinas-Silva *et al.*, 2015; Shimura, 2015; Wilmot and Irwin, 2015; Xuan *et al.*, 2015). There have also been reviews of teachers' geographical

knowledge (Catling, 2014b; Catling and Morley, 2013; Lee, 2018) and of geography in England's initial teacher education (Catling, 2017b). What emerges from school inspectors' reports is that much geography teaching is modest in its practices and accomplishments, and that there is a sizeable flipside to the characteristics of good quality primary geography identified above. These findings suggest concerns about the state of primary geography but indicate also directions for its development to increase the amount of good quality early years and primary geography teaching.

Constraints affecting primary geography teaching

Where geography is not well provided for or taught well, the concerns raised have been as follows.

- Too often geographical studies receive too little teaching time in primary classes with the result that teaching is often ineffective: children study superficially rather than in depth.
- Geography is much more frequently taught in an integrated or cross-curricular context, in which often it tends to be given only a minor role and not be readily identified by the teacher to the children or well thought through by themselves.
- Such an integrated or cross-curricular approach fails frequently to provide a clear focus on the key ideas, knowledge and skills of geography, resulting in weak geography and ineffective geographical learning.
- A core impediment for many teachers is their lack of or weak geographical knowledge and understanding, which inhibits their capacity to plan their geography curriculum and teaching satisfactorily, since they do not appreciate the key ideas and skills of geography and find it hard, even where they are aware of these, to apply them in the geography topics and content they teach, with resulting incoherence.
- This reflects the low status and priority given to geography in too many primary schools and classes, which weakens the opportunities for geographical learning.
- Geography teaching may often not engage children's interest – and even where its topics may do, children remain unaware that there is geography in what they are studying.
- Children's personal geographies and the everyday geographies that affect them are drawn on only to a limited extent where they are recognised at all: children can remain disconnected from their studies.
- The application of geographical enquiry and investigation is lacking in much geography teaching, which tends to focus on using limited information sources to provide descriptive accounts of what is read about or seen in pictures used in a topic, in which stereotypes and misunderstanding can be reinforced.

- Geography topics have been focused too heavily on studies of places, environmental concerns and skills, with too little emphasis given to physical and human geography.
- Geographical studies can be overshadowed by a focus on literacy and numeracy in a geography topic rather than be properly focused on geographical understanding and learning.
- Opportunities for geographical fieldwork and outdoor learning are very limited, if used, and may be constrained by school leadership decisions as much as by teachers' lack of experience, interest or determination.
- In too much primary geography teaching, teachers either rely too heavily on closely structured published resources, from worksheets to textbooks, which they follow unquestioningly and do not adapt to their children's context and needs, or they simply use web-found sources which they do not question and for which they set simple comprehension questions, indicating that they do not have the skills to plan their own topics or engage children in geographical analysis, evaluation and thinking in an effective way.
- Many children develop little deep understanding in their geographical learning because of a lack of progression across a year, or between years, in the topics they study, often only repeating skills or information they have met and used before, with the result that their learning is frequently superficial.
- Assessment is under-played, with records noting little more than the geography topics covered by children, resulting in negligible reference to children's learning of and progression in understanding key geographical ideas, content knowledge and skills: this inhibits planning for progression in their learning.

While many primary teachers may teach geography just about adequately, they lack the self-belief and confidence to teach the subject effectively, finding it hard to challenge, stretch and excite their children about geography, inhibiting what children can achieve: this relates to their limited subject understanding. A contributing factor is that very many primary teachers lack any or have very limited initial or in-service education in geography and its teaching, resulting in too many teachers not having the opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills to teach geography adequately. This lets their children down, who have an entitlement in most parts of the world to good and high-quality geography teaching.

Approaches to improve primary geography teaching

Although this is a challenging scenario, in many primary schools there are teachers whose approaches to teaching geography benefit and enhance children's geographical learning. They aim for and often achieve the

high-quality characteristics noted in the previous section. Their approaches include the following.

- Valuing and enjoying teaching geography, fostered by drawing particularly on their colleagues who are passionate about the subject and its learning, and communicating this to their children.
- Ensuring they and their colleagues are well-informed about the nature and content of geography and that they can maintain their subject understanding of and extend their capabilities in its teaching through consistent personal professional development, particularly in school.
- Making adequate provision of time for geography teaching in the curriculum, whether as a single subject or integrated in cross-curricular topics, and where this happens for geography to be identified and visible to the children and to take its fair share as a lead subject in topics.
- Planning geography topics to ensure a balance between the different aspects of geography, including its study of locations and places, its physical and human aspects, concern and care for the environment, and the skills to use and understand maps and to engage in fieldwork.
- Planning topics that involve the development of children's geographical understanding, knowledge and skills both within a topic and between a class's topics across a year to provide for children's progression in geographical learning.
- Rebalancing planning from overly teacher-directed and led topics to a greater involvement of children in developing lines of investigation and approaches within topics, and perhaps at times to suggest geographical topics for study themselves.
- Recasting approaches to teaching to involve more fully or entirely in a geography topic an enquiry approach that requires the children to identify and select questions, to seek evidence to respond to these, to evaluate this, and to draw conclusions and perhaps make recommendations.
- Using fieldwork and outdoor learning consistently to motivate children and to extend and enhance geography teaching and learning.
- Incorporating problem-solving and thinking skills approaches in geography planning and teaching, which engage children in critical questioning and reflection on their geographical enquiries and learning.
- Broadening and using a wide variety of teaching approaches and activities to enhance geographical learning.
- Making greater and more varied use of digital and other technologies and websites to engage and involve children in geographical learning.
- Involving children in practical projects, particularly of local interest and value, and which might contribute to the community, and to take up opportunities provided by a range of topical events and activities around the world.

- Ensuring that children can connect with and appreciate their geographical topics and studies as relevant to their lives, experiences and futures, understanding why what they study matters.
- Accessing good quality and current geographical resources, used thoughtfully and critically.
- Providing thoughtful formative and summative assessments of the children's work in geography, which involves making good use of focused and rigorous questioning and encouraging children's self-assessment of their learning and next steps in learning, and recording simply and clearly children's achievements, needs and progress in their geographical learning.

Enjoying geography teaching and learning

Enjoyment is the birthright of every child (DfES, 2003, p. 3). For many, the purpose of a primary curriculum is to develop children's sense of wonder and curiosity about and respect and care for places, people, cultures and environments throughout the world. These aims allow teachers to develop their curriculum in creative, imaginative and stimulating ways, resulting in many classes in enriched learning experiences for children. Geography is very well placed to realise this, affording many opportunities for children to be active participants in their learning through its rich and diverse subject matter and engaging its enquiry-based approach. To enjoy their learning, children need to be excited and inspired by what they do, necessitating a creative and flexible approach to teaching. Geography offers all this and, to enable it, provides highly relevant and inspiring subject matter (Pike, 2016).

When asked what they remember about geography at primary school, people tend to recall a diverse set of experiences, ranging from colouring maps to eating sandwiches in the rain on a beach during an excursion. When asked what the truly enjoyable and memorable learning experiences that they had were, responses, if offered at all, invariably refer to being outside and carrying out one form or another of experiential, interactive fieldwork, usually connected to an enquiry of some kind which had obvious purpose and relevance. People talk about how this stimulated their enjoyment of the countryside, generated an interest that led to work in planning or opened their eyes to how we pollute but can look after our streets and urban places. Alongside the content of their fieldtrip, pleasure in being out of the classroom in the environment clearly was stimulating.

Geography teaching that informs, stimulates and motivates children, and which really involves them in their learning, is at the heart of enjoyable learning, as the approaches in the box above illustrate. What is essential is to make the geographical experiences you provide purposeful, meaningful and relevant to the children and, equally important, enjoyable. If the children enjoy the activities, they will be engaged and committed to them and effective geographical learning will take place as a matter of course (Reynolds, 2014).

Creating enjoyable geography learning and teaching involves a range of skills and processes, and a commitment to having and applying an open and creative mind (Mackintosh, 2007; Pike, 2016; Scoffham, 2017b). It necessitates flexibility and a willingness to take risks and make mistakes occasionally and to learn with the children. It is about giving children permission and creating opportunities for them to find their own enquiry path, and to explore and discover issues and situations that are real and relevant for them. It involves, inevitably, using a range of appropriate resources from the sophisticated, such as geographic information systems (GIS), to the basic, such as some string and pieces of paper to show an unfolding journey in a story book, and developing motivating and inspiring ideas in a creative and open-minded way. And it requires understanding the geography you teach in ways to which your children relate and from which they gain insight.



In the classroom

Getting into geography with a bear hunt

The classic and hugely popular picture story book, *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* (Rosen and Oxenbury, 1989), has been a stunning stimulus for geography teaching. Children in a class of 4–6-year-olds were entranced with the *swishy, swoshy grass* and the *splashy, sploshy water*, subliminally learning about direction and developing their geographical vocabulary as they practised acting out going *over, under, into* and *through* all sorts of exciting natural features: rivers, mud, caves, forests and snowstorms. Making a 3D model map of the area travelled through in the story enhanced the learning opportunities for one group as the children navigated their way around the increasingly familiar landforms and natural features. For another group, props, including a map, binoculars and a compass, provided the stimulus for planning a 'journey' in the playground using questions such as 'Where are we going?', 'Which way do we go?' and 'How do we know it's the right way?' To assess their understanding and recall of the story, as well as developing their spatial awareness, these children painted picture maps of the bear hunt, identifying and depicting individual features and their locations. Encouraging children to talk about their map as they created it, using prompt questions, such as 'What' is that feature?', 'Which way do you go?', 'What is it like there?', and, more openly, 'Tell me about your map', involved them in describing and explaining what they knew and understood.



Reflective task

Think back to your geography classes at school. Did you enjoy geography? What has stayed with you about its teaching and what you learned? Why is this? Would you have wanted it to be different or to be even better?

Can you recall your geographical learning from your primary school? What do you remember? Did you realise that you were taught geography? Why do you think this is so?

As a primary teacher, you will teach geography. How do you feel about this and why? What would help you to teach geography well? What would provide the children with memorable learning experiences? Make brief notes for your future reference of your views.

Initiatives in education

Appreciating geography teaching in primary schools requires awareness and understanding of the changes in and evolution of the primary curriculum, as well as of other matters affecting primary schools and younger children's education. Here we outline some influences that are directly relevant to primary geography. It is essential to keep alert to developments in the curriculum and schooling, whether government or locally initiated, and to consider how they might and can affect geography teaching and children's geographical learning in primary schools. Some of these initiatives concern how we might consider the purpose of primary education, while others focus directly on geography education and may, if not immediately, have an impact on geography in the primary curriculum. The first influence we note concerns what many governments now see as centrally important – that is, setting the context for school learning – or, to put it alternatively, providing aims and purposes for education. We discuss, second, the matter of geographical knowledge before noting matters of government, state or local geography curriculum guidance. These are followed by reference to several other educational matters. Several are developed in later chapters.

Contexts for learning

Countries around the world set children's school lives and learning in wider educational and social contexts by specifying the national intended aims and outcomes for children's schooling. For instance, one approach has been to set goals for children to develop towards during their schooling.

In Australia these goals have been identified as: successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens (MCEETYA, 2008, pp. 8–9). You might seek out such statements in your own country. Many of the points that were made about these three areas are reflected in other countries' intentions for schooling in society, and in debates about primary education (Alexander, 2010). In view of what has been presented in this chapter, it is pertinent to dwell on this aspect of educational intentions and to say something about each one.

A key element in becoming a *successful learner* is that children play an active role in their learning, develop their abilities to think logically with increasing depth of understanding, to gather and evaluate evidence thoughtfully, applying disciplinary knowledge, and to be resourceful and innovative in problem-solving approaches and tasks. Children should make consistent use of their developing numeracy and literacy skills, alongside applying digital technologies across their studies, not least to analyse, evaluate and communicate their learning effectively. They should develop the ability to work independently as well as alongside others collaboratively in teams. Important in their learning is being motivated by what they do in school in order to achieve their potential. A core purpose in this is to enable children to make sense of the world and to understand and appreciate how things have come to work as they do and be as they are. Not just this last point but clearly all the others contribute to primary children's high-quality geographical learning, resonating with the points made about good geography teaching and learning.

To become *confident and creative individuals* children need to be self-aware, to build their self-identity and to have self-worth, to believe in and be confident in themselves. Their physical and mental health are as important as their emotional, spiritual and cognitive well-being, and these are engendered through optimism about the future, evolving a set of personal values that include respect for others and empathy, and their sense of living satisfying lives. This includes becoming aware of, understanding and considering the challenges in the world and exploring possible mitigations and resolutions. Building the confidence to be enterprising and resilient, to be creative and take opportunities, and to develop decision-making skills and take responsibility for their actions are important qualities for children to develop. Each of these can support and be enhanced through primary children's geographical learning.

By being *active and informed citizens*, children appreciate the value of diversity in their local, national and international communities, and act with ethical integrity. They will hold to the values of democracy, the rule of law, justice and equality, and have respect for all people and for natural and social environments. As developing responsible local and global citizens, they will act for the common good, to sustain and improve society and the

natural and human created world. Geographical learning plays a central and fundamentally important role in fostering such citizenship.

Various aspects of these three aims and goals for education underpin and are explored and illustrated in the rest of this book.

Debating knowledge for the primary geography curriculum

Teaching geography has always involved developing primary children's knowledge of the subject; it would be pointless if it did not do so. Across the years the prioritised content of primary school geography has evolved universally, if not contemporaneously, and to emphasise similar content. In the first part of the twentieth century there was an emphasis on regional geography, with children introduced to information about the continents and a selection of nations around the world, as well as some aspects of local geography. By the middle of the century in a number of countries there had been a shift in emphasis to investigations in local environments and studies of particular aspects of the physical and natural world in other places, in some nations using a sequentially concentric approach across year groups from the local to the global in geography. However, some felt that world knowledge – for instance, of continents, oceans and countries – had become less important. Towards the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, moves were made to rebalance these different aspects of the subject. It was appreciated that children needed to develop a factual base of information about the world, to appreciate the importance of maps and atlases in studying and finding out about the world, to develop their understanding of places and of aspects of human and physical geography, and to appreciate such core concepts in geography as location, scale, place, spatial distribution and connections, and environmental processes and diversity, as well as undertake fieldwork investigations locally and further afield. In different ways these aspects of subject information, key areas of content and the core ideas in geography were written into curriculum guidelines in countries like England, Australia, the USA and South Africa (ACARA, 2011; DBE, 2011; Halvorsen, 2013; DfE, 2013; Heffron and Downes, 2012).

Debates about the nature and importance of subject knowledge and the school curriculum are nothing new. They have always considered what ought to be taught and have focused on concerns about which aspects of a subject's matter should be prioritised and emphasised in teaching and learning (Winter, 2011). The debate engages with what is meant by 'knowledge' in the context of the school curriculum. To what extent is it about the factual information which children should 'know'? Does a focus on 'information' sideline other ideas about curriculum knowledge that should be discussed? Does curriculum knowledge cover the main areas of content a

subject should cover, such as urbanism, agribusiness and climate change effects in geography, or is it about deeper subject ideas, such as location, scale, place, spatial processes and environmental management, or does it encompass both? This debate has been given impetus by educational sociologists who are interested in knowledge specialisation and what is termed 'powerful knowledge' (Young, 2008; Young and Muller, 2016). The phase 'the knowledge turn' (Lambert, 2014) has been coined to encapsulate this move into a renewed debate about the nature of school knowledge. In particular, it has been taken up in geography education (Butt, 2017; Firth, 2011, 2012, 2018; Lambert, 2018; Maude, 2016, 2017, 2018; Morgan, 2014b; Young *et al.*, 2014), although it is not an uncontested or unproblematic focus (Catling, 2014a; Maude, 2017; Uhlenwinkel, 2017).

The notion of 'powerful knowledge' refers to 'the language, norms and ways of thinking' such as the core ideas and conceptual understanding of school subjects like geography (Butt, 2017, p. 17). It is recognised that subjects such as geography are not static but evolve and have historical antecedents. They are sanctioned by their academic communities who provide a sense of and limits to what counts as knowledge in the subject (Morgan, 2014b). In England, 'powerful knowledge' has been of interest particularly in the geography education community, where debates about what is 'powerful' about and within geography are linked to examining what should be included in the school geography curriculum (Dolan, 2019). To an extent, this concerns justification of the subject as much as internal debates about what should be the focus of geography education in primary and secondary schooling.

In primary geography there has been limited debate about the idea of knowledge and what conceptions of knowledge should underpin, or provide the content for, the geography curriculum (Dolan, 2019). One approach to the debate has been to argue that children bring into school their own powerful geographical knowledge from their experience and that this is important in enabling the development of their geographical understanding in the primary curriculum (Catling and Martin, 2011). Where governments, or others, attempt to define what might be the 'essential knowledge' that children should develop through schooling, it has been suggested that a clear distinction needs to be drawn between 'inert knowledge', meaning factual information, and 'applied knowledge' which focuses on understanding geographical *patterns, relations and generalisations* which build on previous experience and new encounters to *enable us to make sense of the world in new ways* (Scoffham, 2011, p. 126). Applied knowledge is argued to be 'powerful knowledge' and proposes that children's evolving understanding of a subject like geography must be built around its key 'big ideas' and main concepts and aspects of study (GA, 2009; Martin, 2013a; Young *et al.*, 2014). This is not to say that factual information is unimportant; indeed, encountering and knowing factual information in the context of geographical aspects such as river studies, earthquakes

and volcanoes, tourism and trade is very helpful in enabling understanding of these areas of the subject and the underpinning of ideas such as scale, environmental processes and place, which provide coherence to geography. To investigate and examine them without information and examples would create a fruitless geography education.

Discussion of the knowledge that primary children should learn in their geographical studies is important and will continue; it is never concluded. It is being usefully developed in geography around the idea that what is important is not so much the teasing out of the key ideas or areas of content, let alone the relevant information, as to how such knowledge can help primary and secondary age children (Maude, 2016, 2017, 2018) apply their geographical knowledge to understand the world. This realigned focus within the notion of 'powerful knowledge' may be more helpful for thinking about the knowledge that matters in primary geography. Maude proposes five types of knowledge that he considers powerful for geographical learners of all ages. These are summarised as follows.

- Knowledge that provides children with 'new ways of thinking about the world', helping them to engage with geographical ideas such as, place, environment and interconnections during their investigations and build their understanding of geographical aspects such as, weather, energy, city, country and resource.
- Knowledge that provides children with powerful ways to analyse, explain and understand the world, using geography's analytic and explanatory concepts, such as spatial distribution and environmental processes, to help children apply what they learn to begin to make geographical generalisations, such as that trade occurs between people and companies at local and international levels.
- Knowledge that gives children some power over their own knowledge, in that importantly it encourages them to question, evaluate and critique what they come across and learn about the world.
- Knowledge that enables children to follow and participate in debates on significant local, national and global issues, fostering their opportunities for an increasingly full engagement in conversations and consultations as citizens.
- Knowledge about the world, which builds on, deepens and takes them beyond their personal knowledge to stimulate their curiosity about elsewhere and foster their sense of wonder at the world, helping them see their own and others' connections and interdependence.

Maude is arguing that it is not the particular knowledge in the subject that makes its knowledge powerful, but that it is what you do with what you learn and understand. It is about applying knowledge, and it concerns taking a creative and critical stance in gaining and using it. This links with a

much bigger debate about the purpose of primary education (Alexander, 2010) and, indeed, the role of geography in primary schooling. It connects with the section above on contexts for learning.



Reflective task

Reflecting on the sections on 'Contexts for learning' and 'Debating knowledge for the primary geography curriculum', consider these two questions and the subsequent request.

- What types of knowledge do you think it is important for primary children to understand through their geographical studies?
- How will this knowledge help them become successful and creative learners?

Suggest three ways in which you would want children to undertake their studies in geography and explain why you have selected these.

National requirements for geography in the primary curriculum

National frameworks or guidance set out what governments want children to learn through the curriculum. In some countries the primary school curriculum may be set by the state or locally. You need to be aware of such requirements or if there is none, and it is a matter for the school to decide. It is important, therefore, that you find out about the national or local curriculum requirements or guidance for geography in primary education. Examples of national curricula and guidance websites are listed in Appendix 1.

Some governments require all or only state-financed primary schools to include geography as a named subject in their curriculum, such as in England (DfE, 2013; Lambert and Hopkin, 2014). Other countries specify a curriculum area such as social studies or social sciences for inclusion in primary children's school curriculum. Geography will be found, if included, in a social studies/sciences curriculum area, although which aspects of geography are listed may be briefer than in a single subject specification. Indeed, the social studies/sciences curriculum may include a number of subjects, such as history, economics, civics and sociology, alongside geography, or it

may be organised around a variety of themes, such as those put forward by the National Council for Social Studies in the USA, which include ‘people, places and environments’, ‘global connections’ and ‘production, distribution and consumption’, all of which involve geographical studies (Brophy *et al.*, 2013; NCSS, 2010), although these may or may not have taken account of the geography standards set out separately by geography educators for the states and schools in the USA to use to guide geography curriculum construction (Heffron and Downs, 2012). The geography standards in the USA provide greater detail than the geography national curriculum for schools in England. In whichever national context, it is important to know what is specified and whether this must be taught or is for guidance, although guidance from national or state education departments might imply core consideration for a primary school’s curriculum.

Furthermore, it is important that you seek out advice about understanding and teaching primary geography. Some local and national governments provide these, but they will be supplied by national associations of geography teachers. As an example, in the UK the Geographical Association promotes geographical education at all levels. It recognises the importance of primary geography, particularly through the professional development provision on its website and through its publications. Its manifesto, *A Different View* (GA, 2009), affirms geography’s place in the school curriculum, argues for its value, emphasises links with children’s experience and of learning in the real world out of the classroom, focuses on the world today and about alternative futures, and is inspirational in illustrating the power of geography in our lives. The various geographical and geography education societies in the USA make the point in their joint booklet, *Why Geography is Important* (Adams, 2012), that geography really does matter in our lives. This publication argues that geography helps us to understand and appreciate a range of matters, including globalisation, diversity, location, uses of geospatial technologies, energy, climate change, environmental hazards, resource management, infrastructure, employment and national and international security. It concludes by giving geography a personal context, stating that *geographic knowledge is fundamental to reaching our personal and societal goals, and in attaining a higher quality of life* (Adams, 2012, p. 15).

There may well be national and commercial texts and websites that provide advice about teaching geography with primary children. These may provide topics and structures for different year groups or refer simply to the primary stage of schooling, leaving you to make decisions relevant to your school and class. They can guide you to relevant resources and provide lesson outlines and/or suggested teaching approaches, including links with other subjects. You can complement national advice by searching internationally for further advice – for instance, from global and national organisations that are engaged in charitable and commercial international and global activities. Some are listed at the end of this chapter.

Pre-school or early years learning

Pre-school, or early years, provision for children focuses on a number of aspects of early childhood. These include developing their social skills and lives, initiating their awareness of the capabilities and skills involved in school learning and providing a stimulating and well-provided indoor and outside environment in which their learning may take place through play, story telling and reading and organised engaging activities and provided resources. Early education is underpinned by a set of values to foster positive ways in which children can live their lives. For example, in Australia, these values include the creation of a mutually respectful and responsible society and an equality-based future for all that is mutually caring and empowering (DEEWR, 2009, 2010). They can lead to the development of the following outcomes for pre-school education.

- Holding a strong sense of identity.
- Being connected to and contributing to their world.
- Having a strong sense of well-being.
- Being effective communicators.
- Being confident and involved learners.

Such statements of values and outcomes about pre-school children 'being, becoming and belonging' as people in society promote a perspective that applies across societies, nations and education in early childhood. Elements of geographical understanding and appreciation support learning in all these outcomes, although the second may appear to have the most obvious subject connections. In England (DfE, 2017) and Wales (Welsh Government, 2015) in the UK, the statutory frameworks for 3–5-year-olds' learning include 'Understanding the world' and 'Knowledge and understanding of the world', which contain geographical elements about the children's own local area and its features, similarities and differences with other places, directions and maps, and changes in the environment. Through such experiences to help children begin to develop their awareness and understanding of the world, they are initiated into aspects of geographical experience and learning, even though geography may never, of course, be mentioned directly. For such young children geography is an implicit aspect of their lives and inevitably part of their learning.

Sustainable schools initiatives

Increasingly, schools around the world are engaged in sustainable initiatives. Sustainability education is intended to help children understand the need to care for and manage the natural and human created environment,

as well as to support schools and their communities to become sustainable. This can be for people and families as much as for the places where they live. It involves also developing a global awareness and perspective. Many primary schools have developed whole-school approaches, often linked with the geography and science curriculum to help children learn through real-life learning experiences. Sustainability initiatives have also been used by governments to improve schools' resource and facilities management. These include the water, waste, energy, products and materials used within the school, as well as landscape design. Sustainability is a key aspect of geography, and there are good examples of ways in which primary schools and teachers have used practical approaches to stimulate children's creativity to identify practical ways that sustainability can be improved and demonstrated within the school and communities. Geography contributes strongly to these.

Fostering citizenship

Geography has a long history of considering ways in which it engages with citizenship linked, for instance, with children's evolving identity, their activities in and connections to local and more distant communities, and their consideration of, respect for and interactions with others (Stoltman, 1990). This means that geography is particularly suitable for developing citizenship understanding and involvement with primary children. In considering how people relate as citizens to their localities and to activities that directly affect places, geography examines people's environmental attitudes and behaviour, and explores the results of their decisions that affect places (Boyle-Baise and Zevin, 2014). However, citizenship is broader than its environmental interests. It is more than local; it is global as well. Citizenship recognises and appreciates that children are growing up in diverse local, national and global communities. Children begin in geography to learn respect for diversity and difference, as well as to seek what is shared and common between peoples and communities. As a subject it can help children develop their sense of belonging and their identity, which are often linked to place and communities. Primary children can begin to recognise that others may hold different perspectives and views from their own, and learn to discuss and respect these, even if they disagree.

Learning outside the classroom

Outdoor education is popular and well developed in many parts of the world, although it is neglected in others. The UK, the USA and Australia are generally recognised as international leaders in outdoor education and

related fields such as nature tourism. This has come to be thought more important for schools to take up since in their home lives increasing numbers of children spend less time outside (Louv, 2005; Pickering, 2017). Primary school outdoor education includes such activities as fieldtrips, museum visits and time spent away from school for a couple of days or for up to a week or more. Such activities are important for geographical and environmental education, alongside history and science education. The importance for geographical learning and teaching lies in the opportunities that fieldwork provides as a highly motivating and engaging approach to learning and understanding geography.

Developing children's general capabilities and skills

Internationally, the view is that all subjects must contribute to teaching the general capabilities and skills children need to enhance their learning. Indeed, general capabilities and skills are essential in all subjects, because all subjects make use of them in various ways. Such capabilities and skills are:

- literacy capability;
- numeracy skills and competence;
- information and communication technology (ICT) skills and application;
- critical and creative thinking;
- personal and social capability;
- ethical behaviour in relation to oneself and others;
- intercultural understanding.

Developing these capabilities and skills should be through the context of the specific ideas, skills and content of the subject. This applies for geography whether as a stand-alone subject or within social studies/sciences.



Practical task

Select one of general capabilities and skills. Identify a number of aspects of that capability and skill, consulting sources if you need to do so.

Have a particular age group of primary children in mind.

How do you think you could develop your chosen capability and skill through geography teaching?

List some activities and approaches in geography that you think will help your group of primary children to develop that capability and skill.



Key points

This chapter has:

- noted the opportunities and challenges for geographical learning and teaching in primary schools;
- illustrated the enjoyment that can come through and from geographical learning;
- identified a number of developments, initiatives and priorities that influence or affect geography in primary schools.

Moving on

Keep abreast of the curriculum initiatives by government and other agencies and organisations concerning developments in primary geography. Look out for reports in the press. Make a note of geography curriculum developments and changes. Use your own and other nations' websites to help you. Several are listed in Appendix 1.

Further reading

Many books, chapters, journal articles and websites will help you to develop your understanding and appreciation of primary geography and its teaching. The following texts debate, stimulate interest in and provide ideas for teaching and learning geography with early years and primary age children.

Brophy, J, Alleman, J and Halvorsen, A-L (2013) *Powerful Social Studies for Elementary Students* (3rd edn). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

Catling, S (2011) Children's Geographies in the Primary School, in Butt, G (ed.) *Geography, Education and the Future*. London: Continuum, pp. 15–29.

Catling, S (ed.) (2015b) *Research and Debate in Primary Geography*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Dolan A (2019) *Powerful Primary Geography: A toolkit for 21st century learning*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Geographical Association (2009) *A Different View: A Manifesto from the Geographical Association*. Sheffield: Geographical Association. Available at: www.geography.org.uk/adifferentview

Gersmehl, P (2014) *Teaching Geography* (3rd edn). New York: The Guildford Press.

Marsh, C and Hart, C (2011) *Teaching the Social Sciences and Humanities in the Australian Curriculum*. (6th edn) Melbourne: Pearson.

- Martin, F (2006) *Teaching Geography in Primary Schools: Learning How to Live in the World*. Cambridge: Chris Kington Publishing.
- Maude, A (2018) Geography and powerful knowledge: A contribution to the debate. *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 27(2), pp. 179-190.
- Palmer, J and Birch, J (2004) *Geography in the Early Years*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Reynolds, R (2014) *Teaching Humanities and the Social Sciences in the Primary School* (3rd edn). South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Scoffham, S (ed.) (2010) *Primary Geography Handbook*. Sheffield: Geographical Association.
- Scoffham, S (ed.) (2017b) *Teaching Geography Creatively* (2nd edn). Abingdon: Routledge.

See the magazine *Primary Geography*, published by the UK's Geographical Association (GA) three times a year, available to primary school members of the GA (see the GA website).

Useful websites

- Association of Geography Teachers of Ireland: <http://agti.ie/>
- Australian Geography Teachers' Association (AGTA) – GeogSpace: www.agta.asn.au
- Canadian Council for Geographic Education: www.cangeoeducation.ca
- Geographical Association: Early Years and Primary Area (UK): www.geography.org.uk/eyprimary
- Geography for Kids: www.kids-world-travel-guide.com/geography-for-kids.html
- Geography Teachers Association of Singapore: <https://gtasg.wordpress.com/>
- National Council for Geographic Education (USA): <http://ncge.org/>; www.natgeo-kids.com/uk/category/discover/geography/
- National Council for the Social studies (USA): www.socialstudies.org/
- National Geographic Society (USA): www.nationalgeographic.com/
- Social Sciences online (New Zealand): <http://ssol.tki.org.nz/>
- South African Geography Teachers Association: <http://sagta.org.za>