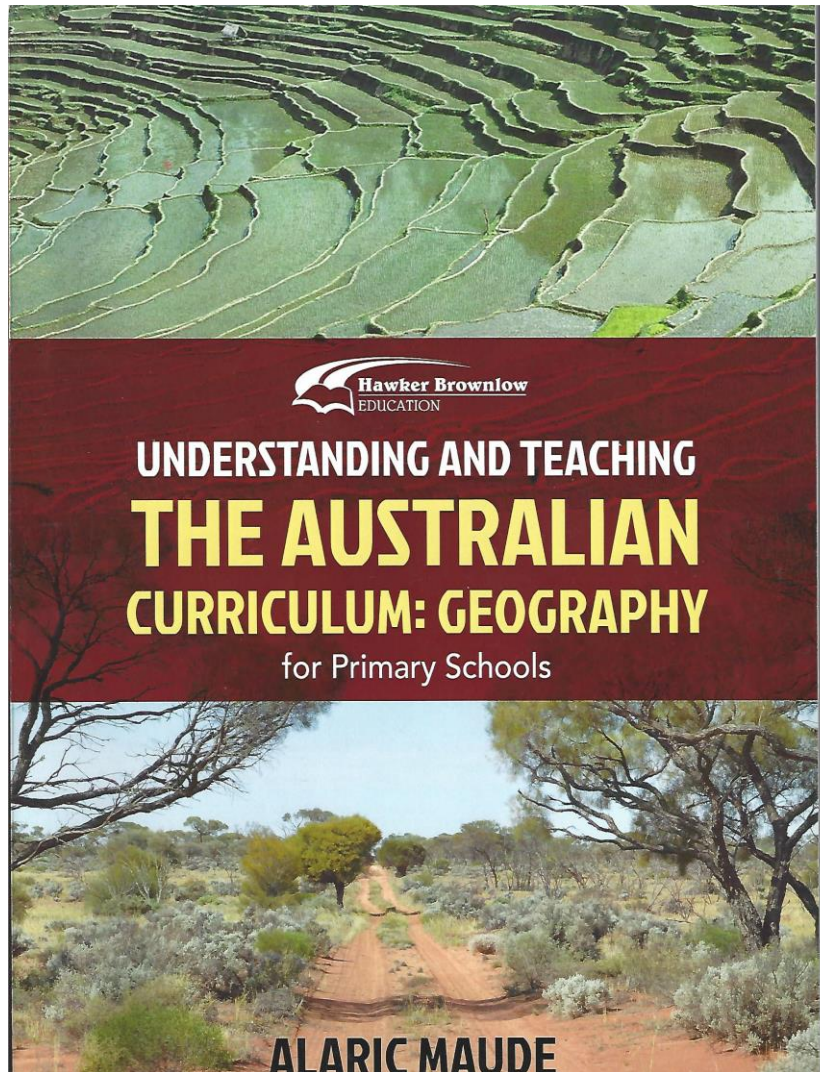


Understanding and Teaching the Australian Curriculum: Geography for Primary Schools



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Professor Alaric Maude's book, *Understanding and teaching The Australian Curriculum: Geography for Primary Schools*, is a timely resource that meets an important need - to familiarize primary school teachers with the distinctive nature of the discipline of Geography, its core concepts and skills. This is of particular importance in the Australian context where Geography is being introduced as a discrete discipline into primary schools for the first time. Prior to the release of the Australian Curriculum: Geography in 2013, geographical concepts and skills were integrated as a component of SOSE (Studies of Society and Environment), Humanities or Social Studies in different states and territories. While primary school teachers will have taught Geography in the past within an integrated context, many remain unsure about the nature of the discipline, how it differs from the other social sciences and how the discipline should be best taught. Many Primary school teachers will not have studied the Geography in upper secondary school and even fewer will have completed undergraduate units in Geography during their university training. As Professor Maude explains, the book has been designed to help Primary teachers better understand the discipline of Geography and gain confidence in interpreting and teaching the Australian Curriculum. It is hoped that this will result in better teaching and Primary students who are able to "think and practice Geography beyond the mechanical" (p. iii)

Understanding and teaching The Australian Curriculum: Geography for Primary Schools is not a traditional textbook but rather a resource that pre-service and in-service Primary teachers can use to gain an insight into the distinctive nature of Geography, its methods and ways of thinking. The book goes beyond basic explanations and sets high expectations for the quality of Geography instruction in primary schools.

Chapter 1 describes the discipline of Geography and its contribution to Primary education. In this chapter Maude provides a clear explanation of the nature of Geography and outlines the seven key concepts and core aims of the Australian Curriculum. He addresses teachers' existing conceptions of the discipline and attempts to challenge misconceptions and broaden narrow views of the Geography by underlining the diverse aims of the Australian Curriculum. The chapter also provides a justification of Geography's inclusion as a discrete discipline in the Australian Curriculum and an overview of the contribution of Geography to the education of young Australians. The

importance of recognizing children's own geographical knowledge, perceptions and experiences – a theme that is further developed later the book - is also discussed in this chapter. Building on students' ideas and experiences, Maude argues, is one way of ensuring that school Geography remains dynamic, relevant and engaging for students.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed discussion of the ways in which the knowledge and understanding strand is developed through the curriculum (Foundation to Year 6). This discussion is supported by a series of tables in the Appendix which map the development of understanding of each of the core concepts - place, space, environment, interconnection, sustainability, scale and change - from foundation (Kindergarten) to Year 6. These mapping tables will be of interest to both Primary teachers and researchers with an interest in knowledge/skill development in Geographical Education.

Chapter 3 focuses on the inquiry and skills strand of the Australian Curriculum: Geography. This chapter explains the nature of geographical inquiry and provides useful suggestions for sequencing the teaching of mapping skills to ensure alignment with the Australian Curriculum: Mathematics.

Chapters 4-10 examine the content descriptions for the F-6 curriculum and explain the relationship between the year achievement standards and content descriptions. This discussion is useful as it helps to clarify the indicators of understanding or relational thinking in Geography. A useful feature of these chapters is the guidance provided about the sequencing of content at each year level. Common misconceptions are addressed and additional information is provided about geographical concepts that may be unfamiliar such as space and place. In each chapter, suggestions are provided for integrating knowledge, understanding and skills to produce authentic and engaging activities and assessments for students.

Throughout each chapter, links are made to key resources including: The Geospace Webpage (a collection of resources developed by the Australian Geography Teachers' Association – AGTA to support the teaching of Geography in Primary and Secondary schools), Catling, Willy and Butler's *Teaching Primary Geography for Australian Schools* (2014), Google Maps, Google Earth and a range of online map-making tools (e.g. Barefoot World Atlas and MapMaker). At the end of each chapter a list of useful sources for both teachers and students is provided. The sources include a combination of books, articles and websites linked to each year of the national curriculum. These citations significantly

enhance the value of this book as a resource for teachers working in a range of contexts anywhere in the world.

While the suggested activities in the book are aligned with the requirements of the Australian Curriculum, there is much that will be of value to teachers of Primary geography elsewhere in the world. Many of the strategy suggestions and resources identified are transferable to a range of contexts and would be useful for any Primary School teacher. The suggestions for developing students' understandings of the core geographical concepts of place, space, environment, interconnection, sustainability, scale and change are also largely transferable.

Another important feature of the book is its focus on integrated studies. Icons and symbols are used in each of the chapters to highlight opportunities for cross-curricular studies linking the knowledge, understandings and methods of the Australian Curriculum: Geography with the Science, Mathematics and History curriculum requirements. Each chapter also provides creative suggestions for extending and challenging students' knowledge and skills.

In addition to focus on key geographical concepts, the book also provides insights into the curriculum construction process. The chapters provide an account of some "robust conversations" that took place during the curriculum construction process, including the choices and compromises that were made to finalize the document. The author, Professor Alaric Maude is in a unique position to provide these insights. He was the Lead Writer of the Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Geography paper (2011) and Writing Coach for the development of the final curriculum. Maude is able to use his detailed understanding of the curriculum identify weaknesses and gaps in the document and suggest approaches for addressing these limitations. Maude's unique insights in this area will be of interest to curriculum researchers investigating the shift from state to national-based curriculum development. The important distinction here being the need to negotiate a consensus between state authorities and to have each jurisdiction endorse the final curriculum document.

This book has great potential to transform pre-service and in-service Primary School teachers' understandings of both the discipline of Geography and the new Australian curriculum. *Understanding and Teaching the Australian Curriculum: Geography for Primary Schools* is a valuable addition to any primary teachers' professional library and a "must-read" for Australian Primary School teachers.