

Contents

Foreword.....	iii
About the author	iv
About AGTA.....	iv
Acknowledgements	vii
List of Australian Curriculum symbols	ix
Introduction.....	1
Key resources.....	3
Chapter 1. Geography and the primary school curriculum.....	5
Chapter 2. The Knowledge and Understanding strand	21
Chapter 3. The Inquiry and Skills strand	41
Chapter 4. Foundation Year	61
Chapter 5. Year 1	81
Chapter 6. Year 2	99
Chapter 7. Year 3	119
Chapter 8. Year 4	157
Chapter 9. Year 5	197
Chapter 10. Year 6	229
Appendix: Relating the development of conceptual understandings to Australian Curriculum: Geography content descriptions.....	273
List of figures and tables	283
List of 'What you should know' boxes	286
References.....	287

List of Australian Curriculum symbols

Understanding and Teaching the Australian Curriculum: Geography for Primary Schools contains numerous quotations from the Australian Curriculum (Version 5.2). All content has been reproduced from the Australian Curriculum website (<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/>) as it was at the time of publication. In some states, the relevant authority may have produced its own version of the curriculum, and this might be slightly different. By the time you teach the subject, ACARA may also have made some amendments, so it is important that you check the ACARA website at <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Geography/Curriculum/F-10> (click on the 'E' symbol next to view near the top left of the page to see the elaborations).

To differentiate between the four subject areas of the Australian Curriculum referenced in this book, symbols have been used to represent each subject. Every time you see one of these symbols, you may refer to the following key:



Australian Curriculum: GEOGRAPHY



Australian Curriculum: SCIENCE



Australian Curriculum: MATHS



Australian Curriculum: HISTORY

Introduction

What this book is about

Primary school teachers have a very significant role in the teaching of geography in Australia because they are responsible for seven of the nine years in which the subject will be compulsory in the majority of schools. Yet primary teachers may be unsure what this subject is all about, as few will have done more than a minimal study of geography at the tertiary level. Although some of the content will be familiar to them, having been taught as Studies in Society and Environment or its equivalent in the past, much is likely to be new, and even familiar material will now be taught as geography. The aim of this book is to help these teachers understand the curriculum they are being asked to teach. I hope to show that geography is an interesting and important subject that teaches essential knowledge, understandings and skills, contributes to the personal and social development of young children, and involves a lot more than maps and countries of the world.

As the first chapter of the book, 'Geography and the primary school curriculum', explains, geography should be treated as a separate subject in our schools because it is a distinct discipline, with ways of thinking that are different to history and science. It is important that teachers understand these ways of thinking, so that they can help students to learn how to use them to understand the world. Research in the United Kingdom, where geography has been a separate subject in the primary school curriculum for over two decades, has found that many teachers lack confidence in interpreting the curriculum and as a result allocate very little time to teaching it. *Understanding and Teaching the Australian Curriculum: Geography for Primary Schools* has been written to help teachers gain this confidence by explaining the content of the curriculum in some detail. I also hope this book will give teachers knowledge they can use to extend students when they judge this to be appropriate. Primary school teachers tell me that their students can do much more than people generally think, and the book has been written on that assumption.

I am a university geographer, not a school teacher, so the book doesn't have detailed plans for lessons or work units. These are being developed by those with the necessary experience and skills, and some are referred to in the book. But I have been involved in the development and writing of the new Australian Curriculum: Geography from the very beginning – first as Lead Writer for the Shape Paper, and then as Writing Coach during the drafting stage – so I think I have a good knowledge of why the curriculum is structured and written the way it is and what the content descriptions and elaborations mean.

The scope of the book

Understanding and Teaching the Australian Curriculum: Geography for Primary Schools discusses every content description and almost every content elaboration in the Australian Curriculum: Geography. While content descriptions are mandatory to teach, the elaborations are only suggestions. Consequently, the book may cover more material than teachers strictly need to teach. In addition, the guidelines for the writers were to produce a curriculum that was teachable within a time allocation of 2% of total teaching time in Years F–2 and 4% in Years 3–6. However, the time allocated to geography is a matter for education authorities and schools to determine, so the book may also have more material than teachers will have the time to teach. How much of the information teachers use, and how they use it, is a matter for their professional judgement.

The structure of the book

Chapter 1 explains geography as a subject, discussing why it is in the curriculum and highlighting concepts and ways of thinking relevant to the primary school years. It also outlines what geography contributes to a primary school education. Chapters 2 and 3 address each of the two strands in the Australian Curriculum: Geography – Knowledge and Understanding, and Inquiry and Skills – and show how the strands are structured. These chapters also identify the key progressions from Foundation to Year 6 that teachers and curriculum planners should be aware of and provide suggestions on how to link geography content with related material in mathematics, science and history. Finally, Chapter 3 also explains how the Australian Curriculum: Geography develops its three cross-curriculum priorities: the Asia region, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, and sustainability.

The rest of the book has a chapter on each year. These contain:

- an explanation of the theme of the year
- a discussion of each of the content descriptions in the two strands, along with their elaborations
- comments on any problems in interpreting and teaching the content descriptions and elaborations, along with ways of solving them
- suggestions on the order in which the content prescribed for the year could be taught and on ways of combining or rearranging some of the content
- suggestions on ways of integrating the teaching of the Inquiry and Skills strand into the study of the Knowledge and Understanding strand
- links with the Australian Curriculum for other subjects
- sources of information on curriculum content, for both students and teachers
- tables on the relationship between Australian Curriculum: Geography content descriptions and achievement standards, and comments on how to interpret some of the words in the achievement standards
- occasional ideas on how to extend the curriculum and exploit its potential for stimulating the learning and development of students. These sections are headed Extension and describe studies that are not strictly required by the wording of the curriculum.

In the chapters on each year, I have included explanations of what some of the curriculum content means, as some teachers with little previous study of geography may be unsure of some topics. This material is presented in boxes under the heading 'What you should know' and is not necessarily material that should be taught to students. I have also included boxes with the heading 'What you could find out' with suggestions for research that teachers could do to assist the learning of their students. Still other boxes are headed 'A puzzle'. I strongly believe that geography can be made more interesting with questions that are not obvious, and I am sure teachers will think of many more like these.

Teachers will naturally be most interested in the chapter on the year or years they are teaching. However, they are recommended also to read Chapters 1, 2 and 3, as these explain the context for individual years. Because the curriculum is cumulative and designed to avoid repetition, it is essential that teachers know where their year fits in the overall development of geographical knowledge, understanding and skills. The progression from year to year is described in Chapters 2 and 3 and summarised in the Appendix.

Where I say 'you' in the chapters that follow, I am addressing the classroom teacher, for whom this book has been written.

Key resources

Books and articles

- Catling, S, Willy, T and Butler, J 2013, *Teaching primary geography for Australian schools*, Hawker Brownlow Education, Melbourne

A companion book to this one. It is an Australian adaptation of a UK book with lots of material on the teaching of geography, written by people with decades of experience of primary school geography instruction.

- Scoffham, S (ed.) 2010, *Primary geography handbook*, Geographical Association, Sheffield

This handbook is a wonderful source of ideas on how to teach geography. It can be ordered from the Geographical Association's website.

- Scoffham, S (ed.) 2013, *Teaching geography creatively*, Routledge, London

Scoffham offers practical ideas for making geography instruction creative and lively. The book includes ways of teaching geography through integration with other subjects.

- Taylor, T, Fahey, C, Kriewaldt, J & Boon, D 2012, *Place and time: explorations in teaching geography and history*, Pearson Australia, Frenchs Forest

This Australian book is aimed at teachers of geography and history in both primary and secondary schools.

Websites

- GeogSpace (www.geogspace.edu.au)

GeogSpace was created by the Australian Geography Teachers Association in partnership with Educational Services Australia. It provides resources and classroom-ready materials for teachers implementing the new Australian Curriculum: Geography. References to materials on the website relevant to the content of each year are included throughout this book.

- Geographical Association (www.geography.org.uk)

This website has a large amount of useful material available to non-members. The Geographical Association also publishes *Primary Geography*, a journal solely devoted to the teaching of primary school geography. You can access the journal online if you become a member of the Geographical Association.

What you will need

- Google Earth. This is a wonderful geographical resource and fun to use. Get it on as many computers as you can.
- A globe. One of these is absolutely essential from Foundation onwards.
- A wall map of the world and one of Australia. The wall map of the world must be an equal-area projection (see Chapter 4) and will preferably be centred on Australia.
- Printed atlases. These should be readily available in the classroom for browsing as well as for reference. Students should be shown how to use the different types of maps in an atlas.
- Electronic atlases. The Barefoot World Atlas is available as an inexpensive and very interactive app for iPhone, iPad and iPod Touch. For more information, see <http://www.barefootbooks.com/buy-barefoot/apps/barefoot-world-atlas>. The atlas can also be obtained as a printed book.
- Topographic maps of at least the local area. These will be particularly useful in Years 3 and 5.



This chapter will:

-  explain what geography is all about
-  discuss why geography has a separate curriculum and what this means for teachers
-  describe geography's concepts and ways of thinking, showing how to break each one into specific themes or dimensions in order to make them comprehensible to students
-  comment on the aims of the Australian Curriculum: Geography and on what geography adds to the education of primary school students
-  discuss a way of teaching geography that uses the knowledge of students, gained from their everyday lives, to engage them with geographical thinking

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1 Geography and the Primary School Curriculum

What is geography?

You probably have your own idea of what geography is – perhaps based on memories from school, geographical magazines or TV programs. For many people, geography is about the countries and places of the world and where they are located, about the longest rivers and highest mountains, and about maps. The ‘geographical’ questions in quiz nights are a good indicator of popular perceptions of geography. This factual knowledge is a part of the subject, just as knowing the dates of major events is a part of history, but it is only a minor part. You may also associate geography with a strand in the primary school social studies curriculum in your state or territory, organised under headings like environment, place and space. You might think of geography as the study of the relationships between people and the environment, or of the location of things on the surface of the Earth. All these are a part of geography, but each is too narrow to be an adequate definition of the subject.

The Advisory Group for the Australian Curriculum: Geography spent considerable time debating a definition and trying to reconcile the different ones found in the curriculums of the states and territories. After extensive consultation and a wide review of the geographical literature, the group decided on the following:



Geography is a structured way of exploring, analysing and understanding the characteristics of the places that make up our world, using the concepts of place, space, environment, interconnection, sustainability, scale and change.

This definition has several elements:

- ‘Structured’ refers to geography’s distinctive ways of finding out and explaining.
- ‘Exploring, analysing and understanding’ means that geography is more than description.
- The ‘concepts’ listed identify the ways that geographers think about the world.
- Geography studies the ‘characteristics’ of places. Characteristics are described in the curriculum as including:

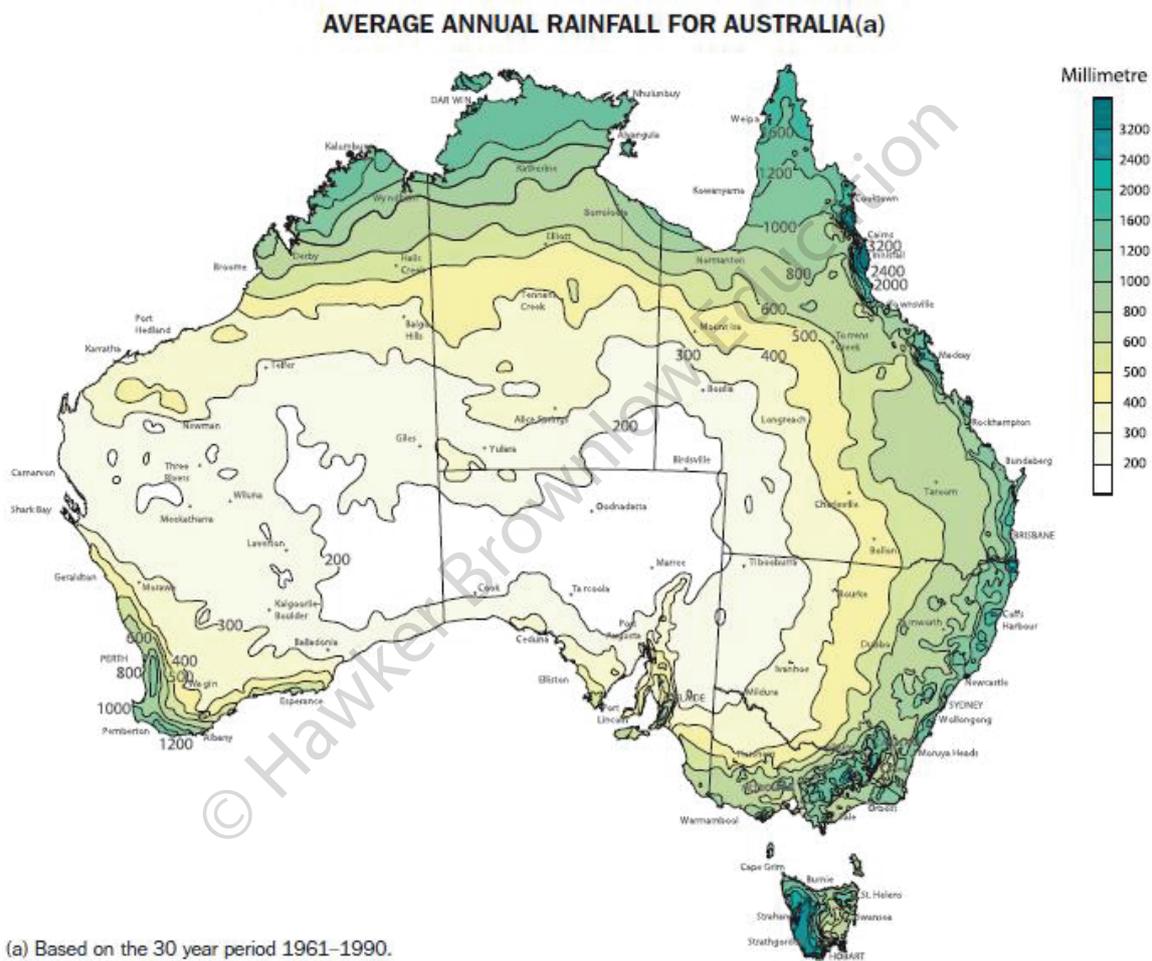


people, climate, production, landforms, built environment, soils, vegetation, communities, water resources, cultures, mineral resources and landscape. Some characteristics are tangible, such as rivers and buildings. Others are intangible, such as scenic quality and socioeconomic status.

The definition chosen can be developed to show how it encompasses the other views of geography noted earlier. For example, the environment is a large component of what a place is like and has an influence on the human characteristics of places, so to understand places one must understand both the environment and how it has influenced people and their ways of life. These have become major themes in geographical teaching and research. Similarly, the differences between places in their characteristics form spatial patterns on the Earth's surface, and these too have become a major area of geographical study. Examining phenomena spatially is also a very geographical method of analysis which can help to identify possible cause-and-effect relationships. For example, a map of rainfall in Australia shows how it declines with increasing distance from the moist maritime air of the coast and rises with increasing elevation (Figure 1.1), observations which identify two of the causes of rainfall.

Figure 1.1 Average annual rainfall, Australia

Source: ABS, Yearbook Australia, 2012, p. 80, Commonwealth of Australia 2012.



Exploring, analysing and understanding the characteristics of individual places is only the beginning of the study of geography. Like other disciplines, geographers search for causal relationships to explain the similarities and differences between places and to understand why places are changing. They also use their knowledge of the processes and interrelationships that produce the characteristics of places to examine contemporary issues. Appropriate issues for geographical analysis are those that involve places, spatial distributions and human-environment interactions. These include:

- natural hazards, such as bushfires and floods
- changes to the surface cover of the Earth, like vegetation clearance and urban development
- land degradation
- the management of water resources

- migration
- planning of the built environment
- the location of services and facilities
- regional development
- differences between places in welfare and opportunities
- urbanisation
- the local effects of globalisation and climate change

Geographers investigate the causes of these issues and then explore and evaluate policies and strategies to manage them. They are sensitive to the need to adapt these policies and strategies to take account of the different conditions in different places, because as geographers they understand how the uniqueness of each place influences both the causes of problems and the effectiveness of problem-solving strategies.

If you studied some geography at the tertiary level, you may be wondering what the study of places has to do with the geography you learned, which might have been about environmental processes and the spatial patterns of social and economic phenomena rather than about places. Academic geographers do not attempt to study places as wholes but focus instead on understanding a particular characteristic of places. They may specialise in the study of vegetation, climate, hydrology, settlement, population, socioeconomic wellbeing or health, examining how and why these vary from place to place across space. These are areas of what is called ‘systematic geography’ that have become separate academic branches of the discipline. Geographers may also study the environmental and socioeconomic processes – such as weathering and erosion, atmospheric processes, population mobility or globalisation – that create and change the characteristics of places, or they may investigate the concepts, theories and methods that contribute to an understanding of these processes. What links the various fields of geography together is the contribution they ultimately make, albeit possibly at several removes of analysis and theoretical abstraction, to understanding the characteristics of, the processes of change within and the specific problems of a place or a group of places.



What you should know: *The term ‘environment’*

The term ‘environment’ can have a range of meanings in geography, but in the Australian Curriculum: Geography the meaning is confined to the physical and biological environment. In the Glossary at the end of the curriculum, environment is defined in this way:



The term ‘environment’, where unqualified, means the living and nonliving elements of the Earth’s surface and atmosphere. It includes human changes to the Earth’s surface, for example, croplands, planted forests, buildings and roads.

In the primary school curriculum, the simple term ‘environment’ is used, while in secondary school the more precise term ‘biophysical environment’ has been preferred. The curriculum does not use the term ‘natural environment’ because human activities are now so pervasive that there are no longer any purely natural environments, and many environments have been profoundly altered by human activities. For example, in Australia we recognise that European colonisation produced major changes to environments, but we are less aware that the pre-colonisation environment also had been strongly shaped by thousands of years of Aboriginal land management – it was not ‘natural’. However, environments have ‘natural’ features, like native vegetation or rivers. They also have ‘managed’ features, like farms and planted forests, and ‘constructed’ features, like buildings and roads. This classification of features is taught in Year 1.

The term ‘built environment’ can be used to refer to the managed and constructed environment of buildings, roads, railways, airports, harbours, drains, parks and wetlands characteristic of the urbanised places in which the majority of Australian students live. Here, the built environment is a subset of the biophysical environment.

You may also think that geography is divided into physical and human categories, and some curriculums are indeed structured this way. However, the Geography Advisory Group designed the Australian Curriculum: Geography as a unified whole because one of geography's educational contributions is to link the natural and social sciences, while another is to view people as part of the environment and not separate from it.

Why is geography a separate curriculum?

Much of what is in the new Australian Curriculum: Geography has been taught in Australian primary schools for some years as part of Studies in Society and Environment or its equivalent. In 2007, however, a committee appointed to review the 1999 *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* recommended that the study of society and environment be taught through the separate disciplines of history, geography and economics. The reasons for this recommendation are not publicly recorded, but most likely had to do with a belief that students were not learning the unique ways of thinking and researching that distinguish each discipline. The recommendation of the *Adelaide Declaration* was adopted by all national, state and territory Australian governments in 2008 in the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, with one of the goals being that students 'are able to think deeply and logically, and obtain and evaluate evidence in a disciplined way as the result of studying fundamental disciplines' (MCEETYA 2008, p. 8). As a consequence of this decision, ACARA determined that the Australian Curriculum would be based on disciplines, and that students would learn both the factual and conceptual knowledge of each discipline and their ways of discovering knowledge.

While geography, like history, now has a separate curriculum, how this curriculum is taught is for schools and teachers to determine. Some elements of the Australian Curriculum: Geography could be taught in conjunction with content from history, science, mathematics and possibly civics. Chapters 4–10 of this book will identify some of these opportunities, and creative teachers will no doubt find other ways to produce an integrated teaching program if this is the way teaching in the school is organised. At each year level, I have grouped the content into topics that I think should be taught as a whole; each topic could be combined in several ways with other subjects, but the geographical themes, ways of thinking and skills taught in geography should not be lost in an integrated program. It is important that students learn the ways of thinking of each subject, because they are different and each adds something valuable to the overall curriculum. For example, by the end of Year 6 students should be able to distinguish geographical questions from historical ones and explain some of the ways that geographers think about the world.

The concepts

To think and investigate geographically, students must use geographical concepts, so the Australian Curriculum: Geography identifies seven key themes it terms 'concepts for developing geographical understanding':



Seven major concepts underlie a geographical way of investigating and understanding the world. These are high level ideas or ways of thinking that can be applied across the subject to identify a question, guide an investigation, organise information, suggest an explanation or assist decision making. They are the key ideas involved in teaching students to think geographically. The key concepts in the F–10 Australian Curriculum: Geography are place, space, environment, interconnection, sustainability, scale and change.

The concepts listed here are very big and multi-dimensional ideas that can't be neatly defined or described in one sentence. Nevertheless, they can be broken down into quite specific statements, each describing a way in which the concept is used in geography to organise ideas, analyse information or add to understanding. In the Australian Curriculum: Geography, these statements are presented as bullet points under each concept, and they are a way to teach students what each concept means and how it can be applied.

It should be noted that the description of the concepts included the curriculum was written for a secondary school level and some of the details are not appropriate for primary schools. Therefore, I have attempted in this chapter to explain the concepts in ways that fit the primary school years.