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The development of an Australian National Curriculum for Geography (ACARA, 2012a) offers teachers a geography curriculum from Foundation to Year 12. The development of the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (DEEWR, 2009) includes implicitly introductory geographical learning for the youngest children in pre-school. To support these developments in early years and primary school teaching, *Teaching Primary Geography* has been adapted for use in Australia. Its purpose is to encourage and foster well-grounded geographical understanding for children through high quality planning, teaching and learning in and of geography for children from three to twelve years old.

*Teaching Primary Geography* covers the development of geography subject understanding and of geography teaching capability, with attention given to how these two key aspects of subject understanding and teaching support children's progress in learning geography. To provide the best teaching for learning for children, you need a secure understanding of the nature of geography, its curriculum requirements, how its teaching may be planned and undertaken, a variety of the ways in which children's geographical learning can be addressed and assessed, and the variety of resources that can be used. This book explores these aspects of geography teaching.

*Teaching Primary Geography* is organised in 14 chapters. The first half of the book explores what geography is and children's geographical experience. In the second half the focus is on approaches to geography teaching, planning and assessment. Chapter 1 outlines the state of primary geography and notes some of the current influences on its future for children and schools. Chapter 2 examines geography as a subject and considers its role and value for us all. Understanding and appreciating its centrality to our lives is vital for our futures. Chapter 3 examines the variety of children's geographical experience, emphasising that children bring geographical awareness and engagement into the classroom throughout their schooling. Chapters 4 and 5 look in greater detail at the ideas of place and environmental impact and sustainability. These are considered separately here but are brought together in later chapters. Chapter 6 explores geographical inquiry, while Chapter 7 considers fieldwork, photographs and map work as key to geographical learning.

Chapter 8 introduces the teaching and learning of geography in the Early Years, which will help support 'Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world'. Chapters 9, 10 and 11 look at contexts for geographical learning and teaching to connect studies of place and sustainability. Chapters 12 and 13 provide advice about the planning and assessment of geography teaching and learning. Chapter 14 draws together aspects of children's geographical learning, offers a basis for constructing the primary geography curriculum, and concludes on matters related to researching primary geography.
Throughout the book you will find, at different points, examples of geography teaching and learning from across the primary age range, references to relevant research and guidance, and suggestions for geography topics. Other elements include practical and reflective tasks and examples of classroom practice.

The introduction of National Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2012) in Australian schools is supported by Teaching Primary Geography. Different parts of the book contribute to your understanding, capability and achievements across the Standards as primary teachers, in your early years in teaching and throughout your career. For the benefit of younger children’s learning and development, you are responsible for developing your knowledge and practice in teaching geography, just as in your other subject and cross-subject teaching. It will be useful for you to have access to the Foundation to Year 12 Australian Curriculum: Geography programme (published in early/mid 2013, and to be found at www.australiancurriculum.edu.au1) and, as appropriate, to the Early Years Learning Framework requirements, Belonging, Being, Becoming (DEEWR, 2009) when you use this book. A valuable way to further your understanding of geography is to make use of the resources on the website of the Australian Geography Teachers’ Association (AGTA), as well as those available on other websites for geography and its teaching and learning, and on the wide range of topics which make up geographical studies (for sources see the ends of the chapters and Appendix 3 in this book).

Whether you already enjoy geography and have studied it in some depth or you come to it needing to be convinced of its relevance and value for primary children, we hope that you will find this book opens your eyes to a fuller sense of what geography is about, how it can deepen children’s inherent geographical awareness, interest and understanding, and how you can contribute confidently, effectively and excitingly to their learning.

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1 Note: At the time of publication we have referred to the latest available information about the key ideas in geography and the primary geography requirements (ACARA, 2012a). We understand there may be only very minimal change in the final requirements.
Geography in Primary Schools

Chapter objectives

By the end of this chapter you should:

- have developed an understanding of the situation of geography in primary schools;
- be aware how geography’s teaching and learning can be enjoyed;
- have reflected on your own experiences in learning geography;
- be aware of various initiatives supporting primary geography’s future.

This chapter addresses the following National Professional Standards for Teachers:
1.2, 3.3, 6.2, 6.4, 7.2, 7.4

Introduction

Geography is a fascinating, invigorating and exciting subject. It makes a difference (Catling, 2012b). It is fundamental to our understanding and appreciation of the world in which we live, through our daily interactions and through the ways it impacts on us, though the causes may be far away. Geography is about the world as our home, from the local to the whole planet and the lives, activities and events across it, what happens in the natural, physical environment, in human society and 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 even where next? We think of human and physical geography, and within these explore what we have in common and the diversity of our world. Geography is interested in similarities and regularities, looking for patterns to explain what is 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 are and have been involved with. Difference is a relational concept for geography (Martin, 2012), in that we do not understand or appreciate similarities and differences without being 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 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. Whether our local community or ‘the whole world’, their
geography amazes, enthrals and engages young children from their earliest years – the constant encountering of the ‘new’ and revisiting the sites that fascination, entice, or just provide what we want at particular times – because of the relational comparisons they encounter. 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 opportunities, the affordances, which places offer, we interrelate these, and we make use of them, in myriad ways. Geography is an aspect of our lives whether we 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 us and everyone else. Geography is an amazing subject!

Through 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 the state of geography in primary schools and what makes for stimulating and enjoyable teaching and learning. The chapter concludes by noting that various government and other initiatives provide opportunities for geography’s role and development.

Geography in the primary curriculum

The introduction of the Australian Curriculum: Geography in 2013 (ACARA, 2012a) provided geography with a clear national curriculum statement for all the primary years, able to be supported by national resources and teacher development. During the 2000s many primary teachers with an interest in the themes and approaches of geography incorporated it into their studies of society and environment, but at times felt dissatisfied with the lack of focus and support available to them. The inclusion and development of geography in the national curriculum in Australia ensured that geography is explicitly an aspect of children’s education from their earliest years and can build from their experiences and interests throughout their primary schooling.

Characteristics of good quality geography teaching

Well taught geography is exciting and enjoyable, uses a variety of approaches to teaching, engages the children through topical matters and issues of interest which often relate to their experience, challenges their thinking, introduces them to new themes and ideas, and has high expectations of them. A vital motivating factor for primary children is gathering material at first hand, through learning outside the classroom. This means undertaking fieldwork in the school grounds, in the local area and further afield. The first quotation in Figure 1.1 reinforces this.

The investigation of topical events, as and when they occur (perhaps suspending the planned topic of study) – Hurricane Katrina in 2006, the earthquakes in China in 2008 and in Haiti in 2010, the Queensland floods of 2011 – enables children to explore the natural processes involved, the contributions of and their impacts on people, and how people locally and elsewhere responded to and dealt with them.

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.
This practical approach is emphasised in the second quotation, where the children’s knowledge of their area is drawn out and enhanced through the use of the photographs and the floor map. The third quotation, from the leading geography inspector in England, reinforces these points and notes the value of examining topical issues with primary children, such as concern about climate change and its possible impact. The inspector had noted various positive attitudes to the learning of geography that emerge from such studies.

In successful schools, fieldwork, both local and beyond the locality, is an integral part of the teaching programme, and so adds a practical element to the development of pupils’ geographical skills, knowledge and understanding. Pupils are very enthusiastic about fieldwork. (Ofsted, 2005, p. 5)

… in (a) [Foundation] class pupils sat around a floor map of the locality around the school:

Initially, the teacher used photographs she had taken to enable the pupils to recognise buildings they were familiar with, such as the doctor’s surgery, the local church, the playground and a range of different shops. The pupils began to build up a vocabulary and were able to identify a range of buildings. The teachers then transferred to the floor map, and pupils applied what they knew about the location of the buildings, recognising their position in the street. Pupils identified the building, for example using crosses for churches and books for the library. This proved to be a very effective introduction to maps and plans which was further reinforced through independent group work where pupils used a range of media including LEGO®, sand and building bricks to produce imaginary places with a range of different buildings. Throughout the activity, pupils were building up a sense of place and those specific features which constitute that place. (Ofsted, 2004, pp. 6–7)

I recently visited a school where Year 5 pupils were discussing the impact of climatic factors in preparation for producing a weather report for their area. Their ability to understand and articulate the effects of altitude, latitude, continentality and ocean currents was worthy of older pupils. In an inner city school, a charismatic young teacher inspired her [Foundation] class through song, rhyme and a floor map to identify locations they had visited on holiday. These young pupils were able to identify and name the major continents as well as specific countries visited.

Elsewhere teachers have made good use of topics and fieldwork to develop literacy. One teacher used photographs taken during a field walk to support a discussion on environmentalism in literacy. This was used to develop persuasive writing to influence the local council to improve transport. More recently I watched a class role-play at being trainee travel agents. This involved passing an exam on their knowledge of places. Once ‘qualified’, the pupils used wireless-linked laptops to search websites for the best travel and hotel alternatives for clients. This made excellent use of practical geography. These are magic moments that make the subject come alive.

(Iwaskov, 2004)

Figure 1.1 An English school geography inspector’s perspectives on stimulating primary geography

These, and many other examples, illustrate six characteristics of high quality geography teaching (Catling, 2004a), points reinforced by Bell (2005).

1. The geography teaching is purposeful; that is, the children recognise the point of what they are studying, see its relevance and value, and have their curiosity whetted and engaged.

2. Their geographical studies are problem oriented, not limited to information gathering and description, requiring children to investigate, analyse, evaluate and propose possible, even most likely, solutions.

3. Their geographical learning is structured through an inquiry-based approach, involving the children in asking, selecting and structuring questions, working out how to investigate them, and in drawing conclusions based on evidence and rigorous thinking.
4. Geographical studies are undertaken cooperatively, probably drawing on independently pursued contributions to a problem or issue, where the focus is on learning with and through each other in paired and larger-group project investigations.

5. Their geographical inquiries involve active engagement with the world, perhaps through fieldwork locally or further away, linked to topical issues, or by making contact with experts and inviting in visitors from whom to seek information, insight and understanding.

6. Children are stimulated by engagement with good quality resources, be these the stimulus of the outdoor environment or the use of photographs, maps, leaflets, postcards, rocks, newspapers, artefacts, websites, even some resource packs, and the many other types of resource that can be drawn upon. Along with high quality geography teaching, informative resources can be the catalyst that makes the difference between satisfactory learning and high achievement by children.

Reflective task
Consider any teaching of geography and/or studies of society and environment that you have seen in an F–6 primary school classroom.

Describe which of the characteristics of high quality geography teaching in geography and SOSE teaching you can recall.

What did you see that you would want to improve? How might one or more of the characteristics be used to make such improvements?

Perspectives on geography in primary schools
In 2008 Erebus International prepared an evaluation report on the state of geography in primary and secondary schools, A Study into the Teaching of Geography in Years 3–10, for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. It provided a critical review of the position of geography, which had been taught in primary education for many years through the integrated and humanities-focused studies of society and environment (SOSE). The analysis of the state of play for geography noted a number of features that contributed to the debate about and the development of the Foundation to Year 12 Australian Curriculum: Geography programme (ACARA, 2012a). While it focused essentially on the teaching and learning of geography in secondary education, it suggested both concerns about and possibilities for the development of good and better geography teaching that applied to primary schools in relation to Years 3–6 (Erebus International, 2008). Essentially these points can be applied to geographical learning and teaching wherever it appears in the Early Years and primary curriculum.

Among the concerns raised were:
- An integrated approach to teaching the social and environmental subjects through SOSE did not provide a clear focus on the key ideas, knowledge and skills of geography;
- Primary teachers of SOSE often had no initial or in-service training in geography, which meant that many primary teachers lacked the knowledge and skills to teach geography adequately;
- The lack of effective time for teaching geography through SOSE inhibited the development of good geography teaching;
- Geography had relatively low status and priority in schools, which affected the emphasis given to it;
- Teaching of geography may often not have engaged children’s interest. Where it did, children might not have appreciated that it was ‘geography’. 
Developments and approaches were noted which could benefit geography teaching and learning. They included:

- Primary teachers who enjoy and value geography and its teaching, including being passionate about the subject and its learning;
- Teachers and primary schools that are well-informed about geography today and keep their understanding of geography and its teaching up-to-date;
- The provision of adequate time in the curriculum;
- The use of fieldwork in teaching and learning;
- Using problem solving and thinking skills approaches;
- Employing a variety of teaching approaches and activities;
- The use of new technologies to engage children;
- Involving children in practical projects, particularly of local interest and value and which might contribute to the community;
- Geographical studies which children can see as relevant to their lives, experiences and futures;
- Access to good quality and current resources.

In many ways these concerns and developments echo those identified in other nations, such as England (Ofsted, 2008; 2011). The development of the Foundation to Year 12 Curriculum: Geography (ACARA, 2012a) has occurred to address and redress these concerns and potential developments, though they have long been the concern of those teaching SOSE in primary schools (Reynolds, 2012).

### Enjoying geography

*Enjoyment is the birthright of every child* (DfES, 2003, p.3). The Foundation to Year 12 Australian Curriculum: Geography aims to ensure that students develop a sense of wonder, curiosity and respect about places, people, cultures and environments throughout the world (ACARA, 2012b). 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 inquiry-based approach. To enjoy their learning children must be excited and inspired by what they do, necessitating a creative and flexible approach to teaching. Geography offers all this and, to enable it, highly relevant and inspiring subject matter.

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 were the truly enjoyable and memorable learning experiences that they had, the response, if at all, is invariably to do with being outside and carrying out one form or another of experiential, interactive fieldwork, usually connected to an inquiry 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 a job in planning or just opened their eyes to how we pollute but can look after our streets and urban places.

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 examples in Figure 1.1 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, 2012).