



Appearances can deceive

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7 Curriculum making with geography

The GA believes that teachers should be accountable, but also that they are autonomous professionals driven by educational goals and purposes: that is, they are the curriculum makers and the subject leaders.

When teachers with a passion for their subject are inspired by a clear sense of the subject's educational benefits they can devise surprising, challenging, engaging and 'living' geography with their students. This is what we mean by 'curriculum making' – teachers balancing the three sources of energy in the classroom:

- the teacher's own practical skills and expertise
- the interests and needs of the students
- what the dynamic, changing subject discipline has to offer.

Designing a curriculum is not just a technical matter, specifying objectives and a course of study to meet them. It is a moral concern, and should reflect what we think we should be teaching. This is why we believe the curriculum should be deeply influenced by confident, autonomous teachers.

The government agrees:

'... we have to support teachers to be the very best that they can be – to fulfil their own potential, so that pupils can fulfil theirs.'



Jim Knight, Schools Minister, at the 2008 Geographical Association Annual Conference.



Curriculum making brings these three sources of energy together to produce successful learning

The moral concern for teachers of geography is to help young people develop the ability to think critically: to make worthwhile distinctions, and detect inadequacies in evidence and argument. As curriculum makers, geography teachers face three particular challenges.

- 1 The subject matter of geography is constantly evolving. This is not just a case of making sure our facts and figures are 'up to date': the way we see the world changes. The 'vocabulary' and 'grammar' we use to make sense of the world is changing!
- 2 The subject discipline is not always well understood. A synoptic understanding of the subject is not easy, for non-specialist teachers particularly. It might even be difficult for some head teachers to see the real point of geography on the curriculum.
- 3 The subject content – its 'vocabulary' – is potentially infinite, so we need a clear rationale for making selections from it.

But these challenges are also great opportunities, for it is precisely geography's range and dynamism that make it capable of occupying a central role in the curriculum. For example:

- it crosses boundaries: physical and human, scientific and artistic. Strong geography is therefore good for launching and leading inter-disciplinary work

- its vast range of content, manipulated, stored and communicated by technology (indeed, by GIS), can be the source of innovative teaching approaches, both inside and outside the classroom.

The quality of their curriculum making means geography teachers can be excellent advocates for the subject in the school curriculum. They need to have a productive, ongoing relationship with the subject: this gives them the confidence to innovate, to respond to the unexpected and at the same time to maintain high standards of disciplined enquiry.

viewpoints

'A curriculum, to be truly educational, will lead the student to unanticipated, rather than predicted, outcomes'



James McKernan, educationist

'... teachers are central to the success or failure of curriculum change, since they are in a position to influence the interpretation of the innovation and shape it in particular ways'



John Morgan (shown) and Ben Williamson, Futurelab

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