

Curriculum planning (adapted from Weeden and Butt, 2009)

Curriculum planning has often focused more on sequencing the content to be covered and less on how children become better geographers. This can result in repetition of content rather than developing understanding of the knowledge and concepts of geography. To help students think geographically it is helpful therefore to recognise the difference between **progression, continuity** and **sequence**.

As pupils mature intellectually the geography curriculum and assessments they engage with should reflect this development (Bennetts 1995, 2005). The terms progression continuity and sequencing are sometimes used rather loosely, or even interchangeably. They are complementary terms, but have particular meanings:

Progression is the measurable advances in knowledge, understanding and skills made by pupils in their studies over time (hence the close links to assessment). Pupils should progress at a rate that is best suited to their developing intellect and abilities.

'Progression permeates, implicitly if not explicitly, the whole enterprise of education, and has implications for many key elements in curriculum planning and implementation: the specification of learning targets; the selection of content and activities; the design of learning materials; the interaction between teachers and students; the assessment and reporting of students' learning; and the evaluation and revision of teaching programmes and strategies.'

(Bennetts, 2005: 157)

Much of the literature focuses on structuring courses in an orderly way to help students advance their learning. Two ideas that help with this structuring are continuity and sequencing

Continuity is the maintenance and development of different aspects of geography education within the geography curriculum. This may relate to the aims stated for geography as a subject, certain geographical concepts and themes, sections of content, teaching and learning activities and assessment procedures. Pupils build upon what has gone before by taking particular strands of knowledge, understanding and skills they have encountered to new levels.

It is clear that a poorly designed geography curriculum may have elements of continuity (featuring similar geographical content, concepts, themes, skills, etc year on year), but poor progression – typically covering the same ground, without expecting pupils to make intellectual advances as they mature. Here pupils would progress essentially by learning the same things, but maybe in a slightly different context. As such the notion of a spiral curriculum (Bruner, 1960) is one curriculum development theory attractive to many teachers as it implies pupils progressing by revisiting aspects of previous learning which are then reinforced, refined and extended. The link to assessment and planning is important, for our expectations of what pupils should know, understand and do in geography must advance steadily over time. Ideally a geography curriculum designed for pupils to study from the age of 5 to 21 would show strong elements of continuity and progression as pupils advance seamlessly through their geographical studies at Geography National Curriculum, GCSE, AS, A Level and degree level.

(Butt, 2009: 10-11)

Eleanor Rawling has shown how the key concepts of the KS3 Geography National Curriculum might fit together in a spiral curriculum ensuring that you can plan for continuity and progression. The shape of the diagram draws attention to the gradually widening span of pupils' experience of places, themes, issues and scales of enquiry. (Source: Rawling, 2007: 56).

Planning Your Key Stage 3 Geography Curriculum

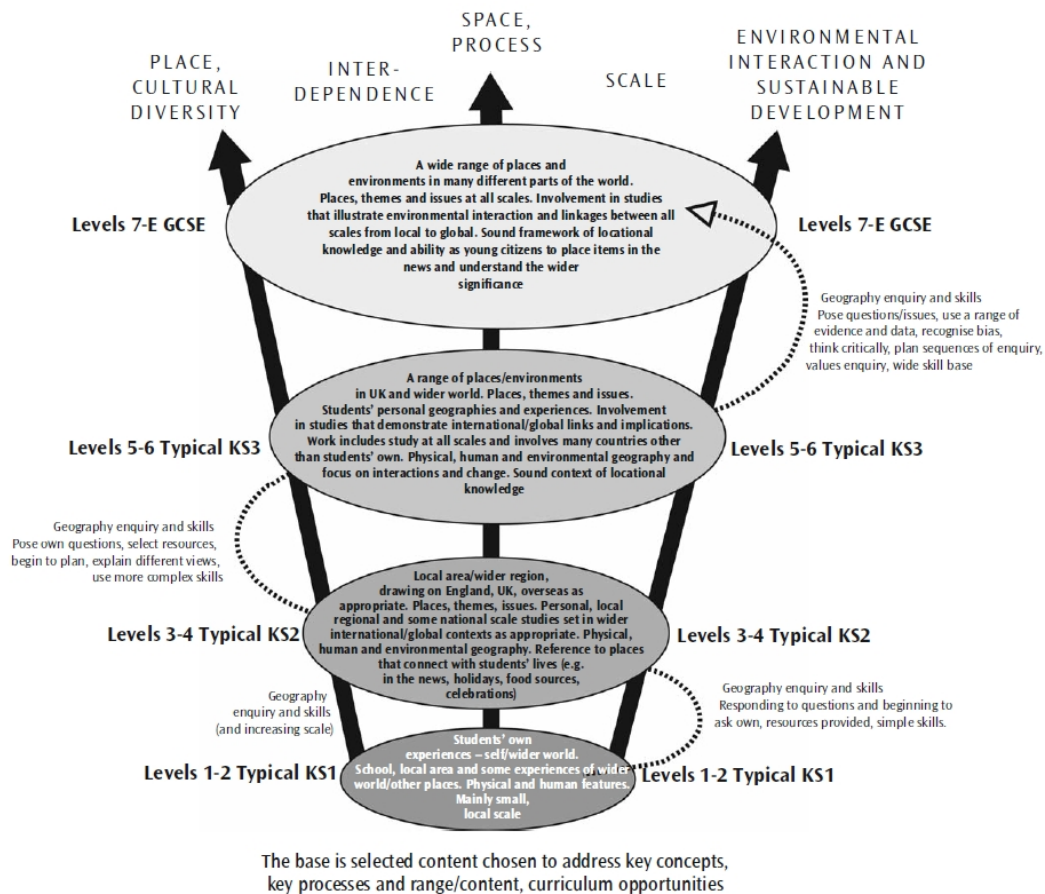


Figure 32 Making progress in geography.

Sequencing focuses on the ordering of the content and activities. Does the order in which the content or activities are taught support learning or is it merely organisationally convenient. This can be applied at time scales of a lesson or over a student's whole school career. Within a lesson teachers can plan a sequence of activities in order to achieve a specific learning outcome. At longer time scales the issue becomes what levels of understanding and skills are appropriate for a particular age group. 'For example what are the implications of planning a unit of study based on ... 'weather and climate' or 'settlements' for 14 year old students, rather than 13 or 12 year old students?' (Bennetts, 2005: 158). This implies there is a 'learning hierarchy' (after Gagne) where particular 'content' or 'activities' may be more difficult or more appropriate for children of a particular age. However children develop at different rates and demonstrate a range of attainment so matching specific content to particular levels is unhelpful in curriculum planning or measuring attainment. Fortunately most content in geography can be experienced and understood at a range of different levels dependent on students' previous experiences and attainment. The challenge for teachers is therefore to differentiate within the content by encouraging students to increase the breadth, scale, complexity, abstraction, precision and maturity of their learning.