GeoCapabilities: Implications for Initial Teacher Education

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What’s the problem? (my observations)

- The place of ‘subjects’ in schools and teacher preparation.
- Knowledge vs skills in curriculum.
- Combining/ removal of subjects (e.g. humanities).
- ‘Corruption’ of the curriculum.
- Teacher training changes.
- Over emphasis on ‘pedagogy’ (the how) rather than ‘curriculum’ (the what and why).
So what Geography should we teach?

‘Powerful disciplinary knowledge’ (Young 2008)

‘Specialised’: created and argued over within academic disciplines.

‘Evidence based’: it represents the ‘best’ knowledge available in that subject.

It is not a given; it can be replaced by ‘better’ knowledge.

It is not ‘everyday’ knowledge but requires deep thought and sustained engagement.

The development of powerful disciplinary knowledge from a subject specialist teacher provides a rationale for a subject based curriculum.
So what is the Powerful Knowledge of Geography?

PRE 1960

REGIONAL APPROACH

Bustin (2019) p75
Lambert (2011)

*Overall, it can be argued, a capability perspective on geography in education evokes a subject that can contribute to young people’s:*  

- Deep descriptive ‘world knowledge’
- Theoretically informed relational understanding of people and places in the world
- Propensity and disposition to think about alternative social, economic and environmental futures.
Possible ITE curriculum thinking exercise: Where’s the geography?

- In small groups think about the teaching of RUSSIA to a Year 9 group.
- Discuss what you want to teach them (focus on the *what* not the *how*- this would come later!). Create a spider diagram of ideas. What is the key geography you would teach (and why).

- Use the GeoCapabilities Framework to map your ideas into three columns. Has this altered your thinking?
- Present your ideas back to the group.
ITE Curriculum thinking exercise...

**Russia**
- Location
- Physical/Human/Environmental

**Issues**
- Cultural identity/History/Communism → progression away from
- Natural resources

**Pupils**
- Conflict → ethnic identity
  → EU
  → Gas/resources
  → Progression from China in Yr B?

7 things to know

- Location & basic features
- News Conflicts
- EU
- Contemporary Europe/Middle East - Geopolitics
- Resources - what & who gets them
- World stage - position
- Power, money, trade
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The capability approach: GeoCapability framework</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deep descriptive ‘world knowledge’</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place and space</th>
<th>Human and physical processes</th>
<th>Choices about how to live</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russia — where/extent, cities, physical landscape</td>
<td>Why cities are where?</td>
<td>Extraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural resources</td>
<td>Why oil/gas/coal?</td>
<td>Supply/demand</td>
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<td>Sustainability</td>
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<td>Conflict of use</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contemporary conflicts — Ukraine — location</td>
<td>Why the conflict — cultural identity?</td>
<td>Future solutions to conflict</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU/Russia divide</td>
<td>Age</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Resources?</td>
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<tr>
<td>World stage — Development</td>
<td>Classification/ globalisation rate/human rights/HDI/trade</td>
<td>Sustainability</td>
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## From ‘powerful knowledge’ to ‘capabilities’: Why teach geography?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Ideological tradition</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Impact on school geography in England</th>
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| Cultural restorationism (as promoted by the New Right in English policy making in the 1980s and 1990s) | • Restoring traditional areas of knowledge and skills (cultural heritage).  
• Providing students with a set package of knowledge and skills, which will enable them to fulfil well-defined roles in society and the workplace. | Emphasis on aspects of locational, regional and economic geography related to Britain’s early twentieth-century Empire and trading links. Strong in school geography in the twentieth century. Re-emerged in 1991 National Curriculum giving a view of a relatively unchanging world. |
| Progressive educational (also called child-centred) | • Focusing on personal development or bringing maturity to the individual student.  
• Using academic subjects as a medium for developing skills, attitudes, values and learning styles that will then help them become autonomous individuals. | Emphasis on enquiry, active learning and the development of skills (e.g., communication), attitudes (e.g., respect of others) and values (e.g., care for the environment) through geography. Emphasised in child-centred primary education in the 1960s and 1970s and in Schools Council geography curriculum projects of 1970s. Reappeared in thinking skills in late 1990s. |
| Reconstructionist (also called radical)      | • Education as an agent for changing society, so an emphasis on encouraging students to challenge existing knowledge and approaches.  
• Less interest in academic disciplines, more focus on issues and socially critical pedagogy. | Geography’s involvement with, for example, environmental education, global education, multi-culturalism. Prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s radical geography. Interest by 1997 Labour government in sustainable development education and citizenship seemed to offer opportunities but may have been a utilitarian reaction to societal concerns. |

**Curriculum ideologies**  
(Rawling 2000)
Task: The significance of curriculum ideologies when lesson planning

- In small groups prepare a lesson on the topic of IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE for a Year 9 group.
- You can choose the learning objectives and lesson activities as you wish (although the focus here is on the lesson outcomes - what do you want the children to be able to think/ do/ understand from your lessons).
- Each group will focus on one CURRICULUM IDEOLOGY to plan your lessons.
- You will present your ideas back to the group.
Outcomes of a student activity to engage with ideological perspectives on the teaching of climate change.

PGCE students work together to create a sequence of lessons

Student critique of their lessons

Task: The significance of curriculum ideologies when lesson planning

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The Capabilities Approach to curriculum thinking

**STRUCTURAL FEATURES OF CURRICULUM:**
- National (National Curriculum)
- Institutional (curriculum structure)
- Social (teacher ideologies)
- Students (prior knowledge)
- Subject Knowledge

**CURRICULUM MAKING**
Within a subject based curriculum, with specialist teachers.

**Pupil Choice**
- PDK from a variety of subjects

**Outputs:**
- Exam grades

**Outcomes:**
- Knowledge based capabilities

**Agency:**
- Active and engaged citizen of 21st Century

**Functioning:**
- ‘Beings and doings’ of life; careers, ways of thinking

‘Morally careless’ teaching
So what? Implications for ITE:

- GeoCapabilities provides a framework for the discussion about what we teach and why.
- GeoCapabilities is theoretical (it cannot be ‘measured’) but some activities can be used as a way in to the thinking it enables.
- Ideally ideas embedded throughout a course, returned to and refined (not a ‘bolt on’ lecture/ workshop).

- **Challenges for ITE?**
  - Complexity (perhaps) of ideas. Lack of understanding in wider geog teaching community (‘PDK worksheets’).
  - Lack of direct classroom relevance.
GeoCapabilities.org:
Further resources, online training modules, videos. Reflective vignettes...

http://www.geocapabilities.org/

Bustin R (2019) Geography Education’s Potential and the Capability Approach: GeoCapabilities and schools, Palgrave Macmillan