



Curriculum making

Creating an outstanding geography curriculum

Online CPD <http://www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk/chartered-geographer/online-cpd-from-cgeogs/>

Objectives

- To explore the idea of ‘curriculum making’ as a means of developing your geography curriculum
- To make effective use of curriculum planning ‘tools’ when designing a sequence of lessons

Resources

- ‘Curriculum making’ PowerPoint presentation
- Curriculum making outline plan
- ‘Balloon debate’ grid
- ‘Justifying content’ table
- Extract from Andy Roberts (2008) *Faster, higher, stronger: are the Olympics the best way to regenerate London?* Geographical Association. Sheffield.
- [Optional – copy of a *Key Stage 3 Geography teacher’s Toolkit* from the Geographical Association]

Session outline

- Introduce the session title and objectives.
- Explain the idea of curriculum making, its relevance and usefulness in an environment where the National Curriculum continues to change rapidly. Refer to the three ‘resources’ needed to create an outstanding geography curriculum.
- Introduce the problem of selecting content. Allow time for teachers to play the ‘balloon game’ in order to select and reject specific items of content.
- Emphasise the need for teachers to justify their content selections. Share an example from the *Key Stage 3 Geography teacher’s Toolkit*. Give time for teachers to articulate the purpose of the place/theme/issue they have selected.
- Explain the importance of an enquiry approach in geography. Define the criteria for a ‘good’ enquiry question. Give time for teachers to frame their own enquiry questions for their place, theme or issue.
- Show the example of ‘planning with concepts’. Explain that the concepts underpin the learning and are used to organise the planning. Allow time for teachers to identify the concepts that link to their place/theme/issue.
- Review the outline plans and identify next steps for curriculum making.



Pre-course task

It is recommended, but not required, for the course leader to be familiar with Eleanor Rawling's *Planning your KS3 curriculum* and/or one of the *KS3 Geography teacher's Toolkit* titles

Further reading/resources

Geographical Association Young People's Geographies project
<http://www.geography.org.uk/projects/youngpeoplesgeographies/#top> (accessed 7-3-2011)

Kinder, A. & Widdowson, J. (eds.) *Key Stage 3 Geography teacher's Toolkit (10 titles)*. Geographical Association. Sheffield.

Rawling, E. (2007) *Planning your Key Stage 3 geography curriculum*. Geographical Association. Sheffield.

Riley, M. (2000) 'Into the Key Stage 3 history garden: choosing and planting your enquiry questions' *Teaching History* (8). The Historical Association.

Roberts, M. (2003) *Learning through enquiry: making sense of geography in the KS3 classroom*. Geographical Association. Sheffield.

Notes for presenters

Slide 1 [1 min]

Explain that the Chartered Geographer network is comprised of experienced and committed teachers of geography and that the network resources are available from www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk

Slide 2 [2 mins]

Introduce the session aims. Explain that the session aims to make use of a range of techniques (or 'tools') for developing your curriculum.

Allow time for teachers to ask any relevant questions about the session.

Slide 3 [5 mins]



Acknowledge the fact that creating or developing a curriculum is one of the most important and challenging aspects of geography teaching. National curricula and examination specifications never seem to stay still – nor do they provide anything more than a ‘framework’ around which a great deal of creative curriculum development work needs to be done – by teachers.

Introduce the idea of ‘curriculum making’. This ‘creative act’ draws on three essential resources for learning:

- The learners (their experiences, interests, expertise, how they learn)
- The subject (its purposes, big ideas, distinctive skills, core knowledge)
- Teaching approaches and subject-specific teaching techniques (the pedagogy).

We’ve all experienced teachers who fail to balance out all three (e.g. the subject expert who teaches didactically but without engaging students; the ‘pedagogic adventurer’ with activities up to their ears, but whose teaching lacks overall purpose etc.).

A good subject specialist teacher possesses the synoptic capacity to combine their knowledge and understanding of all three ‘resources’ – to maximum effect. This starts with planning.

Slide 4 [2 mins]

The world is full of interesting places, themes and issues that might be worthy of study!

Note that the *current* national curriculum consists of broad frameworks for teachers. It places great responsibility on the teacher to make careful selections of content. Proposals for a *new* national curriculum are likely to lead to certain aspects of ‘core knowledge’ being more clearly prescribed. However, in a complex and changing world the question will always remain for teachers of geography: ***what to teach?***

Therefore the first step of curriculum design is the need to select content and be clear about our reasons for doing so.

Slide 5 [10 mins]

Ask: What are the *criteria* for choosing content and what content should be chosen?

There are many such criteria. As teachers, we frequently use what’s available, what we think will engage pupils or provide a foundation for GCSE etc. All very practical considerations.



But there is an intellectual question we need to consider: What is *significant* enough to be included on our curriculum? The questions on the slide do not have a definitive answer, but that doesn't reduce the usefulness of debating the merits of what we currently have on our curriculum.

Arrange the teachers into small groups.

EITHER

Distribute the 'balloon debate' grids, cut into individual cards. Explain that, due to reduced time allocation for geography (!) they have to jettison one topic. Give one minute for this decision. Explain that curriculum time is to be further reduced, and request another topic to be removed. Continue.

OR

Allow groups to select one geographical place, theme or issue by generating some ideas on post-it notes and then deleting each of these one by one.

Ask each group to write the place, theme or issue they have selected into the first box of the 'Curriculum making outline plan'.

Slide 6 [10 mins]

Suggest that we can't take our geography curriculum for granted. We need to make sure that we make a convincing case for every part of it – to ourselves, to students, to parents and to senior leaders. This image illustrates the problem – population is one of the 'issues of our times' – a hugely significant global change that will affect the future of all our students. Except this teacher has failed to convince the class!

Give teachers time to write an argument for teaching and learning about the place/theme/issue they have selected.

[Optionally - use the extract from *Faster, higher, stronger* by Andy Roberts OR the 'Justifying content' table to give teachers a model or language to work with.]

Ask each group to write their justification into the second box of the 'Curriculum making outline plan'.

Slide 7 [10 mins]

Suggest that one of the ways to gain a 'quick fix' in curriculum making is to look at our current curriculum and see if we can express what we teach in terms of *enquiry questions*. This approach can be used for entire 'units' (sequences) of work as well as for individual lessons or even parts of lessons.



There are many advantages to reframing our curriculum to identify what is it that we wish to find out, or find better answers to. These include:

- Creating a ‘need to know’ (Roberts 2003) i.e. arousing a sense of curiosity in students;
- Encouraging open-ended and challenging outcomes;
- Permitting students to take an active role in shaping what they study and how they investigate.

Note the criteria for a ‘good’ or effective enquiry questions (from Riley 2000). Give teachers a chance to ‘play around’ with this idea and create enquiry questions for the topic they have already identified. Ask each group to write their questions into the third box of the ‘Curriculum making outline plan’.

Note that ‘good’ questions require both *pith* and *rigour*:

- A ‘pithy’ question is one that is worded in a way that students of the target age/attainment level can relate to and even be excited by. The aim is for the question to ‘draw them in’ or intrigue them. Questions that are overlong or that contain jargon the students have never heard of before are unlikely to be effective.
- ‘Rigorous’ questions bring key geographical concepts or processes to the fore. Questions that ask us to engage with ideas about place, space or scale (e.g. ‘Is the physical geography of New Zealand an advantage or disadvantage to the country?’) are likely to be successful.
- The idea is to create questions that *geographers would engage with more successfully* than any other subject discipline – or perhaps to create questions that *demand we become better geographers* in order to answer them!
- The level of challenge of questions can be varied e.g. by asking for decisions or evaluations (‘Should ...’); personal reflections/positions; as well as explanations (‘How ...’)
- An ‘overall’ enquiry question is an effective way to think about a whole unit/sequence of work. A number of subsidiary questions can then be generated – these form a ‘route to enquiry’. These more focused questions need addressing if we are to tackle to over-riding question. For example, if we want to find out ‘Why is the population of the UK changing?’ we might first want to know:
 - How is the population of the UK changing?
 - How has it changed in the past and how is it projected to change?
 - What are the influences on population change?
 - What are the impacts of population change?
 - Can anything be done to manage population change and its impacts?
 - What do I think should be done?

Slide 8 [10 mins]



Explain that the key concepts (of the Geography National Curriculum) are intended to ‘underpin’ learning – not to be taught as discrete themes or topics.

The most effective way to ensure that each unit of work really is ‘underpinned’ by key geographical ideas is to **concept map** as many key questions or ideas that relate to the unit of work as possible – as in this example from *Faster, higher, stronger* by Andy Roberts. The ideas can then be rearranged to show how they relate to some of the National Curriculum Key Concepts. As can be seen here, it is a complex and challenging process – some ideas relate to more than one key concept and help students to link ideas.

Note that this isn’t a learning or lesson sequence – just a planning tool to help the teachers define more precisely what it is they want to teach about the theme/topic/place. It helps us to select resources, create activities and be clear about the purpose of each lesson in a sequence.

Give teachers a few minutes to talk about this in relation to their unit of work. Although there won’t be time (in a one hour session) to produce a complete concept map, they should be able to identify the GNC key concepts they feel are relevant and relate these to some of their enquiry questions.

Ask each group to write their thoughts into the fourth box of the ‘Curriculum making outline plan’.

Slide 9 [10 mins]

Give time for each group of teachers to feed back on their ideas (about their topic, the enquiry question and the key ideas they think are involved).

Allow each group to help one another to identify some key skills that might be needed to undertake each investigation. Ask each group to identify some key processes (skills) in the fifth box of the ‘Curriculum making outline plan’.

Finish the session by sharing priorities for general curriculum development. If needed, prompt teachers to reflect on whether they have sufficient enquiry approaches, or effective enquiry questions, within their curriculum, or whether they communicate purpose effectively etc.