







# The Prospects for Geography in Education

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# Some preliminaries

- A commitment to *education* (in its broadest sense)
  - 'to travel with a different view'
- The role of subject disciplines
  - 'ways of seeing'
- The broader context of the school curriculum
  - tradition vs new
  - old knowledge vs new knowledge
  - knowledge vs learning

# Broad Context

"A twenty-first century curriculum cannot have the transfer of knowledge at its core for the simple reason that the selection of what is required has become problematic in an information rich age...

We live in a 'knowledge economy' but that means we need to think carefully about what actually constitutes knowledge.

OECD proposes four distinct types: *Know-what*, *know-why*, *know-how* and *know-who*

There is growing demand for the latter three

The traditional school curriculum consists of the *know-what* category - 'factual knowledge'..."



# Broad Context

"ATL proposes a national curriculum model which starts with pupil needs and interests and is designed in terms of the skills and attitudes that we want pupils to acquire and develop."

[ATL (2006) *Position Statement: Subject to Change*]

See also:

- RSA *Opening Minds* ('competences')
- FutureLab *Enquiring Minds*
- QCA *Big Picture* (confident individuals, successful learners, responsible citizens)



# Intentions

To analyse how geography in education is sometimes:

- not fully appreciated (it is 'mis-heard')
- absent from, or undervalued in, the school curriculum (it is 'mis-placed')



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# Geographical Content

“defined not as a collection of facts but as the state of the art conceptual frameworks of the subject” [p 242]



# Geographical Content

What are the 'central and cherished aspects of geographical education' (Haggett 1996)?

- Landscape, Place, Spatial conundrums
- Sensitivity to place connections at a variety of scales



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# Geographical Content

Or, according to Allen and Massey (1995):

'We live in local versions of the world and in so doing we have to locate ourselves within a wider global context. We only understand the changes taking place in our own backyard when we begin to understand how changes taking place elsewhere affect our world' (p1)



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# What is geography?

According to Alastiar Bonnett (2008)

“Geography is a fundamental fascination. It is also a core component of a good education. ... (I t) is one of humanity’s big ideas.” (p1)

“I ts ambition is absurdly vast. But we know it would be more absurd to abandon it.” (p28)



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# What is Geography?


Ron Johnston in 1985:

'the study of Earth as the home of  
mankind'



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# The rise of 'educational processes' and the fall of 'subjects'

"In general, educational theorists strongly favoured integration, dismissing subject-based syllabuses as mere social constructions and/or historical accidents."

[p 247]



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# Educational Processes

- Child centredness
- Integrated studies
- Transferable skills
- Thinking skills
- Pedagogy
- Assessment



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# (Re)balancing subject and pedagogy

When 'pedagogical adventures' dominate,  
understanding may lack:

- coherence
- purpose
- perspective

We lose track of how to communicate the  
value of a "distinctively geographical  
approach" [p249]



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# Subjects and Social Purposes ("Good Causes")

"good causes tend to generate  
inculcation and indoctrination rather  
than genuine education" [p 244]



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# Social Purposes ('Good Causes')

Some contemporary 'good causes':


- Citizenship (incorporating 'Britishness')
- Sustainable Development (incorporating climate change)
- Global dimension (incorporating the 'war on poverty')



# 'Curriculum corruption'

'Over the past two decades the school curriculum has been estranged from the challenge of educating children' (Whelan 2007 p1)

eg the promotion of 'global citizenship' values (by government, NGOs *and* subject associations) at the expense of knowledge and understanding.



# Balancing subject and 'good cause'

When teaching geography for a 'better world' (however this is configured) dominates, polemics can replace constructive argument...

"... a debilitating anti-intellectualism" [p 249]



# Taking stock

In England we have a new secondary school curriculum. This hopes to

- Put right perceived inadequacies of the National Curriculum (eg over-prescription)
- Emphasise curriculum thinking (eg aims)
- Re-engage with the subject resources (eg teachers as 'curriculum makers')



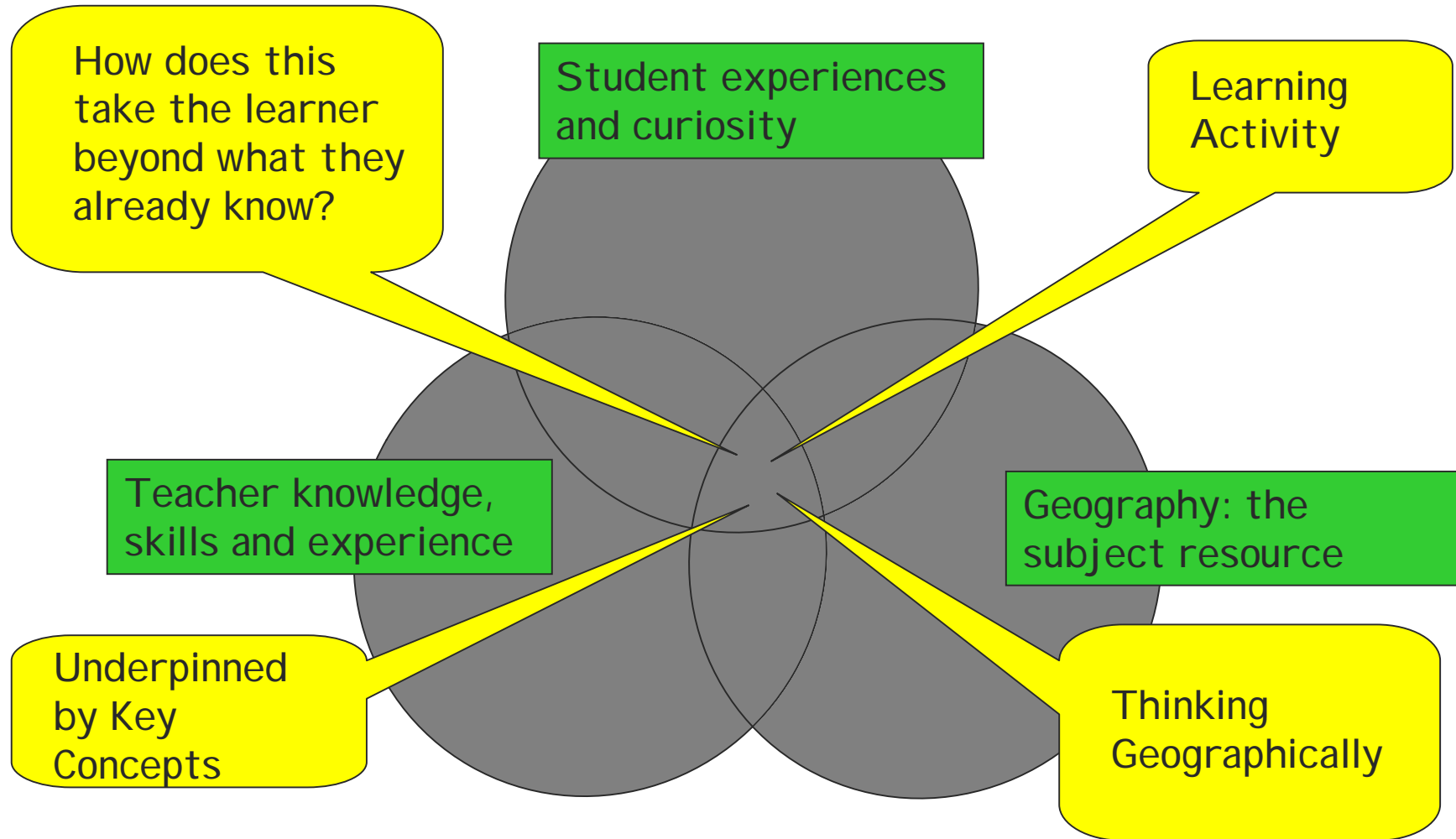
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# Geographical Content (2008 KS3)

- Place
- Space
- Scale
- Interdependence
- Environmental Interaction and sustainable development
- Physical and Human processes
- Cultural Understanding and Diversity

# Curriculum Making





# Concluding comments

1. We need to re-purpose subjects for 'new times'
  - The 'knowledge society'
  - The 'urgency' of our times
2. We need to develop models of 'strong inter-disciplinarity'
  - Working in the borderlands
3. We need to give teachers time to think about
  - traditions in education and the subject discipline. That is, about knowledge and wisdom, not just skills and competences





# Implications for Geography

1. Clarifying and refining the purpose of *geography in education*
2. Providing 'theoretical leadership' for teachers as the 'curriculum makers' – to think synoptically about the subject



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