



Lorraine Chaffer takes us through the Geography K-6 syllabus which becomes mandatory in 2017...

The NSW syllabuses for Geography K-10 and History K-10 replace the 1998 HSIE K-6 Syllabus for primary schools. The new Geography syllabus was informed by the Australian Curriculum. History K-6 was implemented in 2016, while Geography K-6, optional in 2016, will be taught from 2017. For the first time, Geography has its own identity in a K-6 setting, bringing with it many challenges and opportunities.

Before beginning to program, choose content and develop assessment activities for the Geography Syllabus K-6 teachers are advised to read the aim, rationale, stage statements and assessment advice and study the skills, tools and concepts, explanations and continuums. After doing so, thinking geographically will then make more sense.

Challenges

- Understanding geographical concepts, skills and tools;
- Developing the Geographical Inquiry Skills essential to investigating interactions between people, places and environments;
- Creating teaching programs that '*stimulate students' interest in and engagement with the world*' and develop '*informed, responsible and active citizens*' (see the 'Aim' in the NSW Geography Syllabus K-6 p. 15).

Similarities and differences

Although geographical content taught in the HSIE K-6 syllabus can be used in the new syllabus there is a need to work within the scope and spirit of the new syllabus. There is now greater emphasis on geographical inquiry skills and tools, particularly the use of fieldwork and spatial technologies and the application of geographical concepts.

The new syllabus has greater flexibility for teachers when choosing content, programming units of work and developing scope and sequence plans.

When programing, developing or adapting resources and creating assessment activities for Geography K-6, teachers should be guided by the *Stage Statements* on pages 18 -19 as well as the *Content Focus*, *Outcomes* and *Key Inquiry Questions* for each content area.

The concepts, inquiry skills and tools continuums should also be used when developing new teaching materials, differentiating the curriculum and developing assessment activities.

The following table shows components of the NSW Geography Syllabus K-6 that are essential and where flexibility is possible.

Whilst History and Geography are separate subjects, there are opportunities to integrate these subjects where there is a good fit.



Programming ‘must do V might do’

<i>Essential (must do)</i>	<i>Flexibility (might do)</i>
Units for each stage (listed on p.35 and elaborated pp.42-65)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In any order within a stage - Content can be integrated with other subjects - Content dash points are for guidance
Geographical concepts relevant to the stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can include more concepts but not fewer
Geographical Inquiry Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - acquire, process, communicate - use primary data (fieldwork) - use secondary sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use all or some of the inquiry skills – work towards a complete inquiry - Use Syllabus Key Inquiry Questions or develop your own. - Choose where and when to complete fieldwork and specific activities to suit content.
Geographical tools integrated into content and geographical inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Refer to letter symbols beside the content or select tools to suit content or inquiry activity
Integration of Learning Across the Curriculum (this is already mapped throughout the syllabus content)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Refer to the icons beside the content or select to suit content or inquiry activity
Courses of study and educational programs are based on the outcomes of the syllabus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Differentiate

Features of the new syllabus

Geographical concepts

The Geography Syllabus K-10 is underpinned by seven geographical concepts. The Geographical Concepts Continuum (pp 26-27) illustrates links between concepts and content by stage. The concepts are:

- Place
- Space
- Environment
- Interconnection
- Scale
- Sustainability
- Change

These concepts are introduced at different stages to build conceptual understanding from Early Stage 1 through to Stage 3, by which time all seven concepts should be integrated into learning activities. A brief outline of each concept is included in the table below.



CONCEPTS	STAGE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Place</i> – identifiable parts of earth’s surface • <i>Space</i> – the organisation, patterns and distribution of places • <i>Environment</i> – total surroundings and relevant natural and human processes 	Early Stage 1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Interconnection</i> – the links between people, places and environments, actions and consequences, planning and sustainability • <i>Scale</i> – <i>the levels</i> at which geographical phenomena are examined eg. local, national, regional, global 	Stage 1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sustainability</i> – the capacity of the environment to continue to support life 	Stage 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Change</i> – developments and variations over time 	Stage 3

Geographical inquiry skills

The Geographical Inquiry Skills Continuum (pages 30-31) illustrates the increasing sophistication of geographical inquiry activities through stages ES1- 3.

Students investigate the world through the Geographical Inquiry Skills of *acquiring, processing* and *communicating* geographical information. They use *geographical tools* (see below) to answer questions and over time will learn to develop their own geographical inquiry questions.

Collecting and interpreting data, drawing conclusions and communicating findings are essential components of geographical inquiry. Proposing and taking action, when appropriate, develop citizenship skills.

In each stage, students will use elements of geographical inquiry such as studying a map in class, taking photographs during fieldwork or using appropriate digital technologies to create a presentation. Over time, students will be able to undertake a complete inquiry activity independently or with guidance.

Geographical tools

The tools used to acquire geographical information include maps, fieldwork, graphs and statistics, spatial technologies and visual representations such as diagrams and photographs. In this context they are referred to as *secondary sources* of information.

Primary data is obtained through *fieldwork* activities such as taking photographs and measurements, making observations and conducting surveys. Primary data can be represented using tools such as graphs, maps and spatial technologies.

Geographical information can be *qualitative* (descriptive or visual) and *quantitative* (using statistics). The type of information required for geographical inquiry will determine the tools used and influence the type of fieldwork activities undertaken and the equipment needed. The content under investigation, such as a study of weather, will influence the inquiry activities chosen.



Fieldwork

Fieldwork can take place within school grounds and is an essential component of geographical inquiry. During fieldwork, students engage with the real world to gather primary data and answer inquiry questions. It is expected that over time students develop fieldwork skills that allow them to gather quantitative and qualitative geographical information. These skills include observing, recording, measuring, surveying and analysing the geographical features of places.

Examples at school could include:

- weather features such as temperature and wind (quantitative data);
- spatial characteristics such as distances between places (quantitative data);
- taking photographs, drawing maps and describing the features of places (qualitative data);
- observe, measure, record and analyse different places within the school (for early Stage 1 through to Stage 3).

Examples away from school

Fieldwork can also be completed at places further away and include part or whole day activities. A number of fieldwork providers support schools with activities designed specifically for the new Geography K-6 syllabus. Teachers should find their local Environmental Education Centre to see what they offer. Using these facilities is often a good first step for teachers wishing to develop their confidence with fieldwork skills and fieldwork equipment, after which they might develop their own fieldwork activities.

Note: It is important that fieldwork does not become ‘just an excursion’ in which teachers provide information about places. Meaningful and authentic fieldwork involves the active gathering of information = ‘work’.

Fieldwork equipment

Equipment can be low tech, high tech or somewhere in between.

Low tech - simple equipment such as a compass or printed identification charts of plants or animals.

High tech - more sophisticated equipment such as water quality testing equipment or the use of Apps to measure features such as direction and distance.

The availability of digital devices and access to the Internet are issues to consider when selecting fieldwork equipment and activities. There is no right or wrong approach to fieldwork as long as students are actively gathering geographical information. The more ‘hands on’ the fieldwork the more effective the geographical inquiry.



Spatial technologies

Spatial technologies are relatively new tools for geographical inquiry that include software and hardware interacting with real world locations such as virtual maps, satellite images and Global Positioning Systems (GPS). These are the new tools of the digital generation. The interactive nature of spatial technologies such as Google Earth helps students to visualise, analyse and record geographical phenomena and develop critical thinking and decision-making skills such as visualising settlement patterns in different places, analysing issues, developing explanations and proposing solutions.

The *Geographical Tools Continuum* (page 34) illustrates the increasing complexity and choices of tools that can be used from Early Stage 1 to Stage 3. The continuum makes differentiating the curriculum easier, for instance, challenging more capable students with complex tools from a higher stage e.g. a Stage 3 student might be challenged with Global Information Systems (GIS) activities.

Stage	Spatial Technologies
ES1	Virtual maps
1	Virtual maps Satellite images
2 & 3	Virtual maps Satellite images Global Positioning Systems (GPS)
4	Virtual maps Satellite images Global Positioning Systems (GPS) Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

A variety of scales

The syllabus requires a study of interactions between people, places and environments from the local to the global scale. In the early years the focus is on local places, familiar to students e.g. schoolyard, the street they live in or the local shopping centre. By stage 3, studies will focus on people, places and environments at a global scale such as countries or regions such as Asia and will include local comparisons, particularly through fieldwork activities.

Online Resources

The following websites can be used to develop a deeper understanding of the new syllabus and resources to assist with programming and assessment.

BOSTES K-10

As well as the syllabus, the BOSTES website provides support materials including assessment and programming materials and sample scope and sequence and teaching units.

<http://syllabus.bostes.nsw.edu.au/hsie/geography-k10/>

NSW Geography Teachers Association

<http://www.gtansw.org.au>



www.cpl.asn.au/journal

Australian Geography Teachers Association

<http://www.agta.asn.au>

Asia Teachers Association

<http://www.aeta.org.au>

DEC NSW Curriculum support

For stage based frameworks:

<http://www.hsiensw.com/k-10-teaching-and-learning-framework.html>

For the K-10 PDF document:

<http://www.hsiensw.com/uploads/4/7/7/1/47718841/geographyk-10.pdf>

GeogSpace

<http://www.geogspace.edu.au> Of particular use to teachers in NSW are the core units, support units and exemplars of student assessment activities. Care must be taken to match the material with stage based organization used in NSW.

Developing questions for Inquiry <http://www.geogspace.edu.au/support-units/geographical-inquiry/gi-illustration1.html>

EXEMPLARS F-4 <http://www.geogspace.edu.au/core-units/f-4/exemplars/exemplars.html>

Geography: What is it for?

A clever animation from South Australia highlighting the outcomes for students studying the new Australian curriculum.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sgGb8BM2TBk&list=PLCp3_brrD7xpDDH3oa3OjQOicUfaO1x8L&index=2

Geography in Years 1 & 2 using the draft Australian Curriculum

An inspiring YouTube clip from South Australia highlighting the introduction of geographical inquiry and questioning in the early years

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5pGpri67uK8>

Lorraine Chaffer has 38 years' experience as a Geography teacher in NSW public schools and has been heavily involved in the professional development of teachers. Lorraine was a consultant in the development of the NSW Geography Syllabus K-10, has written textbooks for the Australian Curriculum Geography and the NSW Geography Syllabus K-10 and has worked with K-6 teachers across NSW to unpack the new syllabus and develop the essential knowledge, understanding and skills to deliver the syllabus effectively. Lorraine is Vice President of the Geography Teachers Association of NSW and a board member of the Professional Teachers Council.