



STEPPING OUT INTO GEOGRAPHY – REFLECTION AND DIRECTION

Kathy Jones, Fieldwork Connections

Over the past four years and during my university studies in Geography education I have spent a lot of time identifying and developing My Geography and what this means in the context of Australian schools. I have found myself on a path which leads towards inquiry and outdoor learning and I have found that this naturally leads to fieldwork.

I spend a lot of time in the natural world and have always loved observing how natural processes occur. From my background in Environmental Science, my observations of biophysical processes allow me to understand links between human impacts and management of environments. However, I have also learnt that a lot of people see the world through a more human-centric lens and the natural world is mostly kept at arms-length. The danger is that it can be hard to truly comprehend how humans impact our world if we don't first understand the natural processes at play.

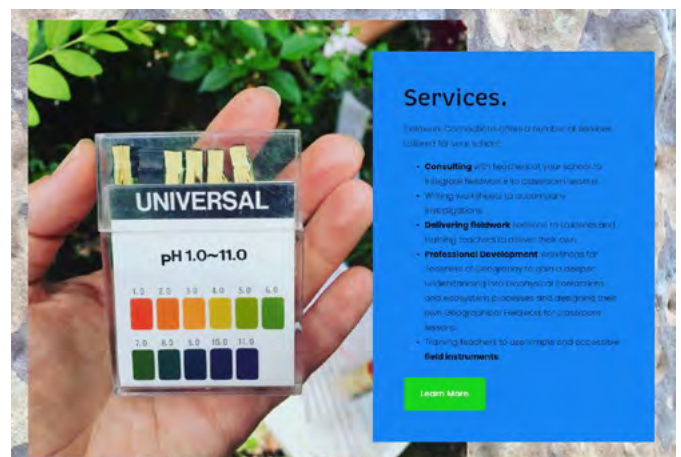
Fieldwork in Geography takes us outside the classroom and allows us to immerse ourselves in the natural world. It sparks wonder which leads to inquiry questioning and light-bulb moments when we realise the simplicities and complexities of how the world works, but equally importantly, how we fit into this delicate balance.

From reading the last edition of the Geography Bulletin (v52, 4, 2020), there are some inspiring geography teachers who have embraced and incorporated fieldwork into their schools and lessons, however, I also know that for a lot of teachers, the thought of taking students outside the classroom is quite a daunting idea and they have no idea where to begin. There are many excellent external opportunities for schools to complete the fieldwork component of the Geography curriculum (NESA, 2015) immersed in an ecosystem, but I feel that fieldwork also needs to become more streamlined into lessons with tools and skills for deeper understanding.

I found myself asking 'Why don't geography teachers enjoy fieldwork?'. I came to the realisation that it was because of the high number (40%) of out-of-field teachers who find themselves teaching Geography

(National Committee for Geographical Sciences, 2018). Some aspects of Geography can have close links to other HSIE subjects and teachers may attempt undertaking suburb liveability surveys, however, fieldwork is more than human demographics and urban processes.

I believe that to truly understand Geography you first need to understand the biophysical environment. It is only then that we can begin to understand human impacts and change which leads to management. I believe that if out-of-field Geography teachers, or 'teachers-of-Geography', can build a firm understanding of biophysical processes through simple fieldwork investigations, they will gain a deeper understanding and grow in confidence and passion for what they are teaching and this will flow through to their students own engagement, enjoyment and understanding. Ultimately the goal is to increase the number of students in senior geography and onto future careers made for informed, responsible and active citizens.





in 50'. Knowledge and skills to use geographical tools can first be discovered in the classroom, followed by observations and data collection in the school grounds. Most importantly, to bring meaning, discussions or directed questions to guide students to an understanding of what they have just participated in and observed and how this fits into the bigger picture, not only from the syllabus but also to the local community and their own lives.

Through my work in industry and now having completed my education degree I hope to fill a small niche to bring about slow but impactful change. I believe that my vision of simple Geographical Fieldwork for all teachers of Geography can bring them to a deeper understanding of not only biophysical processes and human interactions in the context of Geography but also how fieldwork is nothing to be feared as it can be made simple, accessible and achievable in a Geography lesson.

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If teachers of Geography are to understand the Syllabus and make Geography lessons Geographical (Caldis, 2019) by integrating content and concepts with tools and skills, inquiry, language and communication, then this can also be directly applied to Geographical Fieldwork. Geographical fieldwork incorporates all these elements as well as being relevant, having meaning and most importantly being accessible to all 'teachers-of-Geography' and their students.

But how does this work in practice? How can we keep it simple? Fieldwork does not need to be a full day program. It can be a simple idea or process, gently sequenced into lessons, on school grounds, with minimal cost and disruption. These ideas were also developed by Caldís (2020) in 'Fieldwork

References

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- National Committee for Geographical Sciences (2018). *Geography: Shaping Australia's Future*. Australian Academy of Science.
- NSW Educational Standards Authority [NESA]. (2015). *NSW Syllabus for the Australian Curriculum, Geography K–10 Syllabus*. NESA.

Fieldwork Connections

Simple. Accessible. Meaningful.

Geographical Fieldwork for Australian Schools

Geography is the study of the world around us, the natural processes and interactions of living and non-living things. Geography is also the way that people interact and manage the landscape and their place within it. It is vital that we respect and acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who cared for and managed this landscape for tens of thousands of years. We pay respect to their elders past, present and emerging.