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Dumbed-down curriculum means primary students will learn less about the world and nothing about climate

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Revisions to the Australian primary school curriculum for geography mean children will learn much less about the world and its diversity than they do at present. They will learn nothing about some significant concepts such as climate.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) launched the [new version](#) of the Australian Curriculum on May 9. ACARA [described](#) it as “a more stripped-back and teachable curriculum that identifies the essential content our children should learn”.

Overall, the new curriculum reduces the number of content descriptions by 21%. These are statements that describe what teachers should teach and what students should learn. In primary school geography, however, 50% of the content descriptions in the Knowledge and Understanding strand have been deleted or had content reduced.

The education ministers of the governments of Australia [pressured](#) ACARA to reduce the content in the primary school humanities and social science learning areas. What is this knowledge that they have decided is no longer essential for our children to learn?

What knowledge of the world is gone?

The [previous curriculum](#) had a sequence of content descriptions that gave students some knowledge of the world beyond Australia. The following have been deleted:

- the division of the world into hemispheres, continents and oceans (in year 2)
- the main climate types of the world and the similarities and differences between the climates of different places (in year 3)
- a brief study of the continents and countries of Africa

and South America (in year 4), and Europe and North America (in year 5)

- differences in the economic, demographic and social characteristics of countries across the world (in year 6)
- the world’s cultural diversity, including that of its indigenous peoples (in year 6).

The only world knowledge retained in the revision is the study of Australia’s neighbouring countries in year 3 and Asia in year 6. As a result, students will learn nothing about four of the continents, or of the environmental, economic, demographic and social differences and similarities between the countries of the world. They will have no sense of the world as a whole, and its diversity.

In an increasingly interconnected world, children need at least to know about the countries we are connected to through history, trade, migration, alliances and government and non-government aid.

What key concepts have been lost?

Concepts are what we think with, and intellectual development is based on conceptual thinking. The previous curriculum developed children’s understanding of the following key concepts and ways of thinking.

The **concept of place**, including the definition of a place, and an understanding of the importance of places to people. The study of places is the core of primary school geography.

The **concept of location**, including why things are located where they are, and the influence of location

and accessibility on people's activities. These were in the curriculum to get students thinking about the effects of location and distance on their lives, and about where things should be located.

The **concept of space**, including the management of spaces within neighbourhoods and towns. This introduced students to debates about how land should be used and how development conflicts are resolved, and to the idea of town planning.

The **concept of climate**. The difference between climate and weather still confuses debate over climate change, so an understanding of this difference is vital.

The **concept of a settlement**, including the differences between places in types of settlement and demographic characteristics. This added another concept to students' knowledge of places, and introduced them to the small area census data that reveal much about Australian communities.

All this content has been removed.

What are the impacts on learning?

The revision of the primary school geography curriculum has done three things:

1. it has severely reduced children's knowledge of the world
2. it has reduced the level of conceptual thinking that students will be exposed to
3. it will leave them less prepared for geography in secondary school, where the curriculum was designed on the assumption that students would know what is in the current one.

If the aim of these deletions has been to make more time for the development of literacy and numeracy skills, it is self-defeating. Children apply and develop these skills and expand their vocabulary through subjects such as geography and history.

Is this the best we can do to help young Australians understand the world? The [geography curriculum for England](#) demands much more.

#GOWITHGEO provides valuable information on career pathways, resources, study and news.

GEOGRAPHY: IT'S ALL AROUND US!

Geography is the study of places and the relationships between people and their environments. Geographers investigate both the physical properties of Earth's surface and the human societies spread across it. It also examines how human culture interacts with the natural environment and the way that locations and places can have an impact on people. Geography seeks to understand where things are found, why they are there, and how they develop and change over time.

"Geography explains the past, illuminates the present and prepares us for the future. What could be more important than that?"
— Sir Michael Palin, English actor, comedian, writer and television presenter

"The study of geography is about more than just memorizing places on a map. It's about understanding the complexity of our world, appreciating the diversity of cultures that exists across continents. And in the end, it's about using all that knowledge to help bridge divides and bring people together."
— Barack Obama (President, United States of America, 2009-2017)

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The Australian Geography Teachers Association

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AGTA is proud to present this professional learning experience so that you can further your thinking about the teaching of geography in Australian primary schools.

The *Australian Curriculum: Geography V9.0* was released in mid-2022 and reveals the direction geography teaching, including at primary level, should be heading in Australia.

Teachers in all states and territories can learn from its new directions. You can also think about how best to create meaningful student learning activities within this new direction.

This professional development course has been created by Dr Paul Batten and it features video of Assoc. Prof. Alaric Maude – lead writer of the original Australian Curriculum: Geography – interviewed by Dr. Susan Caldis, 2022 Chair of AGTA.

This course provides a bite-sized opportunity of 1-hour of PD including:

- unpacking V9.0, especially through hearing from an expert geographer on the topic (AITSL Standard 2.3.2)
- providing opportunity for collegial discussions with others from across Australia (AITSL Standard 6.2.2)
- inviting you to develop some engaging teaching ideas (AITSL Standard 2.1.2)

Here are some reviews:

- *What a fantastic resource. I can see this being very helpful to teachers of all levels of experience, and something that will be well-received by our communities.*
- *The videos were fantastic and the platform is really slick and worked well.*
- *I love it! I can see real benefits for our community of primary teachers doing this course.*

To access the course go to www.openlearning.com/agta/courses/primary-geo/

COST: \$43 (Geography Association members \$33) you can register straight away at that website, by first creating an Open Learning account by clicking *Join Up* or *Sign Up*, and then paying using credit card. If you want your school to pay for you, follow the instructions at shorturl.at/aBOU7 to organise an invoice. If you have any questions email agta.elearning@gmail.com

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