

# EDITORIAL

ARTHUR KELLY AND BEN BALLIN



## Leading geography

**AK:** You look like you've been to a party, Ben! What's the celebration?

**BB:** I don't know if everyone has heard, Arthur, but *Primary Geography* is 30 years old!

**AK:** Wow! That takes me back to a time, towards the end of the last century, when geography was not a compulsory subject at primary school; when nothing was, really. Let's have a look at what that original National Curriculum for geography looked like...

## The past

**AK:** I managed to find the interim report of the Geography Working Group on the National Curriculum (DES, 1989). It looks like it was typed on an old-fashioned typewriter and it's ninety-nine pages long! I also found the original National Curriculum from 1990 (DES/Welsh Office, 1990).

**BB:** Amazing! It's almost as old as *Primary Geography*! This issue's interviewee, Wendy Morgan, was involved in that working group. She talks in this issue about how they were creating a formalised primary geography curriculum for the first time. That first National Curriculum was huge, wasn't it? All those folders! It covered both England and Wales, I think?

**AK:** For sure. Geography became a compulsory subject from 5 to 11, something that we take for granted today. The Attainment Targets (AT), explained what should be taught:

- AT1: Geographical skills
- AT2: The home area and region
- AT3: The United Kingdom within the European Community
- AT4: The wider world
- AT5: Physical geography
- AT6: Human geography
- AT7: Environmental geography

For each Attainment Target, there were Level Descriptors; what pupils should achieve. So, by the end of KS1, they should achieve a Level 2 in geography. By the end of KS2 they should achieve a...

**BB:** Level 6?

**AK:** No, that would be too logical. Level 4! Here's an example (Figure 1).



Guest editors, Arthur Kelly and Ben Ballin. Photo © Authors.

Level	Statements of Attainment	Examples
1	1a) Name the country in which they live.	<i>England and Wales</i>
2	2a) Demonstrate that they know what the constituent countries of the UK are. 2b) Identify, from suitable sources of information, features of specific localities within the UK and EC. 2c) Suggest how features identified in 3/2b might affect the lives of the people who live in these localities.	<i>The nature of the homes and other buildings; the general environment of the area; activity carried out in the area. What it might be like to live in such surroundings.</i>
3	3a) Identify and name on a map of the British Isles, the constituent countries and selected cities and physical features. 3b) Locate on a suitable map of the British Isles approximately where they live. 3c) Identify and describe the features of the UK and EU localities selected for study.	<i>Main features of the landscape, including conspicuous relief features, settlements...</i>

Figure 1: Example Attainment Target for Attainment Target 3, Key Stage 1. Source: DES/Welsh Office, 1990.

The document also quite clearly sets out that geographical skills, areas and themes should be taught together – not distinctly (Figure 2). How does this compare to today?

Some of the material looks very dated, but other parts are worth a look. I like the section on Geography for All. I find AT3 (The UK within the European Community) very interesting, given what we are going through at the moment.

**BB:** It's hard to imagine that becoming an Attainment Target right now! But maybe it was all a bit too prescriptive? Do you remember, you could study Paraguay but not Brazil? That was odd! And there again, perhaps it was also trying to do too much?



Figure 2: The 1990 National Curriculum set out that geographical skills, areas and themes should be taught together rather than distinctly.

I'm not surprised that a slimmer National Curriculum was issued in 2000, with fewer Attainment Targets. Of course, by then Wales had its own devolved curriculum, in line with the other UK nations.

**AK:** Then we had the exemplar Schemes of Work (QCA/DfEE, 1998): basically, medium-term plans.

**BB:** And don't forget the 'Big Picture of the Curriculum', with stuff like Sustainable Development, Global Dimensions and Community Cohesion. It helped launch some very imaginative geography teaching, but there was also a real risk of what people started to call 'initiative overload'. Too much stuff coming out, too much micro-management. It was as if schools were meant to fix all of society's ills.

## The nearly present

**AK:** Let's not forget *The Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum*, AKA The Rose Review (DCSF, 2009). That had a very different vision of the primary curriculum, including geography.

**BB:** Oh yes, that was all about 'Areas of Learning'. A bit like the Scottish and Welsh curricula now. Geography almost got merged with History! And then it got separated out again, within the same 'area'. Around the same time, the Cambridge Primary Review's truly independent proposals talked about 'Time and Place' (Alexander, 2010). The Review's ideas are still incredibly interesting. They were very thoroughly researched. The Review's Robin Alexander and Alison Peacock are on the roll call of former *PG* interviewees! So, back to the Rose Review. A new curriculum even got printed and went into schools, didn't it? And then it got withdrawn. It must have been a very confusing time for schools.

**AK:** But isn't what Primary and Early Years teachers actually do, on a very local basis, more important than any curriculum set nationally?

**BB:** I'm with you on that, Arthur. Every time, it is the real, living and 'enacted' curriculum that matters more than the one on paper, whatever politicians think!

## 30th Birthday: the present

**AK:** Well, we know what's in the current National Curriculum for England (see web panel). Definitely much slimmer than the first National Curriculum! You have to look hard to find any environmental geography on paper, but my work with the Primary Geography Quality Mark tells me that it is still strong in schools.

**BB:** There is still a very strong 'Green Thread' within the Scottish and the Welsh National Curricula (see web panel). Shall we take a look at what this issue of *Primary Geography* tells us about the state

of real, enacted, living geography in the UK's primary schools? Well, Rachel Adams, Alan Kinder and Naomi Wagner *et al.* provide a particular view on how the Geographical Association is involved in the leadership of Early Years and primary geography. While National Curricula may change, the GA is always there!

**AK:** Yes, I also like the articles from Richard Greenwood and Richard Hatwood. These show that, in the different context of the Northern Ireland and Wales curricula, good geography teaching still always enthuses and engages.

**BB:** There are some really good examples of engaging practice in Louise Wilkinson and Fionna Croft's piece about an international link, and Tracy Edwards's account of enabling SEND learners to 'read the world'.

**AK:** Both articles raise some invaluable questions about the 'charity mindset', too.

**BB:** I hope so. John Halocha gives us an important reminder that good-quality geographical teaching and learning goes beyond the National Curriculum. This also comes through in Kate Thurston's piece... and from the three writers on the Primary Geography Quality Mark. Good subject leaders go beyond; they use the locality and current global events to teach and inspire.

**AK:** The article on Bunhill Fields reminds me that there are lots of hidden places, and stories, right under our noses. Every locality has these fascinating stories waiting to be discovered and used by teachers in all kinds of ways to inspire and motivate children.

**BB:** I love Helen Martin's article. It covers so many things: a whole-school approach, young pupils, parents, performance. The focus on plastics highlighted environmental issues, that 'Green Thread', which remains so important to geography... and to pupils.

**AK:** Yes, it reminds us that geographers (all educators, actually) make the future.

## The future: the next 30 years?

**AK:** So, thirty years in, we at *Primary Geography* should celebrate learning, celebrate pupils, celebrate the planet and celebrate the future. We raise a glass to you all! Way back in the depths of the last century, I remember a quote, 'Geography is what geographers do' (Johnson, 1980). We should remember that, by nature, pupils want to find out about the world that they live in. They are inherently geographers. As teachers, we can help them become better citizens of tomorrow; we can teach the geography of the world, not stuck in the past, but as it is today and what it might be tomorrow.

**BB:** Amen to that!

## References

- Alexander, R. (ed) (2010) *Children, their world, their education. Final Report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- DCSF (2009) *The Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum: Final Report*. London: Department for Children, Schools and Families
- DES (1989) *Interim report of the geography working group*. London: Department for Education and Science.
- DES and The Welsh Office (1990) *Geography*. London: Department for Education and Science.
- Johnson, R.J. (1980) 'Review Symposium: Geography is what geographers do – and did!', *Progress in Geography*, 4, 2, pp. 277–83.
- QCA/DfEE (1998) *A Scheme of Work for Key Stages 1 and 2: Geography*. London: QCA.



## WEB RESOURCES

The National Curricula in the UK, Spring 2019:  
England: <https://www.gov.uk/national-curriculum>  
Northern Ireland: <http://ccea.org.uk/curriculum/overview>  
Scotland: <https://education.gov.scot>  
Wales: <https://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills> (proposals for a new National Curriculum for Wales are due out later in 2019)  
Download ideas for using the front cover of this issue: [www.geography.org.uk/pg](http://www.geography.org.uk/pg)

Ben Balli.