HAS GEOGRAPHY CURRICULUM REFORM IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA STRENGTHENED CONTINUITY AND PROGRESSION?

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ABSTRACT

Continuity and progression are hallmarks of quality learning. Continuity relates to the extent to which significant features of a discipline are emphasised as a learner moves through the school system. Progression refers to the way a learner’s knowledge, skills and understanding are deepened in a given knowledge area as he or she moves through the school system. In this article we investigate the extent to which these two constructs form part of the design features of post-apartheid Geography curriculum frameworks. We further examine whether revisions to curriculum frameworks have strengthened continuity and progression in South African school Geography. We conclude that elements of continuity and progression are evident in both the Human and Social Sciences document of Curriculum 2005 (C2005) and the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) for Social Sciences. However, several shortcomings concerning continuity and progression are evident in the documents, requiring teacher competence in both geographical and pedagogical knowledge.

Introduction

At the level of policy, the past decade has witnessed several changes to school Geography in South Africa. In the General Education and Training (GET) Band, for example, the changes have occurred in three phases: the introduction of the interim syllabus in 1996; the introduction of Curriculum 2005 in 1997; and the introduction of the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) in 2002. These changes have ostensibly been introduced to strengthen social sciences education in South Africa generally, and geography education more specifically. A question that arises is: What criteria could we use to assess improvement in the quality of geography education in schools?

Some criteria that Chalkley, Fournier and Hill (2000: 238) refer to are issues such as the clarity of the goals and objectives, the development of a sound base of knowledge and understanding, ensuring an appropriate level of difficulty and learner-centred programmes to achieve deep rather than superficial learning. Learners should be exposed to increasingly complex challenges through programmes that have attributes that motivate and engage them in learning that is systematically planned and organised. They also suggest that teachers should use a wealth of learning resources and appropriate forms of formative and summative assessment. Chalkley et al. (2008), however, neglect to mention two other important criteria of quality geography education, namely, continuity and progression. Several other authors such as Bennets (1995, 2002), Chamber and Donert (1996), Leat (2000), Lambert and Balderstone (2000), Owen and Ryan (2001), Butt (2002) argue that continuity and progression are key elements of geography learning. Details of the arguments they present appear later in the article.

In South Africa attempts have been made to ensure that continuity and progression are elements of post-apartheid geography education through the inclusion of design features such as range statements and assessment criteria in Curriculum 2005 and assessment standards in the RNCS. An analysis of the extent to which continuity and progression are promoted in school geography and whether these constructs have been strengthened or weakened by changes to geography curricula over the past decade is therefore justified. Although we acknowledge that there is a distinction between the curriculum intended and the curriculum-in-use, and that good teachers would mediate geography subject matter to ensure continuity and progression in learning (irrespective of what is present or absent in policy documents), this article will focus on an analysis of policy documents. The curriculum intended does have a bearing on classroom practice. Research in South Africa has shown that teachers traditionally have relied mainly on syllabuses, school textbooks, etc. to frame and guide their work. However, we also recognise other planning elements as integral to successful geography teaching and learning.

The article is divided into four main sections. First, we provide an overview of curriculum change in South Africa over the past decade with specific reference to geography education in the Senior Phase of the General Education and Training band. Second, we introduce the constructs continuity and progression in relation to geography. Third, we analyse selected geography topics in Curriculum 2005 and the RNCS to ascertain the extent to which continuity and progression are promoted within and across grades, with particular reference to the Senior Phase (grades 7 to 9). Fourth, we critically reflect on whether continuity and progression have been strengthened by new revisions to the geography curriculum for GET in South Africa.

Curriculum change in South Africa over the past decade

In the years immediately following South Africa’s first democratic elections in 1994, curriculum change
in geography education was not substantive. In the main this curriculum revision involved exercising racial content as well as outdated and inaccurate subject matter from school syllabuses. Jansen (1999: 57) points out that the haste with which the South African state pursued what he terms, ‘a superficial cleansing of the inherited curriculum’, needs to be understood in terms of a set of pressures faced by a South African state in transition. He further argues that syllabus alterations which took place during this period had very little to do with the school curriculum, but were more concerned with an uncertain state seeking legitimacy following the national elections. It is worth noting that syllabus alterations in this early period in South Africa’s democracy had symbolic rather than actual significance.

The ‘superficial cleansing’ of the apartheid curriculum meant that the geography curriculum did not change significantly in the years immediately following the legal dismantling of apartheid. The criticism levelled against the geography syllabuses of the apartheid era therefore also applied to geography syllabuses in the first few years of the post-apartheid era. The focus, especially in standards 5 to 7 (today grades 7 to 9), remained mainly on transmission of factual knowledge and not on the development of enquiry skills in order to apply geographical knowledge and understanding to different geographical issues and contexts. Although the provincialised interim syllabus in the Western Cape, for example, introduced what was called, ‘the new approach’, teaching largely reflected a teacher-centred approach characterised by the transmission of geographical facts. This new approach was described as: ‘…understanding relevant knowledge, ideas and concepts; the learning and practising of skills; and attitudes and values that influence the interrelationship between people and the environment’ (Western Cape Education Department, 1996: 1). A key reason for this was a continued reliance on mainly summative assessment that involved learners recalling memorised facts. This was so despite the introduction of what could be interpreted as more constructivist curriculum design features such as ‘Learners should be able to…’ and ‘General techniques and skills to learn and practice…’ which were aligned with the list of content topics that should be covered (Western Cape Education Department, 1996: 1).

In March 1997 the National Education Ministry launched a new curriculum framework entitled Curriculum 2005 (C2005). It was envisaged that this curriculum would replace content-based education with outcomes-based education (OBE), and teacher-centred pedagogies with more learner-centred pedagogies. Another change was the replacement of the 42 school subjects offered to learners in South African primary schools by eight learning areas. The learning areas combined the old subjects, ostensibly to promote a more holistic and integrated approach. Each learning area had curriculum-linked outcomes which learners were required to attain through engaging with learning activities. According to Wilmot and Norton (2004: 28) these developments were marked, among others, by ‘a shift towards a generalist curriculum with a collapsing of discipline boundaries resulting in history and geography being subsumed within the Human and Social Sciences Learning area’.

The introduction of Curriculum 2005 gave rise to a period of vociferous debate and fierce contestation on the merits of outcomes-based education (see, for example, Jansen and Christie, 1999). Other criticisms relate to the difficulties of implementing the new curriculum in resource-poor contexts. In response to the criticisms levelled against Curriculum 2005, South Africa’s second post-apartheid Minister of Education commissioned a committee to review Curriculum 2005. The review committee made several recommendations based on its visits to schools, review of published literature on Curriculum 2005 and review of submissions made by organisations and individuals as well as further investigation (for detail, see Chisholm et al., 2000). This provides the context for the discussion which follows on the concomitant impact on the status of school Geography.

Geographers and the curriculum transformation process

When Curriculum 2005 was launched in 1997 there was concern among geographers and geography teachers that the distinctive character of Geography could be lost since aspects of Human Geography were located in the Human and Social Sciences learning area and Physical Geography was located in the Natural Sciences learning area (Binns, 1999). This concern was based on the fact that the discipline is made up of many fields of knowledge, such as economics, conservation, hydrology, politics, demography, development studies, regional studies, spatial literacy, environmental studies, energy studies, pedology, biogeography, meteorology, climatology, geophysics, geology and astronomy (Earle and Keats, 1996; Van der Merwe, 1996). These sub-disciplines of the subject could become lost or diluted if not integrated into a separate Geography learning area (Mosidi, 1998). Since the Geography community’s request to have a Geography learning area was not acceded to by the national Department of Education (DoE), Geography remained split, with Physical Geography located in the Natural Sciences learning area and Human Geography in the Human and Social Sciences learning area. This left unaddressed the concern expressed by Pemberton (1990: 5) that ‘…attempting to solve many important geographic problems without geography’s physical component or its social component leads to unsatisfactory solutions’. The consequence of this is that the possibility of school Geography (as a subject in the GET) effectively addressing the Critical Outcomes (COs) and the subject-specific Learning Outcomes (LOs), was significantly reduced.

Moreover, the position of Human Geography in the Human and Social Sciences was tenuous at the time because the first Curriculum 2005 document did not prescribe specific content for each grade. Implementation of Curriculum 2005 was based on the premise that teachers had the competence to design learning programmes that would help learners achieve
nationally defined critical and specific outcomes (SOs). Theoretically, teachers could use any relevant content in designing learning programme activities as long as they enabled learners to achieve the appropriate outcomes. In October 1997, however, broad content guidelines were provided in the form of what was termed assessment criteria, range statements and performance indicators (for details, see Department of Education, 1997). The publication of the latter document reinforced the location of Physical Geography within the Natural Sciences learning area by defining the theme *The Planet Earth and Beyond* as one of four themes of the Natural Sciences learning area. The scope statement of the theme *The Planet Earth and Beyond* reads as follows:

Earth’s structure, dynamic features and components – from core to upper atmosphere – and the delicacy of the many environments associated with the Earth must be appreciated and understood at an appropriate level. A grasp of planet Earth’s place in the universe can instil a sense of wonder and stimulate the imaginations of learners. Within this theme, learning contexts should be drawn from under the Earth’s surface; on the Earth’s surface; above the Earth’s surface; and beyond the Earth (Department of Education, 1997: NS-7).

Furthermore, Curriculum 2005 distinguished between two types of outcomes: critical outcomes and specific outcomes. Critical outcomes are generic and cross-curricular and aim to develop in learners the knowledge and skills required to function meaningfully in a democratic country. Specific outcomes are curriculum-linked outcomes and therefore specific to different learning areas. The nine specific outcomes that appear in the original *Human and Social Sciences* framework document are:

1. Demonstrate a critical understanding of how South African society has changed and developed.
2. Demonstrate a critical understanding of patterns of social development.
3. Participate actively in promoting a just, democratic and equitable society.
4. Make sound judgements about the development, utilisation and management of resources.
5. Critically understand the role of technology in social development.
6. Demonstrate an understanding of interrelationships between society and the natural environment.
7. Address social and environmental issues in order to promote development and social justice.
8. Analyse forms and processes of organisations.
9. Use a range of skills and techniques in the Human and Social Sciences context. (Department of Education, 1997: HSS-2)

Specific Outcomes 1 to 8 can be regarded as the so-called ‘content’ outcomes. SO 9, which lists skills and techniques, was intended as a service outcome for each of the eight ‘content’ outcomes (SO 1 to 8). The range statements of specific outcomes indicated the scope, depth and parameters of the achievement for each phase (Foundation Phase: grades R to 3; Intermediate Phase: grades 4 to 6; Senior Phase: grades 7 to 9). They included indications of the critical areas of content, processes and context with which the learner should engage in order to reach an acceptable level of achievement of an outcome (Department of Education, 1997: 119). Close scrutiny of the specific outcomes reveals that SO 4, SO 5 and SO 6 could be classified as the so-called geography knowledge and understanding SOs, while SO 7 was the one which focused on exploration of geographical issues (see Table 1 for content topics). It is important to note that range statements that were gazetted in relation to the SOs, indicated parameters of achievement across phases and not grades. In other words, no level descriptors for grades (school years) were specified at this stage.

Few would dispute that Geography could serve as the context for achieving each of the mentioned SOs. But, so could other disciplines such as History. How effectively geographical knowledge and processes might be used to achieve these outcomes would depend largely on the depth of the teacher’s knowledge and experience of teaching Geography. If, for example, the teacher teaching *Human and Social Sciences* had a History background then History might be fore-grounded in the classroom. It was this kind of possibility that made geographers feel at the time that Curriculum 2005 ‘emasculates the subject by forcing it into a social education framework’ (Ballantyne, 1999). Such a concern might be warranted because geography teachers in parts of the USA and Australia have struggled to regain the subject’s identity since its absorption into social studies frameworks in these countries (Binns, 1999).

However, not all geography educationists share the view that Geography’s position in Curriculum 2005 became tenuous. For example, Van Harmelen (1999) argues that Curriculum 2005 provided opportunities to radically rethink the nature of geography education in South Africa. She argues that Curriculum 2005 provided opportunities to break away from textbook-based behaviourist approaches to geography education that had dominated school Geography in South Africa up to that point. In her view, Curriculum 2005 opened up opportunities for introducing social constructivist approaches to Geography education. Van Harmelen (1999) also makes a valid point that Curriculum 2005 was never intended to provide learners with specialist knowledge, but explicitly aimed at a general education that was compulsory for all South African learners. Specialist knowledge was intended for the Further Education and Training band.

What we have described is the state of affairs up to 1999 when South Africa’s second post-apartheid Minister of Education was appointed. As mentioned, the first major decision he made was to appoint a committee to review Curriculum 2005. The review committee recommendations led to the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) for the GET band (Department of Education, 2002a). The review process provided another opportunity for geographers and geography teachers to forward submissions to strengthen the position of school Geography. The review of Curriculum 2005 also significantly informed the development of a National Curriculum Statement for the FET band. Against this background we next discuss further developments.
in South African geography education with specific reference to changes that have occurred within the GET band.

**Geography teaching and learning under the RNCS**

Based on the review of Curriculum 2005, a final Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) was published in 2002. In short, OBE remained the foundation of the RNCS, the critical outcomes remained unaltered, but the specific outcomes were replaced by fewer curriculum-linked outcomes called learning outcomes, and some of the sophisticated design features were simplified or removed (see Table 2). Table 2 does not provide details concerning all of the design features of C2005 and the RNCS, but it provides evidence that the design features were simplified.

Content foci in the RNCS policy document are explicitly defined for each grade and knowledge and skill development across grades are also provided (Department of Education, 2002a). Parts of Physical Geography remain located within the Natural Sciences learning area as defined by the scope statement of the theme *The Planet Earth and Beyond* (see earlier reference to this). However, Geography gained a distinctive identity in the Social Sciences learning area. In the RNCS the knowledge area has its own learning outcomes and knowledge foci as does History. The three Geography learning outcomes are:
Learning Outcome 1: Geographical enquiry
The learner will be able to use enquiry skills to investigate geographical and environmental concepts and processes.

Learning Outcome 2: Knowledge and understanding
The learner will be able to demonstrate geographical and environmental knowledge and understanding.

Learning Outcome 3: Exploring issues
The learner will be able to make informed decisions about social and environmental issues and problems.

(Department of Education, 2002a)

Learning and teaching Geography in the RNCS is associated with the development of ‘enquiry skills to investigate key concepts and processes in Geography; knowledge and understanding of the interrelationships between people, resources and the environment; and critical analysis of development issues on a local, national and global scale’ (Department of Education, 2002a:5). With appropriate teacher mediation, learners should progressively develop the required skills to enhanced geographical understanding. Abilities that they would be required to develop include: finding sources relevant to the enquiry; working with sources which incorporate asking questions, finding information, organising, analysing, and synthesising (interpreting) information; answering questions and considering practical actions where possible, and reporting on findings of the enquiry process using different communication skills.

In contrast to curriculum statements of C2005, which was defined per phase, in the RNCS knowledge foci are defined for each grade in the General Education and Training band to serve as the context for achieving the learning outcomes. The knowledge foci for grades 7 to 9 (the Senior Phase) are illustrated in Table 3.

The overview document (Department of Education, 2002c: 13) states that ‘...assessment standards in each Learning Area Statement provide the conceptual progression in each Learning Area from grade to grade’. These assessment standards are intended to indicate the minimum requirement in a particular grade for each learning outcome. In the case of the Geography Learning Outcome 2 they are not generic geographical standards focussing on the elements that will constitute quality geography learning, but they emphasise specific content learning. Table 4 shows the stated progression across three grades in the Senior Phase for Learning Outcome 2 (Knowledge and understanding).

The value of the acquired ‘geographical’ skills, knowledge and understanding lies in their application to situations, and to challenges and issues in the worlds that learners encounter. To enable learners in the teaching and learning processes to attain the required competence in terms of Learning Outcome 3 (Exploring Issues), they are expected to make informed decisions about social and environmental issues and problems by ‘identifying the issue; understanding the factors affecting the issue; and making choices or decisions or providing alternatives’ (Department of Education, 2002a: 71). The assumption is that learners are only in a position to develop appropriate understanding as well as appropriate values and attitudes that might ensure a sustainable future for the environment (natural and human) when they start to become aware of human factors influencing problems and issues.
Table 3: Geography knowledge foci for Grades 7-9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th>Grade 8</th>
<th>Grade 9</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Natural hazards</strong> (e.g. drought, floods, earthquakes, volcanoes and tropical cyclones):</td>
<td><strong>Settlement:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Development issues:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• simple explanations of how natural hazards occur - physical processes, climate change, poor environmental management;</td>
<td>• functions of cities;</td>
<td>• approaches to development: concepts of developing, developed, sustainable development and sustainability, applicability to South Africa and elsewhere;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• the impact of hazards on people’s lives - distinguish between disasters and hazards;</td>
<td>• settlement patterns, including internal structures of settlements and location patterns in South Africa and elsewhere;</td>
<td>• the role of science and technology: effect on development, the Green Revolution, modification of crops, use of appropriate technology.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• why some people are more at risk than others;</td>
<td>• factors affecting settlement patterns, including physical, environmental, social, political and economic (e.g. legacy of colonialism and apartheid, rural depopulation, effect of globalisation).</td>
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<tr>
<td>• who is at risk;</td>
<td><strong>Transportation:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• management of risks and risk reduction - preventative measures (e.g. with regard to flooding, measures such as catchment management to improve the quality of rivers, vleis and wetlands and to reduce risks to human life and ecosystems).</td>
<td>• effect on trade;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Population growth and change:</td>
<td>• response to demand for trade;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• factors affecting population growth and change (e.g. age and gender structures, population movement, life expectancy, mortality, fertility, aging populations);</td>
<td>• role in providing access to opportunities;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• processes affecting population growth and change (e.g. disease, poverty, attitudes to birth and death, conflict and war, genocide, forced migrations, rural-urban migration, cause-and-effect relationships on different scales (e.g. South Africa compared to Africa, Africa compared to the world), focus on the impact of HIV/AIDS.</td>
<td>• effect on the shape and structure of settlements;</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mapwork:</strong></td>
<td>• transport between settlements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• extracting information from maps and photos;</td>
<td><strong>Patterns of social inequalities in South Africa:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• measuring distances on maps, atlases and globes and converting to reality;</td>
<td>• status of women;</td>
<td><strong>Sustainable use of resources:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• comparing orthophotos with reality where possible.</td>
<td>• exploitation of labour (including child labour);</td>
<td>• principles of Agenda 21, such as the need for everybody to participate in the management of resources;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• access to education and training, housing and other services and resources - who gets what;</td>
<td>• the dependence of all people on natural resources for their livelihoods and survival;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• comparison with other developing and developed parts of the world.</td>
<td>• the need for all our actions to ensure future sustainability;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mapwork:</td>
<td><strong>Natural resources</strong> (e.g. types of marine life, water, air, forests and soil) in South Africa and worldwide.</td>
<td>• the need for everybody to be actively involved in addressing environmental problems (e.g. pollution, waste disposal).</td>
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<tr>
<td>• extracting, analysing and comparing information from maps, atlases, satellite images, aerial photographs;</td>
<td>• how they are being used;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• identifying features on maps and orthophotos;</td>
<td>• conservation and protection of resources (including wildlife);</td>
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<td>• comparing distances on maps and orthophotos.</td>
<td>• why conservation is necessary;</td>
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<td>• threats to conservation;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• new opportunities to conserve resources (e.g. community development, eco-tourism, ways to share resources in a sustainable manner).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mapwork:</td>
<td><strong>Development issues:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• extracting information from maps and photos;</td>
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<td>• identifying features on maps and orthophotos;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• comparing distances on maps and orthophotos.</td>
<td><strong>Sustainable use of resources:</strong></td>
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<td>• principles of Agenda 21, such as the need for everybody to participate in the management of resources;</td>
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<td>• the dependence of all people on natural resources for their livelihoods and survival;</td>
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<td>• the need for all our actions to ensure future sustainability;</td>
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<td>• the need for everybody to be actively involved in addressing environmental problems (e.g. pollution, waste disposal).</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Social and environmental conflicts in South Africa:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sustainable use of resources:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• comparison with other countries in Africa and elsewhere;</td>
<td>• principles of Agenda 21, such as the need for everybody to participate in the management of resources;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• the role of power, control and discrimination (including racism and xenophobia) in shaping access to and use of resources such as land, food, water, housing and jobs;</td>
<td>• the dependence of all people on natural resources for their livelihoods and survival;</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• use of relevant case studies.</td>
<td>• the need for all our actions to ensure future sustainability;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>• use of relevant case studies.</td>
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Source: Department of Education, 2002a: 71-73
Continuity and progression in geography

Good teaching is often associated with a teacher having sound subject knowledge and the ability to do thorough planning and preparation. Having said this, we contend that planning for effective teaching and learning goes beyond the mere coverage of what is prescribed in the RNCS policy document for Social Sciences (Geography) and related guideline documents. Consideration of the processes by which learners learn Geography should be central to any exploration of pedagogy within the subject (Butt, 2002: 96). Key to these processes is the view that learning Geography does not only entail absorbing discrete facts and principles, but is also grounded in what learners already know (Leat, 2000: 139). Another consideration concerns the wide array of learning styles learners use to develop applied competence in Geography. Therefore the principles of continuity and progression within education are important to curriculum design, planning, teaching and assessment. As learners mature intellectually, the geography curriculum they study should take account of their development. Bennets (2002: 83) notes that continuity and progression are widely recognised as desirable qualities within the curriculum as they are elements of curriculum implementation and delivery that are crucial in synchronising policy, teaching, assessment and learning. Owen and Ryan (2001: 51) however, caution that continuity and progression, though often talked about in the same breath, are different features of planning. Consequently the presence of the one does not necessarily indicate the presence of the other. Against this background, we now discuss continuity and progression separately.

Continuity

Bennets (2002: 83) argues that the idea of continuity ‘suggests the persistence of significant features of geographical education as [learners] move through the school system’. This implies that there are certain specific geographical features in the teaching and learning of the subject that will, according to Lambert and Balderstone (2000: 78) ‘be evident throughout a [learner’s] experience of geography in school’. They further suggest that where continuity is strong, learners will have the benefit of using and building on their previous learning in Geography and in so doing, acquire skills and techniques, knowledge and understanding, values and attitudes in a structured way. Evidence of continuity in long-term planning of geography education can, according to Owen and Ryan (2001: 51) be reflected in some of the following significant features: content, types of learning activity, common assumptions about the nature of the subject, geographical skills and use of certain resources. We use these features to analyse the extent to which continuity is reflected in post-apartheid geography curriculum policy documents.

As discussed earlier, the assessment criteria and range statements of C2005 were phase and not grade specific. In Table 1, for example, it is evident that assessment criteria associated with each specific outcome provide possibilities for continuity in learning within a particular phase. Put differently, the assessment criteria capture the significant geographical features along which continuity could be structured. However, the extent to which continuity would be integrated into the learning programmes of schools would depend largely on both the geographical and pedagogical knowledge of teachers. Because the C2005 framework does not explicitly refer to continuity across grades, in this section we focus our discussion mainly, though not exclusively, on the extent to which the RNCS framework enables continuity in learning.

Scrutiny of the RNCS document reveals that the most prominent aspects of continuity across grades and phases in the GET band are:

- Development and use of enquiry skills to support learners to develop the ability to ask geographical questions, work with sources (information and data) of different formats and to communicate their findings systematically in appropriate ways
- The development and use of map skills to develop spatial literacy
• Construction of geographical knowledge and understanding focussing on organising themes such as people and place, people and resources and people and the environment
• Exploration of social and environmental issues by emphasising identification and understanding of the issue and making choices underpinned by values and attitudes that promote sustainability.

Content
The competency strands mentioned above form the essence of the Geography LOs of the GET band and continue as such in the FET band. The following serves as an example that relates to the development of geographical knowledge and understanding. The conceptual themes people and places, people and resources, and people and the environment that organise knowledge and understanding in the Senior Phase are further developed in the FET band as elements of natural and human processes, related spatial patterns and the interrelationships between humans, and humans and the environment (Department of Education, 2002b).

However, one fundamental difference between the two bands is the fact that, in the GET band specific content is written into the assessment standards (see Table 4), while in the FET band generic standards which focus on the conceptual development of the learner have been gazetted (Department of Education, 2002b: 21). These include, for example, knowing and understanding natural and human processes (‘Explain processes and associated spatial patterns in a range of places and regions’). Spatial distribution and related patterns are captured in ‘Compare and contrast processes and spatial patterns between places and/or between regions’. The interaction between humans, and humans and the environment is reflected in the statements ‘Explain issues and challenges arising from human and environment interactions in a local and continental contexts’ and ‘Explain different measures of conserving the environment while addressing human needs in a variety of contexts’. The interpretation of these assessment standards in the FET band therefore depends to all intents and purposes on teachers’ exercise of epistemological labour, applying the theory of knowledge. Whereas in the GET band, as is the case in other countries (USA, England and Canada) where an OBE system has been implemented, continuity is ensured by writing content knowledge into the assessment standards (for examples, see Butt, 2002: 70).

There is evidence of continuity in geographical knowledge and understanding across grades and bands in the above-mentioned strands. However, we argue that the progression as captured by the assessment standards in the GET might have a limiting effect because of the way in which the content has been written into the standards, and consequently might not support sustained quality Geography learning. The assessment standards in grade 7 (see Table 4), for example, refer only to ‘natural hazards’ and no mention is made of ‘population growth and change’. The situation in grade 8 is worse in that reference is made only to ‘settlements’ while ‘transportation’, ‘patterns of social inequalities in South Africa’ as well as ‘natural resources’ are not included. This presents a particular limitation on Geography teaching and assessment in South Africa as the onus for content selection, and how assessment is done, falls squarely on the teacher (and their reliance on textbooks). The learner’s experience of developing continuity in geographical knowledge and understanding in the different strands will therefore be dependent on choices made by the teacher.

Types of learning activity
Similar learning activities such as map reading and interpretation, research and fieldwork are promoted across phases in both C2005 and the RNCS. These are closely linked with enquiry and map skills – in the case of C2005 with SO 9 and in the RNCS with LO 1. Continuity in terms of these learning activities is a strong feature of both curricula. In C2005 SO 9 is the service outcome for all the other ‘content outcomes’. It closely details what learning activities can be used to support the construction of geographical knowledge and understanding (See Department of Education, 1997: HSS-37 - HSS-40 for assessment criteria and range statements). The difference in the RNCS curriculum, however, is that continuity with respect to the type of learning activities such as ‘finding sources’, ‘working with sources’, etc. are stipulated per grade as well as across the phase (see Department of Education, 2002a: 74-75). In both the RNCS and FET Geography activities such as fieldwork, the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), problem-solving, debating, composing proposals and authentic learning are promoted. Apart from working individually, learners throughout the two bands are also encouraged to engage in pair or group contexts during different learning and assessment activities.

Geographical skills
Working with sources of different kinds is promoted in the construction of geographical knowledge in both C2005 and the RNCS. Across the bands inquiry skills like asking questions, collecting, organising, analysing, synthesising and communicating information are encouraged. As already mentioned, the only difference between C2005 and the RNCS is that in the case of the latter the level at which the learner must be able to demonstrate the skill is specified for different grades. In the knowledge foci for each grade in the RNCS specific mention is made of map and photograph interpretation skills, for example. What is described in terms of these skills is in general the same for each grade (see Table 3). Collection of information and data through observation or fieldwork is mentioned in grade 9 for the first time. We therefore argue that, although there is continuity with respect to map and photographic skills, the RNCS policy document for Social Sciences (Department of Education, 2002: 71-73) for grades 7 to 9 does not adequately support teachers in integrating and scaffolding more complex map skills and field observations.

Use of certain (re)sources
Maps (including topographical and orthophoto maps) are the basic tools of geography learners as they collect, organise and analyse spatial information. These
Learners may merely continue to learn the same or even progression, there may be no advances in learning as in Geography. In addition, he warns that, without builds on particular aspects of a learner's prior learning continuity, it should ensure that the next course of study argues that if the curriculum is to have a strong sense of the interplay between progression and continuity. Butt (2002: 69), in referring (re)source used is different.

If what is stated in the above-mentioned assessment is conducted in consecutive grades while only the type of (re)source is highlighted in both C2005 and the RNCS standard 3 of LO 1 serves as an example. In grade 7 the learner is expected to ‘measure distances on globes, atlases and maps using line scales’. In grade 8 the learner must be able to ‘measure distances on orthophoto maps and/or maps of local and other areas and compare map distances in reality’ while in Grade 9 the learner should ‘analyse and reach conclusions about information from sources such as photos, maps and atlases and statistics’ (Department of Education, 2002a: 74-75). Although the RNCS supports continuity in the use of (re)sources over the phase, it lacks the detail and depth with which the nature and use of sources was explicated in C2005. If what is stated in the above-mentioned assessment standards for grades 7 and 8 is simply interpreted, a situation may arise in which the same level of activity is conducted in consecutive grades while only the type of (re)source used is different.

As mentioned earlier, there is a relationship between continuity and progression. Butt (2002: 69), in referring to the interplay between progression and continuity, argues that if the curriculum is to have a strong sense of continuity, it should ensure that the next course of study builds on particular aspects of a learner’s prior learning in Geography. In addition, he warns that, without progression, there may be no advances in learning as learners may merely continue to learn the same or even easier things in different grades. We therefore now turn to a more detailed discussion on progression.

**Progression**

Chambers and Donert (1996: 27) define progression as 'the careful and deliberate sequencing of learning so that children can build their current learning on previous experience and also prepare for future learning’. This sequencing is, however, not a simple straightforward sequencing of learning experiences and activities. It demands careful planning and a valid understanding of learners’ actual as well as potential level of performance in order to close that gap between these levels. In a critique of the Geography National Curriculum in England, Bennets (1995: 78) refers to this complexity as follows:

Progression is not a simple sequence of activities which, for example, proceed from identifying a feature to describing it and then explaining its characteristics. The nature and distinctiveness of the feature, and the quality of description and explanation are all relevant. A curriculum should be designed to give learners opportunities to improve the quality of their descriptions and explanations, and to apply their understanding in increasingly sophisticated ways. Their explanations can reveal their understanding, and both will reflect their knowledge and their styles of reasoning.

The idea of progression in geography education in the GET should therefore focus on how learners’ learning is advanced in terms of the acquisition of enquiry and map skills and techniques (LO1), constructing knowledge and understanding (LO 2) and the exploration of issues which include the development of values and attitudes (LO 3). The design of the GET geography curriculum, and in particular the structure of the content and sequence of learning activities, facilitate advances in learning. As mentioned, the C2005 policy document did not specify how progression in the mentioned foci should be structured for different grades within the phases. In terms of each of the eight ‘content’ SOs, the range statements and accompanying performance indicators capture the breadth, depth, spatial scale and affective dimensions of a range of geographical topics. This is, however, done for the whole (Senior) phase and not per grade which makes it difficult to track measures to ensure progression. Therefore we will not refer to C2005 again in the analysis of progression. Our focus will be on the RNCS and our analysis will be guided by five aspects of progression. Butt (2002: 70), with reference to a report from His Majesty’s Inspectorate (HMI) on geography education in schools in England, states that progression in geography education should gradually:

- *Extend the geographical content to include different places, processes, patterns, activities, etc.* (e.g. increasing the breadth of study)

The prescribed curriculum in the Senior Phase of the RNCS reflects an increase in the breadth of the geographical content. In each grade for example, learners are expected to explore the content themes in different spatial contexts (local-continental-global). Based on the number of geographical themes and also the complexity of these themes, a measure of progression is evident. In grade 7 for example, two themes (Natural hazards; Population growth and change) are addressed, while in grade 8 there are four themes (Settlement; Transportation; Patterns of social inequalities in South Africa; Natural resources) (see Table 3 for more detail). Although there are only three content themes in grade 9 (Development issues; Sustainable use of resources; Social and environmental conflicts in South Africa), it can be argued that the conceptual complexity of these themes may demand more time to ensure sufficient mediation and understanding. Mapwork activities, which are also mentioned under
the knowledge foci, show broad progression from grade 7 to grade 9. However, it is mainly in terms of the type/variety of (re)sources that learners are exposed to resources such as maps, orthophoto maps, atlases, satellite images and aerial photographs. Furthermore, the enquiry processes that learners use are the same for all grades in the Senior Phase (extracting information; measuring distances; comparing information) with the exception of the added correlation of information with field observations in grade 9. One can identify a measure of increasing breadth. However, teachers would have to provide detailed scaffolding of learning in order to enable the intended deeper understanding of places, processes and patterns.

- Increase the complexity, demands and abstraction within the geographical information provided in line with the learners’ growing intellectual maturity (e.g. increasing the depth of study);

Quality geography teaching and learning depend on gradual gains in knowledge, understanding, skills and competencies which learners actually achieve. In the RNCS these gains are embodied in the assessment standards that reflect progression from simple to more complex outcomes. The assessment standards are outlined in a linear fashion (see Department of Education, 2002a: 71-78) which might not resonate with the cognitive development of learners which often is non-linear. This presents challenges for teachers to bridge the gap between the learner’s actual level of competence and the required level of competence. Moreover, if assessment standards are regarded as level descriptors of achievement in relation to the learning outcomes, then the verbs describing the action (describe, identify, etc.) that will be performed might be important indicators of progression. On applying the six levels of cognitive processing based on Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), it is clear that cognitive progression from grade 7 to grade 9 (see Table 4) for verbs and the related action, is not significant. Instead, the verbs used in the assessment standards of grade 8 might all be categorised as belonging to the lowest level of cognitive function referred to as ‘remember’ which involves memorisation and recall of information. Similarly, in grade 7 verbs such as ‘describe’ and ‘identify’ are used which could be placed on the lowest level of cognitive function, while ‘explain’ and ‘investigate’ represent cognitive processes regarded as middle order cognitive processes. Similar verbs representing lower and middle order cognitive processes, for example, ‘identify’ and ‘explain’ are used in grade 9. Furthermore, it is difficult to evaluate progression in terms of what the phrase describes because in each grade it refers to different content.

- Introduce geographical studies of larger areas, moving from the local to the global (e.g. increasing the spatial scale of study)

The assessment standards do not indicate any progression in the spatial scale at which different topics over different grades in the Senior Phase are learned. The only indication of different spatial scales is found in the stated knowledge foci for each grade (Department of Education, 2002a: 71-73). In terms of ‘processes affecting population growth and change’, it is only in grade 7 that mention is made of ‘cause and effect relationships at different scales (e.g. South Africa compared to Africa, Africa compared to the world)’. All the geographical themes in grade 8 (except ‘Transportation’) and grade 9 (except ‘Sustainable use of resources’) refer to South Africa and other parts of the world. There is no definite progression in the sense of learners moving from their own environment to a global scale. The responsibility for ensuring that progression in learning does occur is left to the teacher.

- Introduce a wider range of geographical techniques and enquiry strategies (e.g. increasing the development of skills within study)

This is the one area in the RNCS policy (Department of Education, 2002a: 74-75) where the assessment standards for LO 1 for each grade in the Senior Phase clearly indicate progression in terms of finding sources (which include using fieldwork and other enquiry methods); working with sources (organise, analyse, synthesise information); answering the initial research question and communicating the findings in appropriate ways. For example: in grade 7, Assessment Standard 1 dealing with finding sources requires learners to identify a variety of geographical and environmental sources relevant to an enquiry. In grade 8 learners are not only expected to identify the sources but also to select relevant ones. At the end of the phase, in grade 9, learners are expected to carry out independent enquiries on aspects of the interrelationships between people, places and the environment. It is evident that learners are progressively taken across the grades to a higher level of finding sources to enable them to undertake independent enquiry.

- Increase the opportunities for affective education (own and others’ beliefs, values and attitudes) and the study of social, economic, political and environmental issues (e.g. increasing the affective dimensions of study)

The type of cognitive processes based on the action verbs that are used in the assessment standards are generally the same across grades in the Senior Phase. Progression in terms of this dimension is clearly embedded in the noun or phrase that describes the expected action. The latter becomes progressively more complex as the learner moves from grade 7 to grade 9. On analysing Assessment Standard 3, a dual progression becomes evident. On the one level, (that is within the grade) learners are expected to explore an issue by identifying the issue, then identifying the factors affecting the issue and lastly to make informed choices in dealing with or managing the issue (see Department of Education, 2002a: 78-79). On another level, progression is evident in terms of the context in which problem-solving is expected across grades. For example: in grade 7 learners are expected to suggest ways of responding to issues associated with a particular geographical aspect like population growth and change, while in grade 8 learners are expected to make suggestions to guide sustainable living practices which is a much more complex and wide-ranging concept. In grade 9 even more is expected because learners are expected to make informed or substantiated decisions about solutions to social and environmental conflicts.
Some critical reflections

The education landscape in South Africa has changed significantly since 1994. In terms of schooling, new curriculum frameworks have been developed to improve the quality of education in South Africa. Two criteria that could be used to evaluate the quality of education are whether continuity and progression in learning occurs within particular learning areas or subjects.

In this article we examined the extent to which continuity and progression are embodied in post-apartheid curriculum frameworks. We focused on school Geography and analysed two key documents: the Humans and Social Sciences document of C2005 and the RNCS for Social Sciences (Geography). As a background to our discussion on continuity and progression we describe developments in school Geography post-1994, including changes brought about with the revision of C2005, which produced the RNCS.

The analysis of policy documents against indicators of continuity and progression show that some improvements with the introduction of the RNCS are evident. However, several shortcomings are still apparent. The improvement of continuity and progression in the RNCS as compared to C2005 might be ascribed to differences in the design features of the two frameworks. The distinctive feature that has improved continuity and progression at the level of policy is the introduction of assessment standards in the RNCS. Because assessment standards are grade specific, continuity and progression across grades have been strengthened. The reason why several shortcomings with respect to continuity and progression remain is that these elements might not have been explicit features of the design of the RNCS for Social Sciences (Geography). Or put differently, these elements might not have been the key organisers of the design of the RNCS for Social Sciences (Geography). There were, however, areas where C2005 statements for the Human and Social Sciences learning area had stronger features of continuity than the RNCS, for example, with respect to use of certain sources (see earlier discussion). The result of all of this is that greater responsibility falls on teachers who have to engage in epistemological labour so as to strengthen continuity and progression in the design of their learning programmes. This responsibility assumes that South African geography teachers are sophisticated and highly competent with respect to both geographical and pedagogical knowledge. Whether this is the case is an open question.

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