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GEOGRAPHY K-10: CREATING ACTIVE GLOBAL CITIZENS

What is Geography and why is it important?

Defining Geography is complex and has been debated for many, many years. However, for teachers and students, the NSW *Geography K-10 syllabus* defines Geography succinctly as: ...

the study of places and the relationships between people and their environments.

(Geography K-10 syllabus 2015, p.13)



The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) defined this discipline as:

... a structured way of exploring, analysing and understanding the characteristics of the places that make up our world.

(ACARA, Revised draft Foundation to Year 12 Australian Curriculum)

Richard Burton, a British explorer and diplomat, when asked by the Royal Geographical Society of Britain in the 19th century to explain the importance of geography exclaimed that:

... if geography itself has any significance it is that we are made to lift our eyes from our small provincial selves to the whole complex and magnificent world.

As a document, the *Geography K-10 syllabus* identifies knowledge, understanding, skills, values and attitudes students in NSW schools are expected to develop at each Stage, from Kindergarten to Year 10. The rationale states that Geography as a discipline:

... integrates knowledge from natural sciences, social sciences and humanities to build a holistic understanding of the world to enable students to become active, responsible and informed citizens... able to evaluate the opinions of others and express their own ideas and arguments. This [understanding] forms the basis for active participation in community life, a commitment to sustainability, the creation of a just society, and the promotion of intercultural understanding and lifelong learning.

(*Geography K-10 syllabus* 2015, p.13)

The new NSW syllabus

The new *Geography K-10 syllabus* will replace the *HSIE K-6 syllabus* and the *Geography Years 7-10 syllabus* in 2017, although primary teachers do have an option to introduce Geography K-10 into their school and classrooms in 2016.

What is similar?

Students will continue to:

- investigate the interactions between environments and communities on a variety of scales
- develop an understanding of being informed, responsible and active citizens.

What is different?

Key differences of the *Geography K-10 syllabus* include:

- a K-10 syllabus
- a two part Stage-based organisation – with physical and human geography focus areas represented in all Stages
- continuums for objectives and outcomes; geographical inquiry; geographical skills and geographical tools that support differentiated learning K-10
- defined geographical concepts which support geographical inquiry using skills and tools, scoped for each Stage
- a focus on in-depth geographical inquiry K-10
- key inquiry questions
- geographical fieldwork K-10
- embedded *Learning across the curriculum* (LAC) content.

Syllabus structure

The structure of the *Geography K-10 syllabus* for each Stage has two parts: content summary and content focus. This is illustrated in Figure 1.

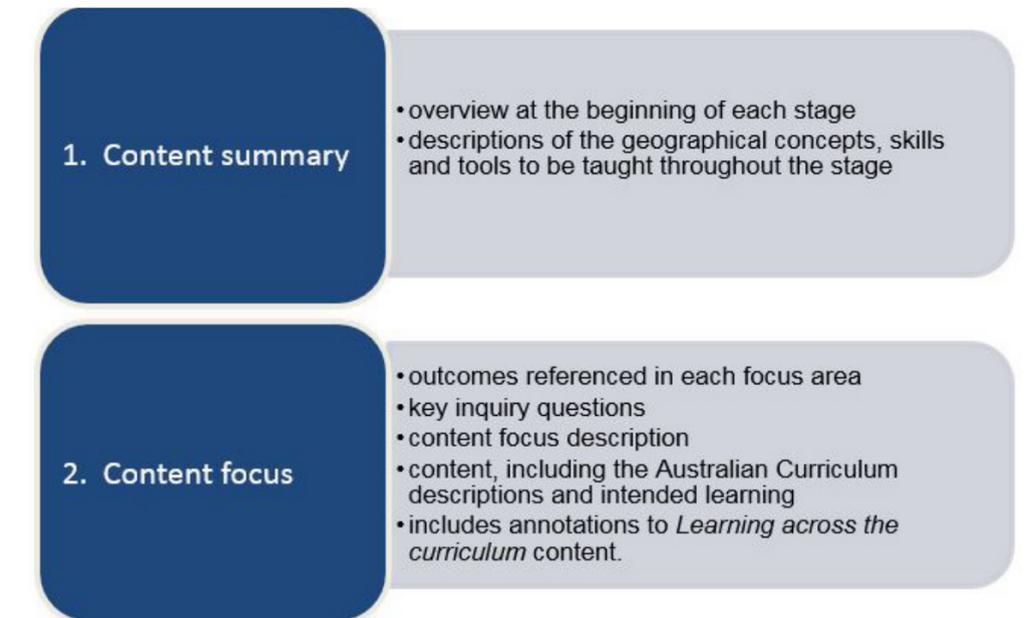


Figure 1 Structure of the *Geography K-10 syllabus*

Geography K-10 content summary

The content summary at the beginning of each Stage describes the geographical concepts, skill and tools to be taught throughout each Stage. An example from Stage 2 showing a list of geographical concepts is seen in Figure 2.

THE FOLLOWING GEOGRAPHICAL CONCEPTS ARE TO BE INTEGRATED THROUGHOUT STAGE 2:

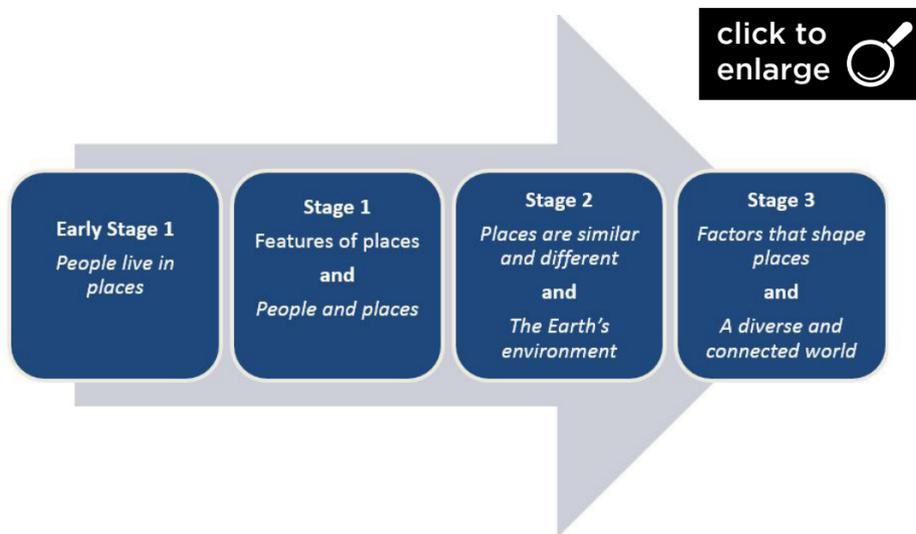
- **Place:** the significance of places and what they are like eg natural and human features and characteristics of different places and their similarities and differences; how people's perceptions about places influence their responses and actions to protect them.
- **Space:** the significance of location and spatial distribution, and ways people organise and manage spaces that we live in eg settlement patterns within Australia, neighbouring countries and other countries.
- **Environment:** the significance of the environment in human life, and the important interrelationships between humans and the environment eg how climate and environment influence settlement patterns; interconnections between people and environments; differing ways people can use environments sustainably.
- **Interconnection:** no object of geographical study can be viewed in isolation eg interconnections between people, places and environments; influence of people's values on the management and protection of places and environments and the custodial responsibilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
- **Scale:** the way that geographical phenomena and problems can be examined at different spatial levels eg types of settlement across a range of scales; the influence of climate across a range of scales.
- **Sustainability:** the capacity of the environment to continue to support our lives and the lives of others into the future eg ways in which people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, use natural resources; differing views about environmental sustainability; sustainable management of waste.

click to enlarge 

Figure 2 Geographical concepts to be taught to students in Stage 2

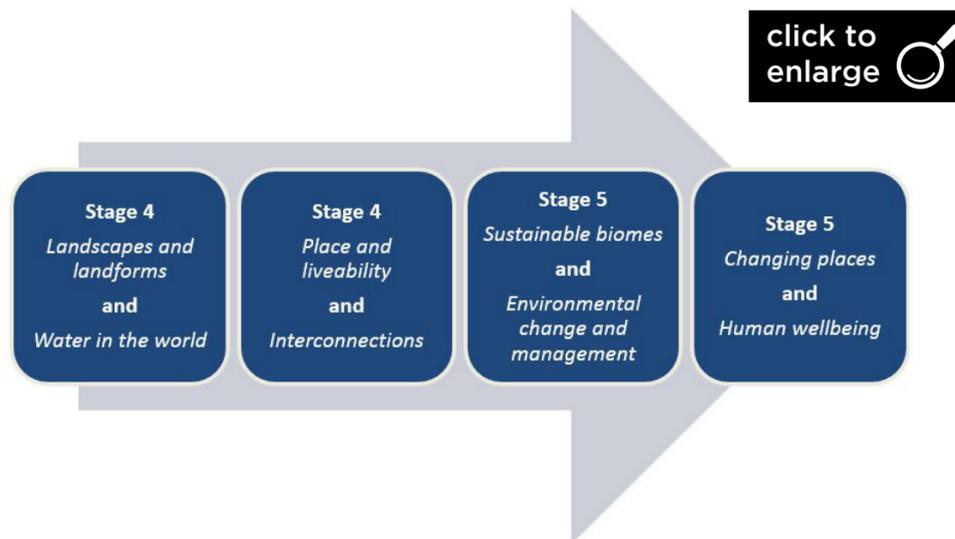
Geography K-10 content focus

The infographics in Figures 3 and 4 outline the content focus topics for Stages incorporated in Years K-10.



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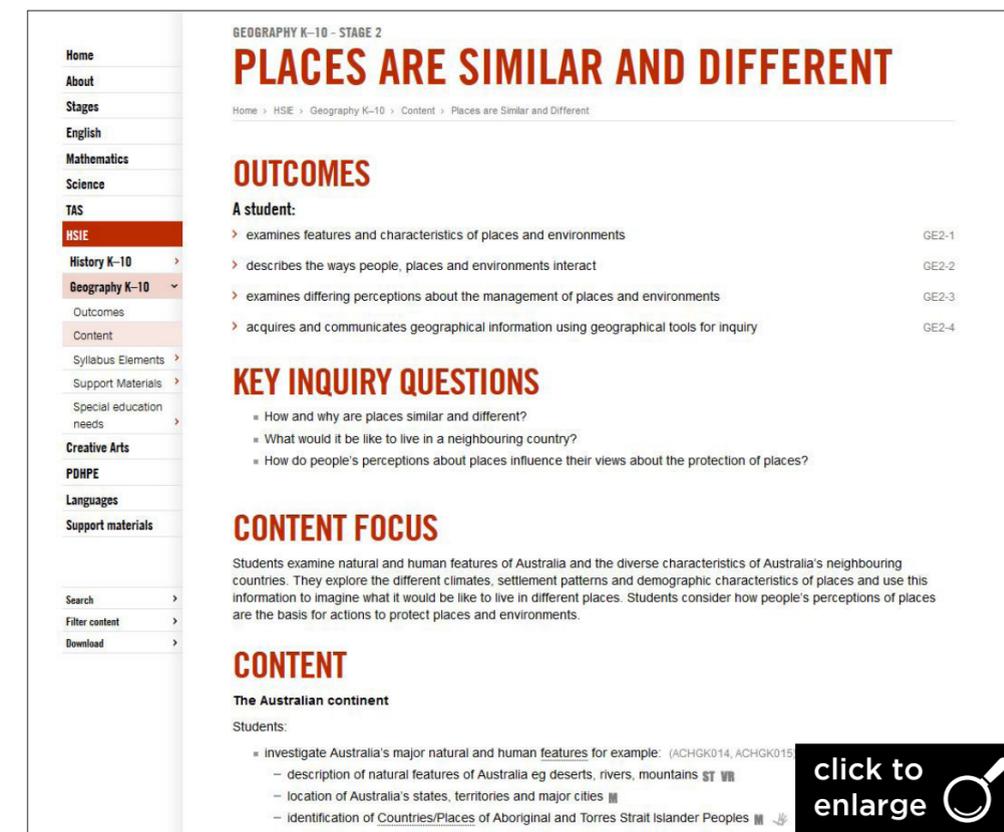
Figure 3 Summary of content focus topics for Early Stage 1-Stage 3



click to enlarge 

Figure 4 Summary of content focus topics for Stage 4-Stage 5

The new Geography syllabus includes agreed Australian curriculum content and other content that clarifies learning for Geography from Kindergarten to Year 10. This is seen through the content focus and content dot points. The dash points in the syllabus are examples of how the curriculum content can be taught, and explicitly linked to the outcomes of Geography K-10, as seen in Figure 5. Geography K-10 teachers have the flexibility to make decisions about the sequence of learning, the emphasis to be given to particular areas of content, and any adjustments required based on the needs, interests and abilities of their students through these dash points.



click to enlarge 

Figure 5 An example of the content focus information for the Stage 2 content focus guidelines for the topic *Places are Similar and Different*

Stage statements

Stage statements included in the *Geography K-10 syllabus* for Early Stage 1 to Stage 5 reflect on the intent of the Australian Curriculum achievement standards. They summarise the knowledge and understanding, skills, values and attitudes that have been developed by students as a result of achieving the outcomes for each Stage of learning.

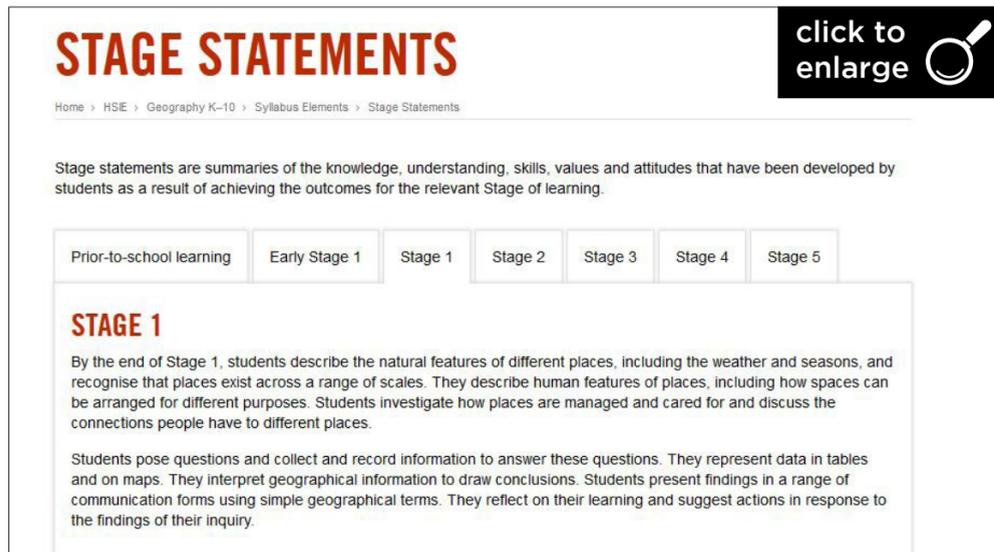


Figure 6 Stage statements are useful for measuring and reporting student achievement across a Stage.

Stage statements, along with the syllabus outcomes, incorporate the Australian Curriculum achievement standards. The Stage statements are useful for gauging student progress throughout a Stage of learning, and may provide a reference for reporting student achievement.

Learning across the curriculum

[Learning across the curriculum](#) areas include three cross-curriculum priorities, ten general capabilities and other important learning for all students. These thirteen areas are incorporated in the content of the syllabus.

Geographical inquiry

The aim of Geography in Years K-10 is to stimulate students' interest in and engagement with the world. For the first time, the *Geography K-10 syllabus* has a strong pedagogical emphasis on [geographical inquiry](#)

from Early Stage 1. Through geographical inquiry, students develop an understanding of the interactions between people, places and environments across a range of scales in order to become informed, responsible and active citizens. To support teachers in understanding this process, the flow chart in Figure 7, albeit in draft, is useful.

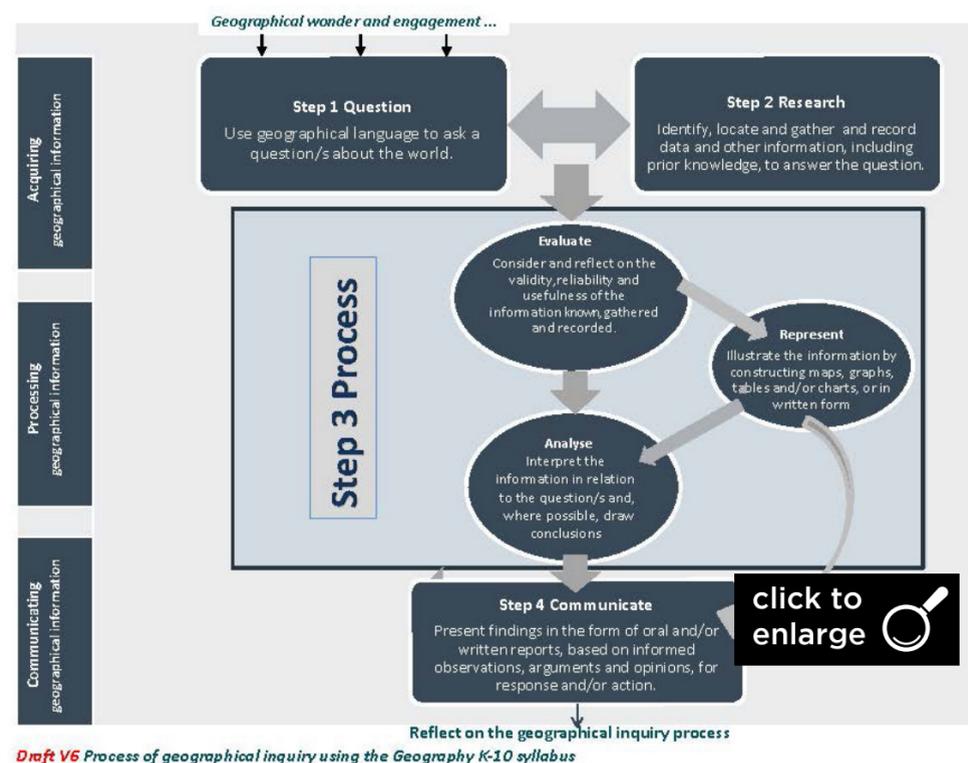


Figure 7 Process of geographical inquiry

Learning for life

Geography provides students with knowledge and understanding about the places where they live and supports their understanding and engagement with life experiences beyond school. Geography also prepares students for a wide range of career options as illustrated in Figure 8.

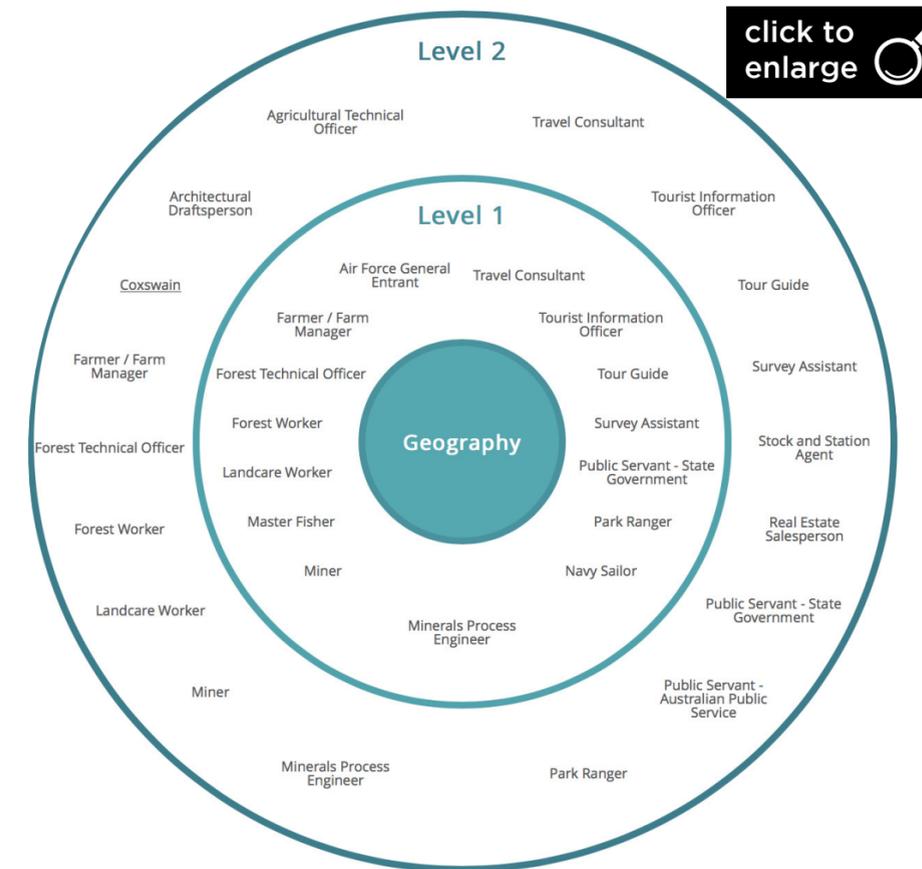


Figure 8 myfuture careers in Geography (Click on image for full view)

Taking time to get to know new syllabuses is essential. While the impact and use of technology in the classroom changes how teachers work, the syllabus provides a constant of what students need to learn. Developing a deep understanding of the syllabus supports the development of dynamic and engaging approaches to student learning in Geography. This will enhance student achievement over time as students become geographers, learn to apply geographical inquiry to a variety of contexts within and beyond school, and engage in making a difference to their world.

The infographic in Figure 9 illustrates support for Department teachers seeking to engage with this approach through the new *Geography K-10 syllabus*. This model is supported by the work of a group of teachers who have developed a number of rich tasks as an adaptable starting point for classroom implementation.

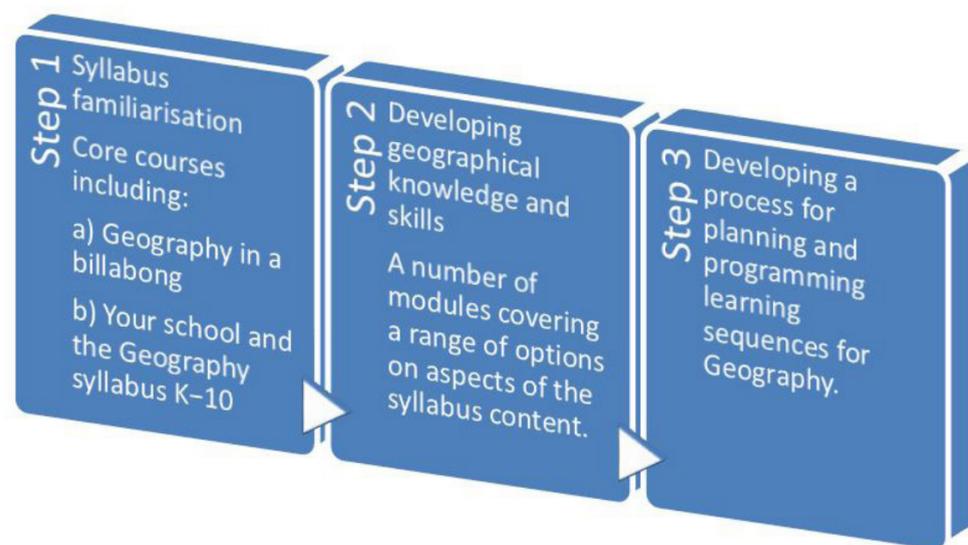


Figure 9 Steps to implementing the new Geography syllabus

Links to high quality teaching

How does the *Geography K-10 syllabus* link to quality teaching? In their recent report, [What works best: evidence based practices to help improve NSW student performance](#), the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) have identified seven themes of practice that have been shown to improve student performance. These are:

- high expectations
- explicit teaching
- effective feedback

Why, what, how	syllabus alignment
Why does the learning matter? (high expectations; explicit teaching)	It is outlined in the rationale , aim and syllabus objectives .
What do you want the students to learn? (high expectations; explicit teaching)	Knowledge and understanding of geography through the use of geographical concepts , skills and tools using the Key Inquiry Questions and content descriptions for each Stage.
What are you going to get the students to do or produce? (high expectations; explicit teaching; collaboration)	Do geographical inquiry to produce geographical responses and / or actions inclusive of Learning across the curriculum (LAC) aspects.
How are you going to do it? (high expectations; explicit teaching; effective feedback; collaboration; use of data)	Through the intended learning and an understanding of student learning needs
How well do you expect students to do it? (high expectations; explicit teaching; effective feedback)	Described by the syllabus outcomes and Stage statements .

Figure 10 Aspects of quality teaching in the new Geography syllabus

- use of data to inform practice
- classroom management
- wellbeing
- collaboration.

It is imperative that all teachers clearly understand the link between quality teaching and what is provided in the syllabus material. For Geography K-10, this is explained in Figure 10.

Enjoy teaching your students Geography and, in the words of Richard Burton, see it as an opportunity to help students look beyond their *small provincial selves to the whole complex and magnificent world*.

References and further reading

BOSTES 2015, [Geography K-10: NSW syllabus for the Australian curriculum](#), accessed 6 January 2016.

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) 2015, [What works best: evidence based practices to help improve NSW student performance](#), accessed 6 January 2016.

Education Services Australia 2015, '[Bullseye-geography](#)', [myfuture.edu.au](#), accessed 6 January 2016.