

Thinking geographically

Thinking geographically is not everyday thinking. If we thought these were the same, there would be little point in having geography lessons, or specialist geography teachers who are grounded in the discipline (GA 2012). Geographers make sense of the world around them by viewing it through a 'geographical lens'. They synthesise information from different sources and use geographical skills to help them enquire about and interpret what they find out. Thinking geographically is a kind of knowledge that can be thought of as 'procedural knowledge'.

"Core knowledge" [Kn1]: This refers to the subject as it resides in the popular imagination: if geography is the 'world subject'¹ its core knowledge is gleaned and created from the information communicated in globes and atlases. Much of this amounts to geographical *context*, and in this sense can be distinguished from the main *content* of the curriculum. It is not low level or trivial material but it can become so if taught badly, e.g. as an end in itself. The GA, in its 2009 manifesto, likens learning geography to learning a 'language'. Using this metaphor, the idea of 'vocabulary' captures the role of 'core knowledge'. It may be thought of as *extensive* world knowledge, in itself fairly superficial yet enabling.

"Content knowledge" [Kn2]: Sometimes referred to as concepts or generalisations, and the key to developing understanding. This may be seen as the main content of the geography curriculum. Key concepts and generalisations in geography show how geography contributes to pupils' acquisition and development of 'powerful knowledge'². Using the GA's language metaphor, the concepts of geography are like its 'grammar'. It may also be thought of as more *intensive* world knowledge, taking in the realm of processes, different perspectives and of values.

"Procedural knowledge" [Kn3]: Thinking geographically is a distinctive procedure – it is not the same as thinking historically or scientifically or mathematically (etc.). The teacher can model this by example, but it is also learned through exposure to, and direct experience of, high quality geographical enquiry which might include decision making or problem solving scenarios. There are two characteristics of geographical approaches, or a geographic orientation, to making sense of the world that are particularly striking to note:

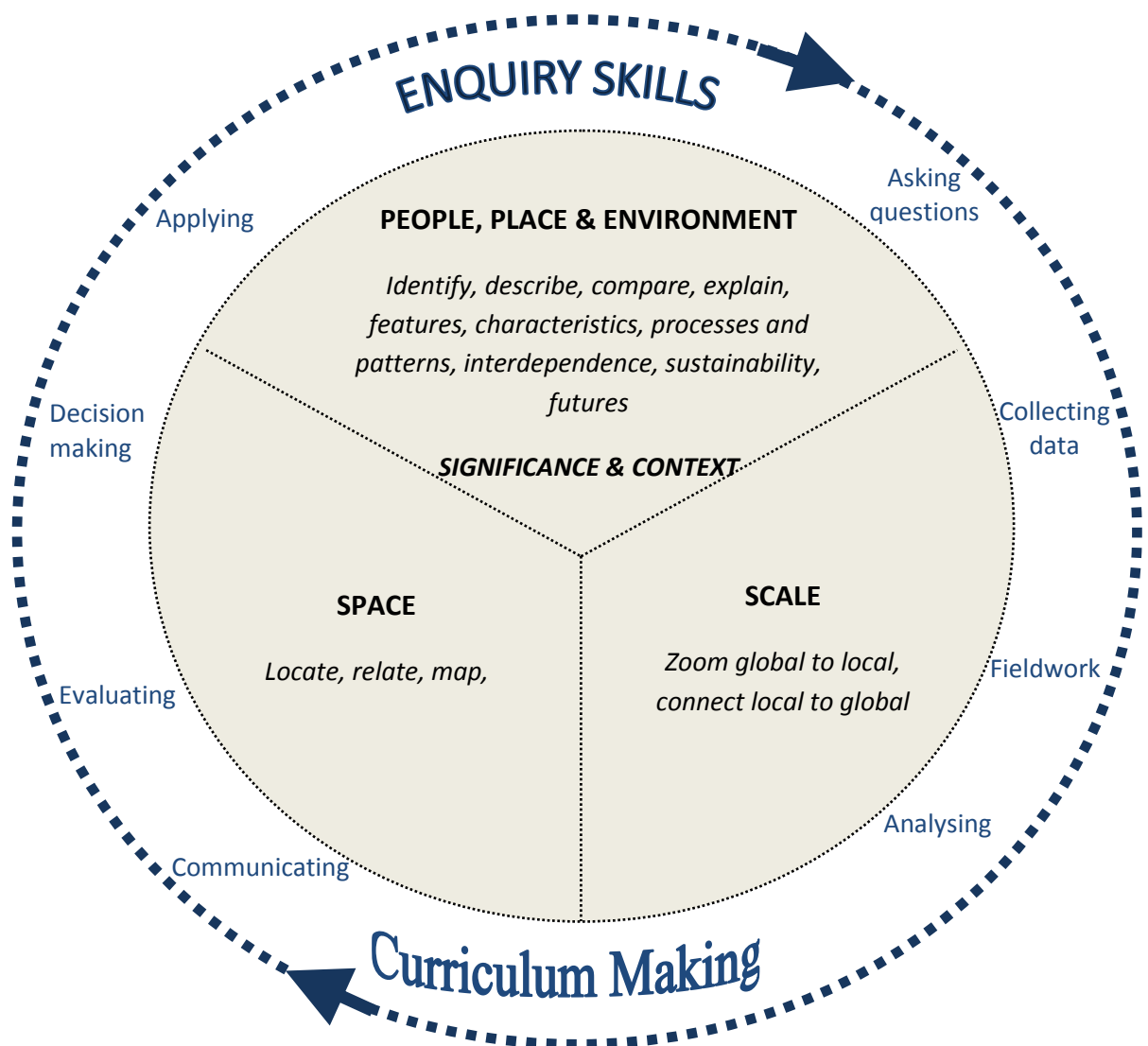
- (a) The recognition of the significance of place and unique context.
- (b) The adoption of a relational (or sometimes, 'holistic') approach to enquiries (e.g. taking account of either physical and human factors; or the links between local phenomena *and* wider global processes).

(See Figure 1)

Learning geography requires pupils to engage mentally with questions about people, society, environment and the planet. This means they identify, assimilate, analyse and communicate data of various kinds, and learn the skills to do so productively. This will often entail using information technology – manipulating maps, diagrams, graphs and images (sometimes referred to collectively as 'graphicacy') – structured talk and debate and writing for a variety of audiences.

GA (2011)

Figure 1 Thinking Geographically



Thinking geographically: a process that involves asking questions within a relational or holistic framework.

Concept	Possible questions	Elaboration
Space (locational framework)	Where is this place? Why is it located here and not there? How does this place connect to ... How does this place relate to other places? What is remarkable about this location? What do maps tell us about this location? How can we map this place?	E.g. Using geographical vocabulary; references, points and grids to explain in words, images, numbers, diagrams, maps and models where a place is in relation to other features and places in the world. E.g. Why are most cities located near coasts? E.g. How easily can I get to this place and how would I travel? Why do we import goods from here and not there? Why do people move to other places? Where does our pollution go to and why? E.g. How do nested hierarchies work? E.g. what is it about location that makes Newquay such a successful tourist town? How can we use maps to interpret and talk about location? What do different maps tell us? How accurate are they? How can we use maps and other graphicacy tools to represent this location and information about it?
People, place, environment	What is this place/environment called? What is it like? How did it get like this? Why is it changing? What will it be like in the future? What do people do here?	E.g. Core knowledge of names of towns, cities, villages, types of environment etc E.g. in terms of characteristics, human and physical features, processes and patterns E.g. recognising and understanding how places are shaped by a combination of human and physical processes; knowing what those processes are and how they work. E.g. using knowledge of human and physical processes to explain change. E.g. applying geographical knowledge to imagine possible, preferable and probable future scenarios. E.g. investigating the kinds of jobs that people do,

	<p>Why do people come here and what for?</p> <p>How and why do we improve, sustain and spoil places and environments?</p> <p>What's it got to me?</p>	<p>the leisure opportunities they engage with and how the landscape both influences and is influenced by, such activities.</p> <p>E.g. investigating human and physical processes, natural resources and how these influence people, environments and economies.</p> <p>E.g. Making connections between what people do and what places and environments are like.</p> <p>E.g. Recognising human agency</p>
Scale	<p>How do places change when viewed at different scales?</p> <p>How do we see the global in the local and the local in the global?</p>	<p>E.g. What happens when we 'zoom' in and out to places? What different patterns and processes do we notice?</p> <p>E.g. How does the food I buy in my local supermarket connect me to the wider world?</p>

Thinking geographically: using an enquiry approach

Enquiring, data - collecting, analysing, evaluating, communicating and decision - making

- Using: maps, counts, photographs, graphs, measurements, questionnaires, films and reports.
- Carrying out fieldwork
- Researching secondary sources
- Engaging with people, communities, views and opinions
- Tackling issues and relevant events
- Purposing outcomes and taking actions
- Working at different scales of enquiry e.g. local, regional, global but in connected ways

Additional Reading

GA (2011) GA think piece re the GA Curriculum Consultation

http://www.geography.org.uk/download/GA_GIGCCCurriculumProposals.pdf accessed March 7th 2013

GA (2012) *Thinking Geographically*

http://www.geography.org.uk/download/GA_GINCCConsultation12ThinkingGeographically.pdf accessed March 10th 2013

GA members only

Martin, F. Owens, P. (2011) Well what do you Know? The Forthcoming Primary Review *Primary Geography*, 75, geographical Association pp.28-29

Swift, Di, (2013) Thinking it Through *Primary Geography*, 80, Geographical Association pp7-8