Irish Primary School Children's Definitions of 'Geography'

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Abstract

This research reviews a sample of 5th class children's definitions of geography.
It was carried out after the publication of the Revised Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999 curriculum) but before any staff development had taken place for the implementation of the this curriculum. Since the data was collected staff development for the 1999 curriculum in geography has been timetabled for the 2005-2006 school year.

The data collected revealed most children had a clear idea what geography was, with the majority of children, 97.3%, referring to one or more aspects of geography. Over half the children defined geography as being about themes and places. A clear emphasis on the learning of place names and fact learning came through in definitions. There were limited references to learning key ideas or concepts. Skills, with the exception of 'maps' were mentioned by few children. No child mentioned fieldwork. The definitions written by the children tended to reflect geography topics they had covered in school textbooks. The findings suggest areas of the 1999 curriculum that will be new to teachers and children and point to the challenges for the implementation of the curriculum.

Introduction

'I think geography is about a lot of things. In our geography book we learned about different countries, space, bogs, and different things like that. geography is very interesting. When we read about countries we learn about the capital of that country, rivers, mountains, towns, famous buildings and a lot about that country. When we learn about space we learn about the planets, the solar system, and when the sun is going to explode. When we learn about bog we learn about types of bogs, what is made from bogs, the size of bogs and where you would see bogs. We also learn about maps and different places in Ireland, famous buildings, and interesting places.'

The position of geography across the education system in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) is a mixed one. At third level, it is a popular option, with all geography departments growing in the past five years (Kitchin, 2004, p. 15). At second level, geography is a popular subject with around half of all students taking Leaving Certificate at 17 (approximately 20 000 per year) and virtually all 15 year olds taking Junior Certificate (approximately 60 000 per year) (DES, 2004).

Despite this popularity, there has been little research in secondary geography and virtually none in primary geography in the ROI. There has been little research in any primary non-core curriculum subjects until recent years. This is due to a number of factors, firstly, until recently courses in geography education were taught by academic geography staff in colleges of education; secondly, even as geography education lectures have been employed in the colleges of education such posts are only the equivalent of less than three full-time staff across the ROI, meaning the potential time

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for research is very limited; finally, there has been limited funding for research in geography education as funding is directed towards areas of priority in education.

This situation is not limited to the ROI; specifically there is very little international research into children's experiences of and attitudes to geography and a 'noticeable lack of research' into children's perceptions in geography (Lord and Harland, 2000, p. 29). Researchers in primary geography have stated the need for further research in primary geography internationally (see for example Williams, 1996; Bowles, 1997; Catling, 1999; 2000). For example, in a PhD thesis, Dowgill traced the history of attitudinal studies in geography and came up with only four (Dowgill, 1998, p. 56). However, there have been examples of published research in primary geography, such as Scoffham's Primary Sources (Scoffham, 1998).

Other new research is emerging; educational researchers are working on a number of collaborative projects to find out about children's experiences of and attitudes to geography. Catling has carried out research in the UK to discover both pupil and student teachers' definitions of geography. In his initial research into children's definitions of geography, Catling found children could define geography. Analysis of children's definitions showed the components of geography that stood out were: map work, countries, world studies and localities (Catling, 2001).

Recent research has begun to assess children's attitudes to geography. For example, in the UK Biddulph and Adey (2004) surveyed and interviewed children in Year 9 (ages 13 to 14), and again in Year 11 (ages 15 and 16). All of their research is revealing certain likes and dislikes amongst children of different age groups. They like 'active pupil-centred learning' for example, investigative work, group work, discussion, debate and fieldwork (Biddulph and Adey, 2004). They dislike more inactive learning, for example, answering questions and making notes (Biddulph and Adey, 2004).

Geography in the Primary Curriculum in Ireland

The history of geography in the Irish Primary Curriculum has been characterised by two features: Firstly, cycles of new, usually constructivist child-centred, curriculum followed by lack of implementation. Secondly, by remarkable continuity in the content and methodologies promoted by subsequent curricula:

Figure 1

Geography became a feature of the Irish primary school in 1900 with the introduction of the 'Revised Programmes'. This curriculum allowed a freedom in the choice of methods used in class and the use of the local area (INTO, 1995, p. 7) suggesting children be taught 'not merely to take in knowledge from books but to observe with intelligence the material world around them' (quoted in INTO, 1995, p. 7). Research by the Irish National School Teachers' Organisation (INTO) found the curriculum was not implemented due to lack of finance, attitudes of teachers, lack of resources and the top-down nature of the proposals (INTO, 1995, p. 7).

The 1971 curriculum made geography an element of Social and Environmental Studies. There were fundamental changes in ideology and methodology, with the curriculum involving a 'radical shift of ideological position and methodological approach' (Gash, 1985, p. 85). The methodologies of the curriculum were open-ended and experiential, including enquiry and use of the local environment. Further research by the INTO found the curriculum was not implemented due to lack of funding, in-service training and support from the inspectorate (INTO, 1995, p. 7).

Following a number of reviews and reports in the 1990s (for example the Primary Education Review Body, 1990; INTO, 1995; DES, 1995) the Revised Primary School Curriculum was

introduced in 1999. Geography became part of the curriculum area named Social, Environmental and Scientific Education along with History and Science (DES / NCCA, 1999a; 1999b). In principle this was similar to the 1971 curriculum: There was a clear child-centred approach, with the emphasis as much on methodologies as content. However, there was a more explicit feature of enquiry and of the study of people and cultures within and beyond Ireland (1999a).

The 1999 curriculum has six subject areas, with 11 subjects, as outlined in Figure 2:

Figure 2

The curriculum consists of 11 subject books, with each curriculum statement containing the rationale, aims, objectives, structured content and assessment approaches for each of the four class levels: infants; first and second; third and fourth; fifth and sixth. There are also 11 teacher texts with information on school and classroom planning, and on teaching approaches and methodologies (Primary Curriculum Support Service, 1999, p. 2).

What is apparent from a review of the 1971 and 1999 curricula is the striking similarities in both content and approaches, as can be seen in figure 3.

Figure 3

Context of the research

As outlined above, curricula in the ROI have been developed but not implemented over the past century. In the case of most of the curricular changes reviews carried out have found the lack of implementation has been because of financial constraints on schools and shortages of staff development via in-service courses, large class sizes, etc. The lack of implementation of the various curricular changes has resulted in what has been described as a child-conscious but not child centered curriculum (Sugrue, 1990, p. 11). This sentiment of the ROI primary school system can be seen in relation to resources for geography. Schools in the survey, like many in the ROI use textbooks to teach primary geography and other subjects (Waldron, 2005). Geography textbooks in the ROI have varied content and are visually interesting, however the nature of any textbook means opportunities to develop the interests of the children are limited by the extensive coverage of topics. Furthermore, features of the curriculum such as learning in the locality or learning about current events are limited because of the generalist nature of such textbooks.

Table 4

As can be seen in table 4, there are two particular features of ROI textbooks: Firstly, the amount of material covered, with most textbooks having over 20 chapters on numerous topics. Secondly, the production of textbooks that require children to complete maps and fill in tables with little coverage of the other aspects of geography.

It should also be noted that in the ROI there are limited indigenous resources for the teaching of geography. This is due to lack of funding for such resources, lack of funding in schools to purchase a wide range of resources and the relatively small demand for such resources due to the size of the country. These contextual factors should be taken into account as the children's definitions are considered.

Research Methods

This study was undertaken by 186 children in 5th class (10 and 11 years olds) of six schools in three counties in the ROI. The children had been taught geography since third class using various methods and resources, such as school textbooks, atlases and maps. The teachers completed a

questionnaire as the children completed their activities. These revealed teachers were tending to use the textbook as a guideline for the teaching of geography in 5th class. Although there was evidence of other resources being used, one of the schools had recently used a resource pack on bananas; this was used to enable the children to learn about trade and development as well as the banana industry.

Children were given a 'writing frame' style sheet with the question: What is geography?' followed by a number of lines to write their definitions. The class teacher asked them, to write down what they would say to someone who walked in the room and asked them the question 'What is geography?' The children were not given a time limit to complete the definition.

The children's definitions were read through and initial categories of their responses made using the themes, places and skills framework found in the 1999 curriculum and other reference in primary geography (see for example, Martin, 1995):

Children's Definitions
The definitions of geography in the 1971 and 1999 curricular, as shown in figure 5, and these were a useful starting point in analyzing the children's responses:

Figure 5

It was clear from reading the children's definitions that the majority of them had a clear idea what geography was. Many of the children's definitions were broader than the above definitions! All but one child wrote a definition and they varied in style and content:

'Geography is learning mountains, counties, rivers, inlets, bays and islands. When you get older you learn all of those things but in other countries. You learn what its like to live in other countries learn their culture and what they eat or drink. The book tells you what other people do in their jobs and how they do their job. That's what geography is.'

'If someone walked in the door and asked me what is geography about I would say that it is about the study of rivers, mountains, counties, countries, and stuff like that.'

As with Catling's work (Catling, 2001, p. 363) there were great variations in the lengths of definitions, even from the same class:

> Geography is a subject we learn in school, it teaches us about our world and environment. It tells us more about what we can see and what we can't. It tells us our problems like making the hole in the Ozone and if we don't try to fix it there mightn't be the Ozone for generations to come. Geography explains what we have today like mountains, rivers, and planets and how they formed. Without geography we wouldn't learn about the weather and could be walking out in the middle of a hurricane without knowing. People when they think about geography they're thinking about planets and the Ozone and things we've never seen or will never see, which is true but geography tells us about clouds, rain, trees, the ground etc… And they're things we see every day and would never suspect they'd come up in the subject of geography.

'Its a bunch of maps and information about the planet and our environment.'

As can be seen from the examples above, many of the definitions were very similar to the curriculum definitions. Therefore children already have a clear idea of what geography is. There was a huge range in definitions; some were broader than textbook geography:

'What geography is it is about the world what happened the world and why did it happen?'

Others were tied very closely with the textbooks:

'Geography is a subject we do it in school and the name of it is world wise three. When we do geography we find out about the ups and downs of maps.'

Generally there were many mentions of the books used in geography, reflecting on the almost universal take up of a single text per class in Irish primary schools. There were very few mentions of atlases, perhaps because the children have map workbooks rather than atlases.

Aspects of Geography in Children's Definitions
The majority of children in the survey had a clear idea of what geography was. Only one child wrote nothing and another wrote all about History. Other children wrote about other subjects, but also geography.

The tables in Figures six and seven below show aspects of geography children referred to in their definitions. As can be seen the majority of children, 97.3%, referred to one or more aspects of geography. The majority of children referred to two aspects of geography (55.4%). Finally, 12.9% of children referred to all three aspects of geography:

Figure 6

Figure 7

Within these figures are huge variations in the quality of the children's responses for example both the following children referred to all three components:

'Geography is a subject we learn about in school. We learn about the environment, planets and what's helping and damaging the world like pollution. It tells us about different cultures and tradition of people around the world. Rivers, Mountains, weather, space, places and people all around us. How things are made and created. Maps and plans help us to figure out things. Islands and seas around different countries.'

'Geography is planet, seasons and country. I live in Dublin. We learn geography in school. When we are looking for a country we look in our atlas or my geography book. I like geography.'

Nearly half the children, 44.6%, defined geography using references to themes and places. Conversely, relatively few children referred to geography as including geographical and generic skills.

The following sections look at each of the aspect of geography within children's definitions.

Place Aspects in Children's Definitions
As can be seen from figure 8 below, the clearest aspect of geography for children was that of places, from local to global scales:

Figure 8

Two thirds of children mentioned geography being about the world. Four fifths of children referred specifically to countries. The learning about people, in most cases abroad was mentioned by over half of the children (51%). Children's depth of ideas about geography in relation to place varied from child to child and from school to school. Some children had a clear idea about learning about different places and different cultures:

'Geography is a subject that tell you about the world and how it works. It mostly tells you about nature and different and new plants and different countries in our world. Like we call it the third world countries like Asia and Africa and other poor countries.'

'Geography is about people and places.'

'Geography is also about learning about the different countries around the globe. You might be able to learn about space and different people and their habitat. What they wear, eat, drink and who they praise like god or someone. You would also learn about festivals in different countries.'

There were also quite simple views of other cultures and countries, in some cases stereotypes were clear:

'Geography is a subject you do in school about people in other countries the way they live their lives and how hard it is and we also learn about energy and atmosphere. We learn about our environment like how Ireland used to be an ice-land and we also learn about fossil fuels and energy or Irish agriculture or children from around the world like Maria from Per. We also learn physical geography and tours of Britain or industries of Europe we also learn about all the rain forests and we learn about trees like the Californian redwood and we learn about the Shetland islands famous for their ponies.'

Other definitions were about different countries only in relation to learning the names and/ or location of them:

Geography tells us about rivers and counties, mountains, bays and all different places on maps and all over the globe. Like the five continents and all the countries in them. We have done about bays and lands and about Europe.

In many cases famous landmarks dominated children's responses. There were numerous mentions of the Eiffel Tower and the Statue of Liberty:

'How they were made the statue of liberty the leaning tower of Pisa the Eiffel tower American Grand Canyon. It took millions of years to make that Grand Canyon. Don't forget the French gave the statue of liberty to America. Spain is in Europe.'

Children only mentioned their own counties in terms of learning the names of counties:

'Geography is a lesson of nature like all around us. It is mostly about Ireland like I know off by heart there are 32 counties. Here are somethings that we learn about in geography = Countries, rivers, capitals, mountains, counties, what type of weather there is like mild, moist, hot, cold. In my

class, our teacher sometimes gives us a little test where we have to mark in things like countries, counties, capitals and Islands. The questions sometimes can be very hard or very easy.'

There were no real mentions of learning about places in the immediate locality of the school. This was a major element of the 1971 curriculum and is the major thrust of the 1999 curriculum. There were two exceptions, from different schools:

'If we didn't know about geography we wouldn't be able to tell people what a lovely area we live in.'

'We learn about our home area and how it has changed.'

Children have a clear idea that part of geography is learning about people and places. The references to different cultures shows that this important aspect of the 1971 and 1999 curricular is reflected in children's understanding of the subject. The lack of local geography references is surprising as it is a major aspect of geography in both curricula. This may reflect the lack of local geography that is possible to include in geography textbooks.

Theme Aspects in Children's Definitions

The most varied responses from the children came from any area of geography that could be considered geographical themes. As can be seen from figure 9 responses varied between human, physical and environmental themes:

Figure 9

Within the children's definitions there were far more mentions of physical geography themes than human themes. This contrasts with international research that has found a neglect of physical geography (Mackintosh, 1999, p. 69). The dominance of physical themes reflects the dominance of physical geography in school resources and specifically the learning off of rivers, mountains, capes, bays and headlands by children. Many children mentioned rivers and mountains and / or sea, bays and inlets. Although a small number of children mentioned how these were formed such features were generally mentioned in terms of learning the names of them:

> Geography to me is learning about all different countries of the world. It is like learning the capitals. You can learn more things like rivers, mountains cities and town. It is like when you get older you will know where to go if you are driving. Sometimes it can be easy but sometimes it can be hard. It is only hard if you do not listen. It also can help you on your holiday. If you want to go see something you will know where it is cause you have listened.

'Geography is learning mountains, counties, rivers, inlets, bays and islands. When you get older you learn all of those things but in other countries.'

The list of all themes mentioned, shown in figure 10, reveals the influence of work covered recently by the classes. For example, in one class nearly every child mentioned the environment, in another development was frequently mentioned as they had recently used the 'Bananas' resource pack, children from another school mentioned the environment more times than others, etc. The length and range of the list of themes above show some of the children in 5th class have a clear idea of the range of topics that can be covered in geography.

Figure 10

When individual responses are looked at there is variation in the depth to which topics are studied. Some children referred to many aspects of understanding key themes in geography, such as globalisation and development:

'Geography is about the world. You may learn about your country or about the atmosphere. You may learn about the affects of global warming on the environment. You may learn about how mountains are formed.'

'It will show us things like "The Water Cycle" and "The Food Chain"'

In terms of themes, children seemed to have a clear idea about the number of different themes. Although, the definitions do tend to emphasise the knowing of facts rather than the understanding of key concepts such as change, processes, patterns, etc.

Skill Aspects in Children's Definitions
This aspect of geography was least mentioned by children, with the exception of maps, very few skills were mentioned, as can be seen in figure 11:

Figure 11

Across all the children's definitions only thirty-five percent mentioned any skills. This was taken to include fieldwork, and map work, as well as generic skills such as project work and group work. The majority of responses referred to maps, with twenty-nine percent of children mentioning maps:

'Geography is learning about map work and about the atlas. Geography is also about learning about the different countries around the globe.'

'Geography is an important subject that tells us about the world or space or counties that is one of the aspects of geography there is also the aspects of temperatures, climate, altitude, latitude and oceans there are loads more too many to mention.'

The use of maps in geography is clear to a significant number of children. However their awareness of the uses of maps seems limited. As mentioned above, many children's responses referred to learning off and / or memorising maps:

'Geography is learning about the world. About different places we learn about seas, and farming we learn from North to South from east to west we learn about Mountains, rivers, and streams. We learn about counties we learn about countries we learn about Islands, bays and inlets. We also learn about maps how to use them. We know that there are thirty-two counties in Ireland. We learn about England and France and America.'

'Geography is all about the world. It gives you Knowledge about the countries and counties of the world. It has maps all over the geography book of the world. Geography is places of the world. You can memorise the countries and counties of the world. It has lots of landscapes.'

Uses of maps for finding out about places and uses of map skills were only occasionally mentioned, mainly by children in one school:

'It teaches us about maps and how to read them too.'

'Geography is about maps of countries and the rivers or mountains in countries. It tells us where airports are in our country. It shows us how to draw a map from birds eye view and how to measure with scales.'

Only one student referred to the use of maps as a problem solving device:

'Maps and plans help us to figure out things.'

Although children do use maps within workbooks and textbooks in geography the lack of mention of this essential skill in geography is surprising. The value of map skills, including use and interpretation as well as drawing maps was not evident to the children surveyed. The lack of specific skills, especially map skills in the textbooks used by the children probably account for the lack of mention of skills mentioned in the children's definitions.

Concept aspects in children's definitions

Children indicating that geography can be about key concepts or ideas were evident in only some of the children's definitions. From quotes below it can only be inferred that these children were seeing that geography included key concepts or ideas about the world:

'...It tells us about the change and development that is going on in the 3rd world and populations in countries.'

'Geography is all about the world. It tells you about the seas and lands by map and they tell you about the environment like the ozone layer or how the way it rains and how plants and trees grow. I can go on and on but time is up.'

The lack of reference to key concepts or ideas in geography may reflect the disjointed nature of the coverage of geography in resource materials. This can be seen in geography textbooks used by the classes surveyed where topics within chapters do not progress from previous work covered in the books.

References to Learning Geography in Children's Definitions

The purpose of this work was not to find out what children do in geography although, many children mentioned learning experiences in geography. Within these quotes a recurring feature was the mention of using textbooks in geography:

'In our geography book we learned about different countries, space, bogs, and different things like that.'

'When we first took out our geography book we thought it would be boring but then we saw agriculture then it was brilliant.'

'My geography books for this year were People and Places 3 and Fallon's Map Workbook. In People and Places 3 I learned about farming and industries of Ireland exports and imports that we use every day.'

However, some children did refer to different resources and approaches:

'We are learning about bananas I think it is good. I know a lot about them now.'

'I think that there should be more assignments and projects in a geography book because it would make it more enjoyable for us and other children.'

There were also a number of likes and dislikes about the subject expressed:

'And geography is about good things and bad things.'

'Really I think geography is boring because people don't know because the world could blow up tomorrow or every body could die we don't know. I could be wrong but that's what I think.'

'Some people like geography and some people hate it.'

Though the children were not asked their opinions of geography for this research project, the opinions they expressed were interesting. Those that did express opinions tended to have extreme views. Further exploration of children's opinions of geography in future research could investigate children's opinions of geography.

Limitations of the Research

The limitations of this of this research should be noted. Firstly, the methodology of the research asked for the children's spontaneous response to one question. What they wrote was limited by their own skills in expressing themselves in writing in a short time period. If the children had been interviewed they would have had time to develop their ideas. Secondly, the question did not necessarily mean children would write about all aspects of their experiences of learning in geography.

However, their spontaneous writing did reveal much about their ideas about geography. Furthermore, as stated above, the intention of this research project was to collect initial data on the current position of primary geography in schools in the ROI. The data and findings from this research has already resulted in further research on primary geography investigating other aspects of both children's and teachers' experiences in the teaching and learning of geography.

Conclusions

The results of this survey reveal children have a range of ideas about what geography is. Children's definitions are remarkably similar to formal definitions of geography in the curriculum (NCCA / DES, 1999a).

The children surveyed also had well developed ideas of the content of geography. They mentioned many different themes and places in geography, thus indicating that, for them, geography is a subject in which a lot of content is covered.

Children seemed less aware that geography is a subject where geography and generic skills can be used. Children make very few references to geography being a subject you can learn experientially. The lack of mention of specific geography methodologies, such as map work and fieldwork were very pronounced.

This research was carried out during the window between the 1999 curriculum being published and being implemented (2006). The findings can be taken to reveal a lack of implementation of the 1971 curriculum but also a challenge for the implementation of the 1999 curriculum. If the definitions from this sample are representative of children's experiences of geography in the ROI

then it can be argued there will be a number of challenges in implementing the 1999 curriculum. Firstly, there will be a requirement to teach less content than had previously been covered and secondly, there will be a requirement to teach geography using more varied techniques, including investigation and fieldwork. These changes will involve further consideration and planning of geography in individual schools beyond the one-day of staff development planned for the school year 2005-2006.

Future research carried out with 5th class children, after the implementation of the 1999 curriculum, should reveal changes in primary school. It would be expected there would be a renewed emphasis no learning in the locality of the school, via fieldwork and other activities. There should also be a noticeable reduction in the amount of content taught in geography lessons, though children's definitions may not reveal this. With the more visible emphasis on investigation / enquiry in the 1999 curriculum in geography, science and history it would be likely that children would mention such experiences.

In finding out about children's definitions of geography the potential for research with children is clear. Research into children's attitudes to geography and further investigation into their experiences would be very worthwhile in considering future developments in the subject. With the emphasis on place in the 1999 curriculum it would be interesting to discover more about children's ideas about their locality but also their experiences and attitudes to places beyond their local area. At this time of change in geography curricula at both primary and second level in the ROI research with teachers would also be both interesting and helpful for staff development planning.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the effort and careful thought put into this task by all 186 children and 6 teachers involved. Their efforts have provided a fascinating insight into their experiences in geography and a great starting point for further research.

Approaches to Geography	
1971 Curriculum	**1999 Curriculum**
• Local, county, country and world geography • Fieldwork • Projects • Sample studies or case studies • Integration • Recording (in a variety of ways)	• Skills, including fieldwork and graphicacy • Knowledge and concepts • Enquiry: questioning, observing, experimenting and recording • Local, county, country and world geography • Local identity • Integration
Content of Geography	
1971 Curriculum	**1999 Curriculum**
• Weather • Animals, plants and crops • Map interpretation. The local area. • Home county • Ireland • Other lands	• Sense of space and place • Geographical skills: use of globes, maps and pictures • Geographical investigation • Human environments • Natural environments • Environmental awareness and care

Figure 1: Geography in the 1971 and 1999 Irish Primary School Curricula (DES, 1971; 1999a)

Geographical categories	Examples of components of Geography identified in each category	
Places	• People and their lives / culture • Countries • World • Place	• Counties • Europe • Names • Continent
Geographical themes	• Animals and plants • Mountains • Space • Rivers • Sea / bay / inlet • Weather	• Development, including famine and food • Environment • Industry • Homes • History
Geographical skills	• Maps • Projects • Atlases	
Geographical concepts	• Change	• Development

Figure 2: The categories and components used to analyse children's definitions – Geographical

Categories	Examples of components identified in each category	
Learning	• Learning • Book • Interesting • Facts	• Boring • Project • Memory
Misconceptions	• Past	
Opinions	• Interesting • Boring	

Figure 3: The categories and components used to analyse children's definitions – Generic

1971 Curriculum 5th and 6th Classes	1999 textbook 5th and 6th Classes

Themes	Weather Power, fuel and transport	Climate Weather Settlement Bays, harbours and inlets Rivers and lakes Oceans Grasslands and forests Plate tectonics: Earthquakes and volcanoes Transport* Communications Trade and industry Famine Mountains* Minerals, rocks and soils Deserts Services Farming / Agriculture* Natural resources Settlement Night, day and seasons Electricity Tourism
Places	Local geography Home county Ireland: home region and Ireland as a whole Great Britain Europe: general with samples The World through sample study The globe	Ireland Antrim and Belfast Britain Europe* Greece Italy Germany Netherlands Denmark USA Australia Egypt India The continents Rivers of the world Mountain ranges of the world

Skills	Map interpretation Fieldwork Projects Sample studies or case studies Recording (in a variety of ways)	Maps Interpreting maps Comprehension exercises: finding answers, filling blanks, true or false, Longitude and latitude*

*Topic covered in both textbooks

Table 4: Suggested content and methodologies in the 5th class 1971 geography curricular compared to content and approaches in geography textbooks

1971 Curriculum
Geography is mainly concerned with the relationship between people and the environment in which they live…Geography … then, is the study of those features which give to a region and its inhabitants their distinctive character.

1999 Curriculum
Geography encompasses the study of the Earth, its inhabitants, and the interrelationships between them, and is particularly concerned with the themes of place, space and environment.

Figure 5: Definitions of geography in the 1971 and 1999 Irish Primary School Curricula for Geography

Aspects mentioned by children	Number of Children	Percentage of Children
None	5	2.7
Places only	16	8.6
Themes only	38	20.4
Skills only	0	0.0
Places and Themes	86	46.2
Places and Skills	5	2.7
Themes and Skills	12	6.5
All aspects	24	12.9

Figure 6: Children's references to aspects of Geography in their definitions

Number of aspects mentioned by children	Number of Children	Percentage of Children
0	5	2.7
1	54	29.0
2	103	55.4

3	24	12.9

Figure 7: Totals for Children's references to aspects of Geography in their definitions

Aspect	Total referrals*	Number of children referring to aspect	Percentage of children referring to aspect
country / ies	197	134	80
world	170	108	64
people	123	85	51
place	73	59	35
county / ies	32	24	14
Europe	20	14	8
name	12	10	6
continent	10	7	4
Total	637	441	-

**Many children mentioned the aspects more than once in their definitions*

Figure 8: Children's references to place aspects in their definitions of Geography

Broad theme	Total referrals
Human	93
Physical	426
Environmental	48

Figure 9: Children's references to broad themes in their definitions of Geography

Aspect**	Total referrals*	Number of children referring to aspect	Percentage of children referring to aspect
animals / plants	89	73	**43**
mountain	87	73	**43**
river	68	58	**35**
sea / bay / inlet	68	66	**39**
weather	59	57	**34**
space	55	54	**32**
development	54	54	**32**
environment	48	47	**28**
industry	30	30	**18**
homes / houses	9	9	**5**
history	6	6	**4**
Total	**573**	**527**	**-**

**Many children mentioned the aspects more than once in their definitions*
*** Aspects have been grouped, for example, references to jobs, factories, etc. were all classed as industry*

Figure 10: Children's references to themes aspects in their definitions of Geography

Aspect	Total referrals*	Number of children referring to aspect	Percentage of children referring to aspect
maps	62	49	**29**
atlas	4	4	**2**
project	8	7	**4**
Total	**74**	**60**	

**Many children mentioned the aspects more than once in their definitions*

Figure 11: Children's references to skills aspects in their definitions of Geography

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