

What makes a Geography assessment geographical?

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Abstract

This article is based on the content and discussion from a workshop presented at the GTANSW & ACT Annual Conference in April 2019. The original intention of the workshop was to explore and reflect on: (i) the constructive alignment of assessment tasks in a teaching and learning program for Geography; and (ii) the provision of timely, useful feedback and feedforward using the *ANU and MQ Feedback for Learning Coffee Course* blog as a guiding structure. However, as planning and preparation for the session developed, the focus shifted. Whilst constructive alignment, feedback, and feedforward were still addressed in the workshop, they became contextualised through asking 'What makes a Geography assessment geographical? Workshop participants were invited to consider the overarching question to help them drill down in to the geographical knowledge, understanding, tools and skills deemed to be important enough to be assessed. The article covers selected points from the workshop including a series of thought-provokers for personal reflection, and an overview of emerging research from the pool of literature around geographical assessment. If you are interested in learning more about what makes a Geography assessment geographical I encourage you to read the 2018 issue of *Geographical Education: Assessment in Geography* available via www.agta.asn.au under the Resources tab, or enrol in the webinar scheduled for Wednesday 7 August, or consider attending the AGTA Conference in October and sign-up for the workshop.

A thought provoker for personal reflection



(Authors' photographs and collage)

Focus on one of your Geography classes and a particular unit of work. With those students placed at the centre of the relevant teaching, learning and assessment program, consider the following questions and write down your responses:

1. What do I want my students to be able to know, do and understand that is *distinctly geographical* by the end of [insert timeframe for the program]?
2. How will I know when students have achieved this or are working towards its achievement?
3. How will the students know when they have achieved this or are working towards its achievement?
4. What makes my Geography lessons in this program *distinctly geographical*?
5. What makes the assessment activities in this program *distinctly geographical*?

An overview of the literature

Drawing from selected Australian and international studies about the effective assessment of Geography in a secondary school context, it is evident that alignment needs to occur between what is valued in the Geography classroom that is *distinctly geographical*, and the purpose and outcomes of assessment within the school. To encourage development of constructive alignment between what is valued, taught and assessed in from a teaching, learning and assessment program in Geography, the following points emerge:

EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT IN GEOGRAPHY	REFERENCE
<p>Formative and summative approaches are required but need to be focused on cognition <i>and</i> meaningful geographical learning including conceptual, contestable and theoretical content.</p> <p>Formative assessment practices have been shown to enhance student engagement in Geography lessons <i>and</i> allow teachers to demonstrate their depth of knowledge about Geography</p>	(Bijsterbosch, van der Schee, & Kuiper, 2017; Lane & Bourke, 2019; Solem, Stoltman, Lane, Bourke, Chang, & Viehrig, 2018)
<p>Formalised and purposeful diagnostic assessment around alternative conceptions throughout a teaching, learning and assessment program. Such as strategy helps teachers to determine the nature and extent of conceptual change occurring student learning. Furthermore, results from diagnostic assessment become a source of feedback to teachers about the effectiveness of the program and provide a chance for constructive alignment between teaching, learning and assessment to be enhanced. Additionally, levels of required complexity or simplicity in instruction can be determined from diagnostic assessment and monitored throughout a learning progression.</p>	(Lane & Caldis, 2018)
<p>Spatial reasoning needs to be evident in formative and summative assessments, and become a benchmark for complexity of thinking.</p> <p>Spatial reasoning can be assessed through a taxonomic assessment tool such as SOLO.</p> <p>Spatial reasoning can also be utilised as a strategy for assessing the ability of students to analyse content and apply learning to the key concepts of Geography.</p>	(Bijsterbosch, van der Schee, & Kuiper, 2017; Lane & Bourke, 2019)
<p>Active construction of knowledge using prior and new knowledge provides opportunities for rigorous assessment in Geography and for teachers to determine how students are progressing in their geographical knowledge, understanding and application skills.</p> <p>Active knowledge construction activities are those which allow students to apply, integrate, create and evaluate procedural and conceptual knowledge in accompaniment to core knowledge. Examples of such activities include concept mapping, sketch-mapping, word-associations, interpretation and development of visual representations and diagrams.</p>	(Bijsterbosch, van der Schee, & Kuiper, 2017; Lane & Bourke, 2019)
<p>Demonstration of multiple perspectives needs to occur in formative and summative assessment. Perspectives could include communication about the global relevance of an issue or range of issues, and a process or range of processes across a variety of scales. Perspectives can also be assessed through active citizenship and the application of knowledge, skills and capabilities to a given context.</p>	(Solem, Stoltman, Lane, Bourke, Chang, & Viehrig, 2018)

The relationship between a geographical Geography lesson and a geographical Geography assessment

The pedagogy of Geography is distinctive and our teaching practice in the Geography classroom should leave our students and visiting colleagues in no doubt that they have been participating in or observing a Geography lesson. Evidence from GEOGStandards project (www.geogstandards.edu.au) revealed a framework of common and distinctive elements related to the teaching of Geography which were consistently demonstrated by the national participant group of experienced and accomplished Geography teachers (Hutchinson & Kriewaldt, 2010; Kriewaldt, 2010).

So, the question arises... What makes your Geography lesson geographical?

In the workshop, participants were invited to consider this question and share their responses as part of a small group and whole group discussion. Although there are nine Standards emerging from the GEOGStandards project, five of the Standards were focused on during the workshop: Knowing Geography and the geography curriculum; Fostering geographical inquiry and fieldwork; Developing geographical thinking and communication; Understanding Geography teaching – pedagogical practice; and Planning, assessing and reporting.

The theory-practice nexus suggests the following factors in the diagram below contribute to a geographical Geography lesson



Authors' photograph taken from the powerpoint slide of the authors' workshop at the GTA NSW & ACT Conference

Each factor can be connected to one or more of the GEOGStandards as well as the literature about geographical assessment, indicating that what becomes privileged in our pedagogy as a Geography teacher, should also become evident and valued

in our Geography assessments. For example, as a Geography teacher, our lessons should be hinged upon an overarching inquiry question and we should be incorporating a range of geographical tools in to our lessons to help our students develop the skills of inquiry, interpretation of content, and its conceptual analysis, reasoning and application across a range of scales, perspectives and contexts. By modelling such factors in our teaching practice, the use of terminology and development of geographical literacy becomes inherent. Through a combination of immersion, moments of explicit instruction, and being encouraged to investigate, our students become Geographers and learn to both think and communicate in a geographically distinctive way. What is valued and known to be distinctively geographical in our teaching practice, should also be valued and evident in our assessment activities for the subject.

Returning to the thought provoker for personal reflection



Author's photographs and collage

Having considered the research and selected key messages from the workshop in the context of one of your Geography classes and a particular unit of work, have any of your responses to the following questions been challenged or confirmed?

1. What do I want my students to be able to know, do and understand *that is distinctly geographical* by the end of [insert timeframe for the program]?
2. How will I know when students have achieved this or are working towards its achievement?

3. How will the students know when they have achieved this or are working towards its achievement?
4. What makes my Geography lessons in this program *distinctly geographical*?
5. What makes the assessment activities in this program *distinctly geographical*?

In closing, you are invited to consider what your next steps will be to ensure your teaching practice in the Geography classroom and an upcoming Geography assessment becomes as distinctly geographical as possible.

References

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COMPETITIONS

Australian Team at the 2019 International Geography Olympiad in Hong Kong, China

Four Year 12 students will represent Australia at the XVI International Geography Olympiad to be held in Hong Kong, China, from Tuesday 30 July to Tuesday 6 August. The team was selected following their outstanding performance at last year's Geography's Big Week Out held on Kangaroo Island, South Australia. Representing Australia in Hong Kong will be:

Alex Shierlaw, St Peter's College, South Australia
Stefan Simic, McKinnon Secondary College, Victoria
Eleanor Smith, Kilvington Grammar School, Victoria
Jacob Thai, Sydney Grammar School, New South Wales

The International Geography Olympiad is an annual competition for the best 16 to 19-year-old geography students from around the world. The theme of the 2019 Olympiad is "Discovering a vibrant city for our smart future".

Australia's 2019 Olympiad team was chosen from sixteen high performing Year 11 students who participated in the 2018 Geography's Big Week Out – an intensive six-day residential programme with challenging geographical activities. Selection of Year 11 students to that event is based on their performance in the school round of the Australian Geography Competition.

The Australian Team at the 2020 International Geography Olympiad in Istanbul, Turkey, will be selected based on students' performance in this year's Australian Geography Competition, visit www.geographycompetition.org.au.

To find out more about the 2019 International Geography Olympiad in Hong Kong, China, visit www.eduhk.hk/igeo2019/.