

Syllabus change, student learning and teacher experiences

Shelagh B Waddington

Department of Geography
National University of Ireland, Maynooth,
Ireland



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Background to the study- Geography in Irish Schools

- Irish syllabi common to virtually all schools within the state [state-funded and fee paying]
- Syllabi developed by National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
- Primary schools - new syllabus 1999
 - Geography part of Social, Environmental and Scientific Education
 - SESE taken by all students from start of school age [4+ years] to end of primary [12 years]



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Geography in Second Level Education

- Taken by 92% all students at Junior Certificate Level – age 15 years
- Taken by 49% all students at Leaving Certificate Level – age 18 years



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Syllabus change in Ireland

- Syllabus change is uncommon in Irish second level education
- Change in 1989 – Junior Certificate
 - wide variety of concerns at this time
 - in-service provision
 - impact on student performance
 - very little information on assessment until late date in first cycle
- Leaving Certificate unchanged since 1975 until current revision
 - reduction in content, not a radical departure
- New course begun in 2004
- First examination 2006



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Aims/ aspirations of the syllabus – citizenship

- To understand the opportunities for, and challenges of global interdependence
- To promote conservation and sustained management of earth's resources
- To recognise, and be sensitive to other people and their culture....
- To develop and promote active citizenship and to encourage informed participation, through lifelong learning, in society.....
- To assist students to become well-informed and responsible citizens



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Lifelong learning

- To develop and promote active citizenship and to encourage informed participation, through lifelong learning, in society.....
- ... to enable [students] to [progress to further studies or to enter the world of work]
- To provide students, through their study of geography, with an interesting and enjoyable experience and imbue them in a lifelong love of their natural and cultural environment



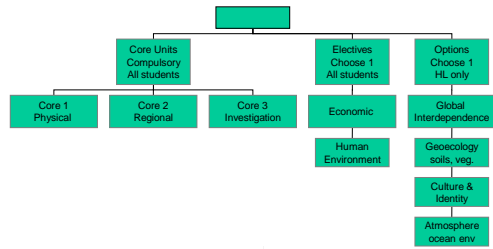
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Skills

- Through their study of geography students will develop geographical skills which will help them make informed judgements about issues at local, national and international levels including:
 - maps, figures, statistics, photographs, pictures, textual sources, presentation and communication, investigative, social and evaluation skills
- To encourage the use of information and communication technologies in the teaching and learning of geography

Leaving Cert. Geography Syllabus

Leaving Cert. Organisation



Research questions

- Would the new syllabus aims and course changes have any impact on actual learning outcomes?
- What were the initial responses of teachers in terms of:
 - reaction to the change overall?
 - changes in learning outcomes?
- Would the teacher predictions be justified in reality?

Study methodology

- Examination of syllabus and other documentation to identify relevant aims/ aspirations
- Interviews with 26 teachers in 2004
 - varied teaching experience
 - similar levels of learning about the new course
- Questionnaire survey of third level students in 2006
 - including both the 2006 Leaving Cert. cohort and those who had followed the previous course

Teacher data

- 22 individual interviews
- 2 pairs
- All interviews by researcher
 - audio recordings
 - transcription
 - analysis using QSR-N6
- Informal discussion during course of 1st cycle
- limited follow-up

Positive aspects of the change

- Generally change was welcomed
 - 'It's up to date, bringing the subject into the 21st century'
 - 'It's quite exciting, it is all going to open up more.'
 - 'It's a whole lot more knitted together'
 - 'I think as an individual you get stale and if you don't make changes, challenge yourself...you can't impart love of the subject to the students'
 - Geographical Investigation [project]

Negative aspects of the change

- 'Bittiness' vs. integration
- Assessment uncertainty
 - detail required in assessment
- Is this a dumbing down or a challenge too far?
- Subject areas/ citizenship
 - social geography
 - globalisation
 - EU awareness
- Skills



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Citizenship: issues

- × 'I would rather they cover both [electives]. How can populations issues be studied fully in isolation from development in the South'
- × 'the feeling of what makes France France won't be there if you're just looking at [one region]'
- × 'There is no component related to Ireland...across the spectrum. social, economic, population studies.'
- × 'There has to be some understanding of the global processes as well'
- × 'If we tackled it well we could perhaps educate people in such a way that we could prevent difficulties relating to racism'
- × 'I find it hard to keep up – social geography keeps changing'



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Citizenship: A cause for concern

- I like the idea ...that you could study out-migration and in-migration in peripheral and core regions'
- '.. although our immigrant problem for example is a very relevant topic, how do you do it without a bias?
- ...'religious conflict. .. students do a fair bit of that under religion'.
- 'I thought the Northern Ireland issue too close to home to get a good, unbiased discussion going



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Citizenship 2

- ✓ 'It's [geography] stuff going on in the world today'
- ✓ 'It's an integrator ..across the whole spectrum..'
- ✓ 'I think it's a good move to make it more global
- ✓ 'they prefer the more social geography' [a male teacher in a girls' school]



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Skills

- × less developed knowledge of skills and OS maps. 'There is a lack of focus on mapwork, surely the fundamental geography skill'
- × 'map reading skills, aerial photograph skills
- × Essay writing skills . 'This is important for everyone, not just HL students
- ✓ Visual data will be interpreted better, weather maps
- ✓ Fieldwork skills
- ✓ Practical aspects [will improve]. 'Unfortunately funding does not exist to provide facilities to develop this as one would like'



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The questionnaire survey

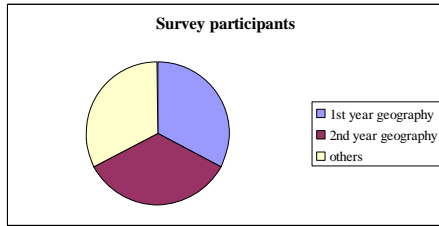
- An investigation of the level of geographical understanding of NUIM students
- Research questions included:
 - Does the level of study of geography affect the level of understanding?
 - Has the change in the Leaving Cert. course had any effects on the level of geographical understanding?



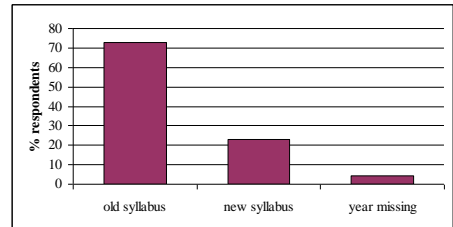
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Survey Respondents

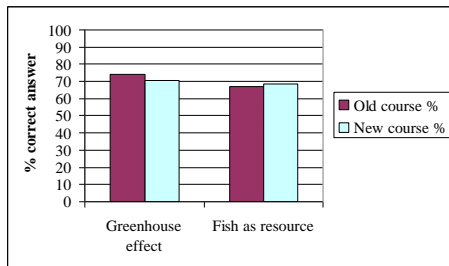
- 523 students in NUIM



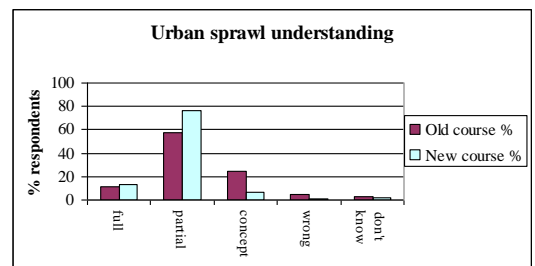
Leaving Cert. Geography participants



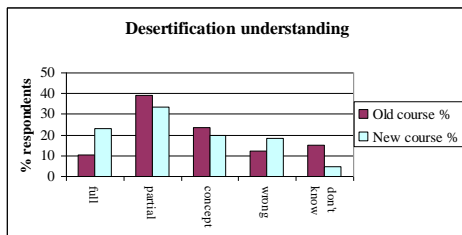
Citizenship 1



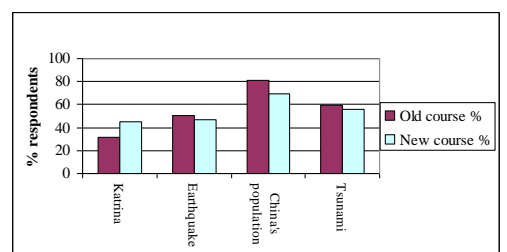
Citizenship 2



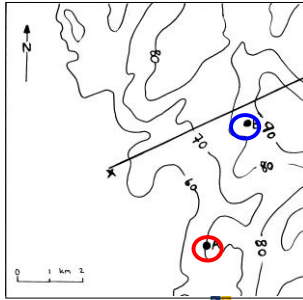
Citizenship 3



Geographical knowledge



Skills 1: Map skills Interpreting height on maps



height at B
[between
contours] =
approx. 85 m

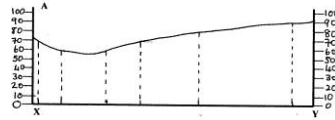
81% Old
48% New

height at A [on
contour] = 70 m

94% Old
98% New

Other map skills

• Recognition of cross-section



•Compass Direction
Both 82.8%!

Impact on ICT skills

- Good question!!!!
- clear statements about use – for example:
'information technology applications'
'geographical information systems' p.17
'the use of ICT, where appropriate, to prepare and present
results and conclusions' p.18
Government of Ireland, 2003 [LC syllabus]
- BUT
- 'Do not insert any extra material – paper or otherwise.
Examiners will mark only what is presented on the pages
of the booklet itself'
- Geographical Investigation Reporting Book [supplied by
SEC for completion in schools]

Conclusions

- Change does seem to have occurred
- Teachers did predict some of the changes accurately
- Some evidence of improved 'citizenship' concepts
- Some evidence that basic geographical skills not as well developed.
- What is happening now?
 - predictability in investigation
 - issues over standard of assessment
 - issues over overall grading – compared to other subjects
- Generally teachers seem reasonably satisfied
- Numbers taking geography not declining noticeably

Any comments/ suggestions

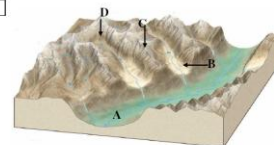
- Shelagh.Waddington@nuim.ie
- Thanks for listening!

Core : short answers

12 Glacial Landforms

Examine this diagram of a glaciated landscape.
Match each of the following landforms with its correct letter in the diagram.

• Hanging Valley	
• Cirque / Corrie	
• Glaciated Trough	
• Arête	



[8]

Core and elective: multipart questions

A EUROPEAN UNION UNEMPLOYMENT

Examine the table below, showing selected unemployment statistics for 2004.

COUNTRY	UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (% of adult population)
Austria	3.8%
Estonia	9.7%
France	9.9%
Latvia	14.6%
Poland	16.1%
Spain	10.5%

Using graph paper, draw a graph suitable to illustrate these data.

[20m]

B MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Examine some of the factors that have influenced the development of one economic activity in a non-Irish region that you have studied.

[30m]

C URBAN GROWTH

"The boundaries of city regions have expanded over time".
Discuss this statement, with reference to one example you have studied.

[30m]

Option: Global interdependence – essay question

14. Examine the impact of any two of the following global environmental issues:

- Deforestation
- Desertification
- Global warming

[80m]