

Enhancing understanding of the HSIE

Environment strand

Environmental education is a strong component of primary education. It is more than the HSIE component alone. Environmental education can take up to 10–15% of overall classroom learning time. Many teachers are enthusiastic about the environment and use their enthusiasm to inspire and motivate students. The *Environmental Education Policy for Schools* has curriculum links for teachers to deliberately address components of the policy, to ensure the easy inclusion of teaching about environmental management into teaching programs and school plans. Components of environmental education are included in several key learning areas.

Within HSIE, *Environment* is one of the four syllabus strands. The two *Environment* sub strands are *Patterns of place and location* and *Relationships with places*. The syllabus subject matter, organised in Stages, helps to clarify the context of the outcomes associated with the sub strands.

The relative size of the *Environment* strand varies across the Stages. It is quite common for components of the *Environment* strand to be taught in conjunction with other strands. Undertaking a mapping activity, related to *Patterns of place and location* to locate a particular place, town, city or country is important learning for students and often precedes the learning related to other strands. For example, locating China in the world is the first theme in the new *China downunder* support material that has a focus on the *Culture* strand and resource systems sub strand from *Social systems and structures*. Aspects of teaching the *Environment* strand supports understanding in *Change and continuity* in relation to changing heritage features, both natural and built, over time.

What is the focus of the HSIE *Environment* strand in each stage?

Early Stage 1

For Early Stage 1, the focus is on the natural and built features of the immediate environment. These include developing the language of place and location related to known features. Teachers explore student experience and interaction with a range of different environments, particularly those that are clean and safe. Students are taught how to care for the environment, particularly the natural environment. Early Stage 1 topics can include *our environment, where we live*, and *places we know*.

Stage 1

The focus in Stage 1 moves from the immediate environment to the local environment. A range of natural, built and heritage features in the local area, plus their uses and the differing values and responsibilities people have about these features of the environment are

explored. This exploration includes describing how the environment has been adapted by different people to meet changing needs, including Aboriginal relationships with the land and ways of caring for the land. Some geographical terminology related to local environment is developed. Stage 1 topics can include: local places, our local area; our place ... (name of own town or suburb), and changes in our local area.

Stage 2

The focus in Stage 2 broadens to include significant natural, built and heritage features at the local, state and national level. The mapping components in Stage 2 are also very important. Students use the major features of a world map to be able to locate states, territories, capital cities and other major Australian environmental features and to describe the significance of particular features and places. The understanding that environments need care and management is included, along with some Aboriginal land management practices. Stage 2 topics can include: significant Australian places, Australian states and territories, *Australia, you're standing in it* and *It didn't always look like this*.

Stage 3

The focus in Stage 3 is much broader again than Stage 2. The complexity of geographical terminology and the use of mapping skills increases and the range of environmental examples expands. The case study model is particularly relevant in Stage 3 where a range of natural, built or heritage case studies can be used. The case studies can focus on an example of a global environment through the study of a specific Australian example. This can include the Great Barrier Reef, various national parks such as Uluru, Kakadu, Tasmanian wilderness, Greater Blue Mountains, and Mt Kosciusko. The specific features of the environment can be investigated to develop and understanding of the significance of the environment and the environmental responsibilities in managing the site.

A study of a particular environment showing significant change over time is also a feature of Stage 3. This study can include a significant built site such as a historic house or site, Sydney Opera House, the Queen Victoria building, Darling Harbour, a natural heritage site with significance to Aboriginal people, (such as Mutawintji National Park), or a combination of both built and natural features, such as the Murray Darling basin environment.

Primary teachers have a good understanding of the particular Stage and nature of teaching about the environment as outlined above. In Stage 3, as teachers endeavour to provide interesting and engaging topics to work with, they should avoid using components of

Stage 4 and 5 Geography. Stage 3 teachers need to select topics carefully to ensure appropriate teaching and learning experiences for their students when addressing the Stage 3 syllabus components related to environment.

- **Antarctica** is a topic that will be addressed by many secondary schools in Stage 4. It is recommended that an alternative study to Antarctica be used in Stage 3, such as a study of the Murray Darling Basin, using <http://www.mdbc.gov.au/>
- **Rainforests** is a topic that often overlaps between primary and secondary, and should be avoided by primary teachers.
- **Natural disasters** has only a tenuous link in HSIE K–6, but is a significant component of Stages 4 and 5 Geography and should be avoided by primary teachers.

Teachers also need to consider the availability of resources. There is no point in selecting an environmental case study for which the school has no resources, or one that is not part of the primary curriculum.

History and Geography are now compulsory subjects for the School Certificate. The History and Geography 7–10 syllabuses are more detailed than the HSIE K–6 syllabus and have been designed to provide a spiral of learning K–10. When primary students engage with subject matter from the secondary syllabus this can have a negative impact on both the learning of students and course management for secondary teachers.

Stage 4

The focus in Stage 4 is on global geography. Detailed mapping skills are further developed using different types of maps, plus physical, political, topographic and calculation material using maps, graphs and statistics. Fieldwork is undertaken using measuring instruments. Geographical tools are developed within the context of the Stage 4 topics:

- *Investigating the world (4G1)* uses selected World Heritage sites to develop students’ understanding of physical and political geography.
- *Global environments (4G2)* uses examples of global environments, such as rainforests and Antarctica, to develop students’ understandings of geographical processes and community responsibilities to the particular environment.
- *Global change (4G3)* students look at the changing nature of the world and responses to these changes. This includes globalisation, global inequalities and global organisations.
- *Global issues and the role of citizenship (4G4)* students learn about global geographical issues and appropriate methods of citizenship for their management.

Stage 5

Geographical tools continue to be developed in Stage 5 Geography, which has a focus on Australian geography. Stage 5 topics are:

- *Investigating Australia’s physical environments (5A1)* includes detailed studies of natural disasters.
- *Changing Australian communities (5A2)* environmental and demographic changes and their affects.
- *Issues in Australian environments (5A3)* investigates physical and human elements related to selected Australian environmental issues.
- *Australia in its regional and global contexts (5A4)* how Australia interacts through regional and global links, inclusive of human rights.

The Geography 7–10 syllabus can be downloaded from the BOS website.

The HSIE K–6 syllabus and the Geography 7–10 syllabus have been planned as sequential learning for students. There is a need for primary and secondary teachers to coordinate teaching programs.

Curriculum K–12 Directorate website

<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au>

The curriculum support site has been revamped with consultation from teachers across NSW public schools. Through this consultation the material has been re-organised into six major areas: **Preschool-Year 6, Years 7–12, Curriculum policies, Curriculum initiatives, Curriculum services** and a **Home** area.

The site contains approximately 15 000 files, either as information or downloads, which are designed to enhance teaching and learning in NSW public schools.

