

1. Title of Research

Eleven Years On: A Case Study of Geography Practices and Perspectives within an Irish Primary School.

2. Name of researcher

Ms. Méabh Cummins

3. Date

June 2010

4. Timeframe including details of when the research was carried out

November 2009	Gaining access.
December 2009	<p>General meeting with participants.</p> <p>Purpose, format, and time frame of the study were discussed, and processes of data were explained. Roles, responsibilities, and rights of the researcher and participants were outlined, including the voluntary nature of participation. Participants were presented with a plain language statement.</p> <p>Those who agreed to participate in the first part of the study, the quantitative data collection, were given a questionnaire to complete, including a cover letter reiterating instructions. These were returned within the month.</p>
January – February 2010	Qualitative data collection – Initial interviews.
February – March 2010.	Qualitative data collection - Classroom observations, followed by a second interview.
April 2010	Analysis of data.
May 2010	Final write up.

5. Brief outline of research idea

Research and regular evaluation are necessary if curricula are to keep pace with changing conditions (INTO, 2006; Sugrue, 1990) and in the past 11 years, research has been conducted by the NCCA, INTO, and individuals into the RPC's general implementation. However, despite calls for an evaluation of the SESE curriculum (INTO, 2006), no large scale review exists nor is one planned. Interestingly, this situation is not limited to ROI, as Catling (1999) states that internationally, "almost nothing is known about how teachers plan and teach primary geography" (p. 62). Consequently, researchers in primary geography have stated the need for research in primary geography implementation internationally (Catling, 1999; Pike, 2006).

Arising from this situation, and as a result of my interest in geography and geography education, both in primary schools and as a member of the Curriculum Geography and History team in St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, this research focuses on the teaching of primary geography. This was a small-scale study of teachers' practices and perspectives in delivering the Primary Curriculum: Geography (1999) in a designated disadvantaged, single sex girls' school in the Republic of Ireland. Issues of constraint and support inherent in implementing the geography curriculum were also examined.

6. Summary of research aims

The following core research questions helped frame the research focus and design:

- What geography content is being taught by teachers in primary school?
- What approaches and methods are being used in primary geography?
- What are teachers' opinions of geography and their practice in primary geography?

- What factors affect teachers' methods and content choice in primary geography?
- What are teachers' opinions regarding professional development in primary geography?
- What are teachers' needs in relation to support for primary geography?

7. **Outline of methodology used including details of how any ethical considerations were addressed**

A small-scale case study approach was used to enable in-depth investigation and reporting of the complex and multiple realities that affect the implementation and experiences of Irish teachers with the geography curriculum. For triangulation purposes, this study used mixed methods (Creswell & Clark, 2008). This encompassed a range of quantitative and qualitative methods, the former involving a survey of 11 mainstream teachers in a designated disadvantaged, single sex girls' school in the Republic of Ireland, and the latter involving interviews and observations with four of these teachers. In line with other educational research, I felt that mixed methods would enable me to collect sufficient data to illuminate my, and the readers', understanding of these teachers' practices and perspectives (Creswell & Clark, 2008; Lyons et al., 2003) and allow findings to be corroborated, clarified, or questioned by comparing data produced by one method with another.

The questionnaires provided an overview of current teaching geography practices within the school and teachers' perceptions of ITE and in-service. The qualitative data collected data concerning participants' perceptions of the Primary Curriculum: Geography (GOI, 1999) and how this played out in his or her classroom. This data expanded on or challenged data collected from the questionnaire in order to increase the credibility of my findings. A range of qualitative approaches was used to gather data. This involved semi-

structured interviews with four mainstream teachers, lasting 20 to 40 minutes. Following on from this, the teachers were observed teaching two geography lessons. Following each observation, another semi-structured interview took place to stimulate a commentary upon the teacher's thought processes during the lesson, explore emerging ideas, encourage mutual understanding, reflection, and correct any misinterpretations (King, 2000; Troman, 1999).

This research was carried out in adherence to recommendations regarding ethical guidelines from a number of sources (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; St. Patrick's College, 2009).

8. Summary of background reading

Akengin, H. (2008). Geography teachers' views on the revised high school geography curriculum [Electronic version]. *Marmara Coğrafya Dergisi*, 18, 1-20. Retrieved September 15, 2009, from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/44/02/fe.pdf

Alexander, R. (Ed.) (2009). *Children, their world, their education. Final report and recommendations of the Cambridge primary review* [Electronic version]. Abington: Routledge. Retrieved March 3, 2010, from http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/Downloads/Finalreport/CPR-booklet_low-res.pdf

Bell, D. (2005). The value and importance of geography. *Primary Geographer*. 56, 4-5.

Bliss, S. (2006). Forum: Geography and geographical education in New South Wales, Australia. *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 15(2), 149-158.

Brooks, C. (2006). Geography teachers and making the school geography curriculum. *Geography*, 91(1), 75-83.

Bruner, J. (1960). *The process of education*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Catling, S. (2003). Curriculum contested: Primary geography and social justice. *Geography*, 88(3), 164-210.

Catling, S. (2005). Children's personal geographies and the English primary school geography curriculum. *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 3(3), 325-344.

Catling, S., Bowles, R., Halocha, J., Martin, F. & Rawlinson, S. (2007). The state of geography in English primary schools. *Geography*. 92(2), 118–136.

Catling, S. & Willy, T. (2009). *Achieving QTS: Teaching primary geography*. Exeter: Learning Matters.

Chalmers, L. & Keown, P. (2006). Communities of practice and the professional development of geography teachers. *Geography*, 91(2), 109-116.

Chan, E. (2004). The conceptions of geography teaching and learning of two proactive teachers. *Geography*, 89(3), 282-286.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education*. London: Routledge.

Creswell, J. & Clark, V.L.P. (2008). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. London: Sage Publications.

Denscombe, M. (2007). *The good research guide for small-scale social research projects*. Berkshire: Open University Press.

Department of Education. (1971a). *Primary school curriculum: Teachers handbook 1*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Education. (1971b). *Primary school curriculum: Teachers handbook 2*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Education and Science. (2002). *Fifty school reports: What inspectors say*. Dublin: Government Publications.

Department of Education and Science. (2005). *An evaluation of curriculum implementation in primary schools: English, mathematics and visual arts*. Dublin: Government Publications.

- Devine, D. (2003). *Children, power and schooling*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.
- Gökçe, N. (2009). The problems of geography education and some suggestions [Electronic version]. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, 9(2), 757-768.
- Grierson, A.L. & Gallagher, T.L. (2009). Seeing is believing: Creating a catalyst for teacher change through a demonstration classroom profession development initiative [Electronic version]. *Professional Development in Education*, 35(4), 567-584.
- Halocha, J. (1998). *Coordinating geography across the primary school*. London: Falmer Press.
- Haubrich, H. (2005). Reflections on geography standards in Germany. *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 14(1), 72-76.
- Hourihane, J. and Keane, M. (2004) The state of geography in Ireland, *Belgeo*, 1, 95-118.
- Irish National Teachers' Organisation. (1996). *Primary school curriculum: An evolutionary process*. Dublin: Author.
- Irish National Teachers' Organisation. (2006). *The primary school curriculum*. Dublin: Author.
- Kaivola, T. & Rikkinen, H. (2007). Four decades of change in geographical education in Finland. *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 16(4), 316-327.
- King, S. (2000). *Into the black box: Observing classrooms*. Sheffield: Geographical Association.
- Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. California: Sage Publications.
- McNiff, J. Lomaz, P. & Whitehead, J. (1996). *You and your action research project*. London: Routledge.
- Munn, P. & Drever, E. (2007). *Using questionnaire in small-scale research*. Edinburgh: Scottish Council for Research in Education.

- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. (1990). *Report of the review body on the primary curriculum*. Dublin: Author.
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. (1999a). *Primary curriculum: Geography*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. (1999b). *Primary curriculum: Geography - teacher guidelines*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- National Council for Curriculum Assessment. (2005). *Primary curriculum review phase 1: Final report*. Dublin: Author.
- National Council for Curriculum Assessment. (2008). *Primary curriculum review phase 2: Final report with recommendations*. Dublin: Author.
- Ofsted. (2008). *Geography in schools: Changing practice*. Retrieved November 8, 2009, from <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Education/Curriculum/Geography/Primary/Geography-in-schools-changing-practice>
- Pike, S. (2006). Irish school children's definition of geography. *Irish Educational Studies*, 25(1), 75-92.
- Pike, S. (2008). *Children and their environments*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Queen's University, Belfast.
- Pike, S. (2010). *Eco-detectives*. Dublin: Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.
- Rawling, E. (2003). *Connecting policy and practice: Research in geography education*. BERA Professional User Review of UK Research. Retrieved November 20, 2009, from The Geographical Association website; <http://www.bera.ac.uk/files/2008/09/geogpu1.pdf>
- Reinfried, S. (2004). Do curriculum reforms affect classroom teaching in geography? The case study of Switzerland. *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 13(3), 239—250.
- Semple, S. (2005). Reflections on geography: The worst taught subject? A view from Canada. *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 14(1), 77—79.
- St. Patrick's College. (2009). *Research ethics committee guidelines*. Dublin: St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra.

Stoll, L. Fink, D. & Earl, L. (2003). It's about learning [and it's about time]: What's in it for schools? London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Sugrue, C. (2002). Irish teacher's experience of professional learning. *Journal of In-Service Education*, 30(2), 54-76.

Trochim, M. & Donnelly, J.P. (2007). *The research methods knowledge base*. Mason, OH: Thompson.

van der Schee, J. & van der Vaart, R. (2005). Geography teaching in The Netherlands: changes and challenges, *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 14(1), 80-82.

Waldron, F., Pike, S., Greenwood, R., Murphy, C.M., O' Connor, G., Dolan, A. & Kerr, K. (2009, October). Becoming a teacher, primary student teachers as learners and teachers of history, geography, and science: An all-Ireland study. Armagh: SCoTENS.

Walshe, N. (2007). Understanding teachers' conceptualisations of geography, *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 16(2), 97-119.

Wiegand, P. (1993). *Children and primary geography*. London: Cassell.

9. Overview of research findings and recommendations

It appears that teachers still strongly believe in delivering a broad geography curriculum which covers the 'basics', reflecting previous findings (Haubrich, 2005; INTO, 2006; Reinfried, 2004), and perhaps this partly explains the continuing influence of textbooks in the teaching of primary geography within this school. Furthermore, even though teachers in this study felt in-service did explain the geography curriculum's approach, this is not necessarily translating into practice. I argue, based on my findings and previous research (INTO, 2006; Pike, 2008) that this is the result of personal geography learning experiences, which tended to be teacher-centred, passive, and class-based. On a positive note, it would appear that recent models of ITE have expanded teachers' definitions of primary geography

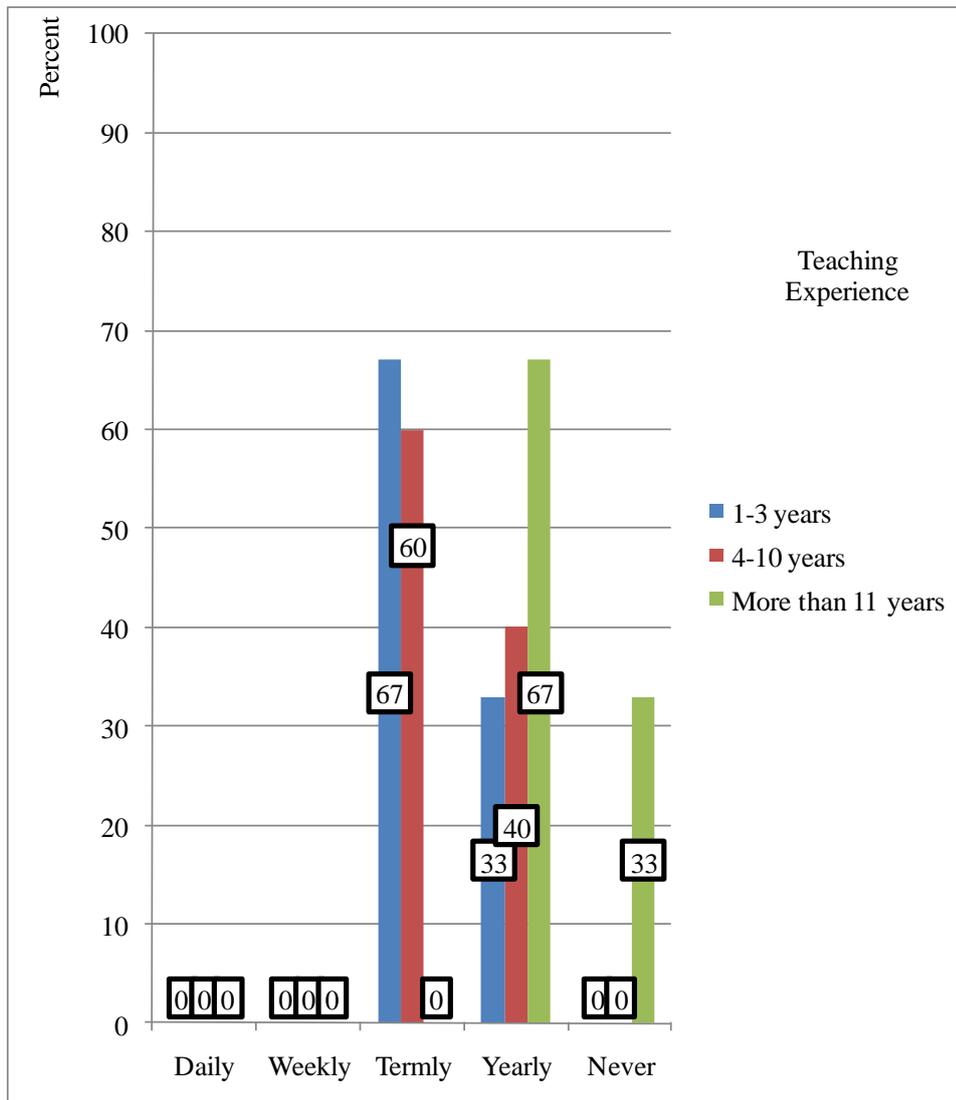
(Waldron et al., 2009) but as other studies (Pike, 2006; Reinfried, 2004) note, the strands and strand units most closely resembling traditional geography education still dominate in this school. Based on these findings, it could be argued that teachers struggle to reconcile personal experiences and beliefs about geography education and their understanding of what it should now be. For example, teachers know that the geography curriculum emphasises local-based learning but learning about non-local locations continues to dominate. Furthermore, although recent geography educational research in ROI (Pike, 2008) and elsewhere (Catling, 2009) suggest that children enjoy local-based studies, not all teachers in this study agree. This suggests that practices depend on teachers' understanding of geography, the range of its possibilities, and level of PCK (Chan, 2004; Gökçe, 2009).

Overall, progressive geography approaches are clearly evident throughout this study. Teachers connect the pupils' experiences with geography and use elicitation activities to access children's ideas. Similarly, active learning (especially talk and discussion, use of images, and group work), integration, and use of resources are evident in geography practice. The data also indicates that differentiation, skills through content, and development of geographical language are frequently addressed during geography time, which supports general findings from DES (2005) and NCCA (2008). Findings from this study appear to indicate that teachers use these methodologies to make primary geography more relevant, enjoyable, challenging, and interesting for children.

However, some interesting issues began to emerge during this study. First, data suggests that specific geographical methodologies are seldom employed. Teachers cite a lack of personal knowledge, PCK, and confidence as reasons for these lost opportunities. A typical comment in relation to models and simulations was: "I don't think I've ever done that. Is that sort of, design and technology?" (Celine, initial interview). Similar to other studies, (Bliss,

2006; Catling et al., 2007; Haubrich, 2005; Reinfried, 2004), the questionnaire revealed that teachers rarely conducted fieldwork in the school grounds. This was consistent across junior and senior classes but, as illustrated in Figure 1.1 there were differences across years of teaching experience.

Figure 1.1 *Frequency for engaging in school-based fieldwork by years of teaching experience. (N = 11).*



Similarly, teachers seldom conducted fieldwork beyond the school grounds. There was no variation in this based on class level or years of teaching experience. Throughout this study, it became clear that while teachers often referred to the locality and children's experiences in it, they did not use it as a focus for sustained geography teaching and learning, corroborating findings from previous research (NCCA, 1990, 2008; Pike, 2006, 2008).

Connected to this, while teachers in both junior and senior classes expressed confidence in their ability to teach geography, class level and years' teaching experience did appear to influence confidence to use the locality. Furthermore, while the questionnaires suggested no relationship between teachers' level of geography subject knowledge and confidence to teach geography, there was an evidence link between teachers' knowledge of the locality and confidence to utilise it for geography teaching. A strong belief that emerged was teachers' perception that the urban locality lacked anything of geographical value in the traditional geographical sense, as one participant described: "We don't have streams, mountains ... even trees, if we were going out to look at a hedgerow, we'd be a long time looking!" (Angela, initial interview). This reflects findings in the NCCA's (2008) study in relation to primary science practices. Furthermore, some teachers' believed that children were more interested in learning about other places: "They know about [the locality] already... Maybe for the smaller ones talking about what's in the area might be more appropriate but at 6th class, it's a bit juvenile" (Lisa, initial interview). However, general education theory and more practical guidance for teaching primary geography have long argued that children's localities offer

many opportunities for meaningful, active learning and the development of skills and attitudes. Indeed, the spiral approach to geography education is advocated, whereby children at all stages of primary education would revisit and build on geographical topics, skills, and attitudes in increasingly complex and developmentally appropriate ways (Bliss, 2006; Bruner, 1960; Catling et al., 2007; DES, 1971a, 1971b; INTO, 2006; NCCA, 1990, 1999b, 1999c; Reinfried, 2004).

Based on these findings, it could be argued that children in this school lack certain aspects in their geography education by not learning key, and sometimes complex, concepts through engagement with familiar examples from their locality, which runs contrary to general education theory and more practical guidance for teaching primary geography (Alexander, 2009; Bruner, 1960; Catling et al., 2007; NCCA, 1999a, 1999b).

Second, there appears to be an element of passivity in relation to improving geography practices (Catling et al., 2007). For example, although school trails have been designed, only one of the four interviewees has used them. Also, teachers consistently requested greater structure and guidance from the school plan or curriculum to support innovation in areas such as local studies (Kabylov, 2006) but based on these findings, it appears that few are actively attempting to improve subject content knowledge or PCK, corroborating other studies (Akengin, 2008; Catling et al. 2007). I critique this approach, since previous studies have found that successful curriculum innovation depends on teachers actively participating in the process (Alexander, 2009; Catling et al., 2007; DES, 2005). On the other hand, as D. Bell (2005) argued, perhaps this is due to lack of CPD opportunities and dissemination of progressive practice in ROI.

Similar to the NCCA's (1990) review, teachers in this study draw on a limited range of geography resources. For example, the teachers in this study regularly use globes and atlases but never local people, aerial photos, maps (other than those in the textbook), or resources relating to the locality. It was suggested that this was due to the unavailability of these resources and an unwillingness to source them due to time limitations. Consequently, the ready availability of generic resources, especially through the internet, interactive whiteboard, and commercial packs, result in teachers using resources relating to non-local places rather than local ones.

Second, findings suggest that a number of teachers feel the infant geography curriculum (approximately 4 – 6 years) is too simplistic in terms of content and skills, and too closely linked with other areas such as science. Also, as in other classes, findings suggest that specific geography methodologies are seldom utilised in infant classes, which runs contrary to arguments from the geography curriculum (NCCA, 1999a, 1999b) in relation to the capacity of geography to provide a realistic and holistic learning context for young children. The question remains however, whether teachers actually underestimate young children's capacity for geographical learning, or on the other hand, are critical of the geography curriculum (NCCA, 1999a) itself.

In this study, the majority of teachers refer to the importance of active learning. However, findings suggest that teachers are more likely to use passive activities, for example, children were more likely to look at and discuss pictures or maps, rather than draw or use them in activities. Evidence also suggests that teachers in this school tend to focus on extracting factual information from resources (Davidson & Catling, 2000) rather than developing higher-order, critical thinking or progressive skill development. I critique this approach to geography, as it runs contrary to the geography curriculum's (NCCA, 1999a)

philosophy of children working as geographers in a developmentally appropriate way. Moreover, I was struck by the lack of reference to geographical enquiry or investigation throughout this study, despite growing evidence that enquiry develops children's emergent geographical understanding (Catling, 2003; Pike, 2008). Therefore, as noted elsewhere (Catling et al., 2007; NCCA, 2005, 2008), findings suggest a need for greater development of children's geographical higher-order thinking skills, values, and attitudes. Perhaps it could be argued that teachers' lack of personal experience using these approaches creates over-dependence on expository, passive methodologies.

Interestingly, across data, teachers fully trained in the RPC appear more likely to engage in progressive practices and employ a wider range of resources and organisational approaches than those who are not, corroborating general education research from ROI (INTO, 2006). On the other hand, data suggests that factors such as teacher confidence, attitude, and personal knowledge appear more influential regarding the employment of specific geographical methodologies than factors such as years of experience and class level. Therefore, it could be argued that teachers in ROI continue to have limited opportunities to explore and develop geographical PCK during ITE and in-service (Waldron et al., 2009) which is inhibiting understating and/or confidence in employing progressive geography practices.

On the basis of previous studies (e.g. Chalmers & Keown, 2006), I had expected that teachers would still require CPD, with a preference for *cuiditheoir* visits. This was confirmed, and appears to stem from teachers' positive experiences in other curriculum areas because "rather than just a planning day, it would be better if we could see how they would operate in front of the kids" (Celine, initial interview). Teachers expressed the belief that this type of

support could be tailored towards the school's needs and illuminate the possibilities of its teaching context (McInerney & Shepherd, 2006).

In summary, it is worth acknowledging that the majority of teachers in this study endeavour to teach geography through some element of practical and investigative work. Furthermore, teachers doing this are being rewarded through the interest, excitement, and enthusiasm of children, an important element considering reports from elsewhere that geography in primary education is under threat (D. Bell, 2005; Bliss, 2006; Semple, 2005). Yet, as Alexander (2009) comments, "old habits of thought die hard. We may have to be patient" (p. 6). Therefore, while the intended geography curriculum is not yet the implemented curriculum in this school, the process appears to be beginning.

Recommendations

Arising from the conclusions of this school-based study, the following recommendations are made for future practice, some of which may also be of relevance to a wider context.

A specific recommendation for this school is the incorporation of children's local experiences into geography practices. From my teaching experience, this approach can make geography more relevant and enjoyable for children. Also, this approach acknowledges the geography curriculum's progressive philosophy (NCCA, 1999a, 1999b). Furthermore, the school must become more proactive in developing knowledge and understanding of the locality, and in creating locally-based activities and resources. This could be achieved through collaboration with school staff, the children themselves, the local community, and outside agencies.

The findings from this study appear to demonstrate that teachers are drawing on a limited repertoire of geography methodologies and that overall there is a lack of geographical progression in this school. Consequently, school staff must take increased ownership for sourcing and sharing progressive geography practices from websites and publications, such as the GA for example, and from other staff members. Revising the geography plan is an essential step in changing and sustaining practice within this school. A well-sequenced plan would provide greater guidance on geography planning, methodologies, progression, learning objectives, and assessment and therefore, may support teachers to engage in less textbook-based geography practices.

For these changes to occur, this school would benefit from an SESE cuiditheoir who, supported by the principal and interested staff members, could guide teachers in implementing a progressive geography curriculum specifically in relation to:

- Developing teachers' understanding and confidence to teach a greater balance of geography content and skills.
- Supporting teachers to incorporate a greater range of specific geography pedagogy including models and simulations and fieldwork for example. Models and simulations are particularly useful for modelling natural processes such as erosion or weathering. The Geography Curriculum (1999b) gives some useful advice and exemplars regarding this. The possibility for integration with science here is very evident. Websites such as the GA, www.mash.ie and www.bbc.co.uk/schools/riversandcoasts/ have many links to animations and simulations **can** be informative about processes such as the formation of bays or the sequence of events in an earthquake. These pedagogies introduce dimensions and senses that photographs or texts cannot **not**, such as the sounds and dynamism of a

Comment [pm1]: that

Comment [pm2]: omit not

place or event, providing multi-sensory experiences which evoke a stronger reaction in children.

- Developing teachers' understanding and confidence to employ both short and extended geographical enquires. Rather than teaching geography as a series of isolated lessons, where topics change weekly or fortnightly, geographical enquiries are developed around a theme which is explored over a series of weeks. The teacher assists the children to generate questions about this theme or topic and **them** to answer them through investigative work, which develops knowledge, understanding, skills and geographical values. It promotes meaningful learning activities and **content** structured around answering key questions and draws heavily on children's natural curiosity (Catling, 2010). The GA website has example of enquiries on its website and these could easily be adapted by schools. Here in Ireland, Susan Pike, from St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, has recently published a pack entitled *Eco-Detectives* which clearly explains how to employ **an** geographical enquiry to teach children about climate change. Pike developed four enquiries, one suitable for each class level. The pack also includes two guides, one for teachers and one for children, which outline each stage of the enquiry approach. The *cuidtheoir* could support teachers as they implement this approach in the classroom
- Organising and maintaining a variety of resources, including ICT and those based on the locality, as well as developing awareness around using these resources to their full potential.

Comment [pm3]: then

Comment [pm4]: comma

Comment [pm5]: a

At a broader level, findings appear to suggest that both the colleges of education and PPDS need to provide more opportunities for teachers to experience a greater range of specific geography methodologies. In addition, time and/or information must be provided to

improve teachers' personal knowledge, confidence, and PCK in more practical areas such as rocks and soils. Furthermore, perhaps provision needs to be made for a specific module on infant geography, with combined input from curriculum geography and early childhood education departments. This could further explain its purpose within the early years curriculum, the concepts and skills that can be developed, and provide guidance for teachers' geography practices for young children.

Comment [pm6]: apostrophe

10. How the research has contributed to your professional development

This study informed my own practice and consequently improved the type and quality of support that I could offer within my school in relation to teaching primary geography, as I was in the position to make a positive contribution to the process of school planning and teaching in geography and be in a position to shape and improve this whole school's plan for the provisions of teaching geography.

Engaging in this research process also helped develop my skills as a researcher, which will help me to conduct further research in this area. Reviewing literature related to geography teaching contributed to my knowledge base, thus encouraging me to be more proactive in the provision of peer-support as a member of the teaching profession.

Furthermore, by exploring in detail the attitudes, practices and perceptions of teachers to primary geography, I gained a better understanding of the needs of teachers engaged in initial teacher education. This has been particularly useful since completing this research I have begun working full time as a Lecturer in Education in St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, specialising in the area of Primary Geography Education.

11. How this research will benefit the teaching profession and the wider education community

Catling (2004) argues, geography teaching “is a matter that needs detailed and rigorous research in order that pupil’s learning of geography can be better understood, supported, improved, and extended” (p. 34). Likewise, the NCCA are seeking feedback on the curriculum in general (NCCA, 2009). This research answers such a call and is intended to contribute to the limited, but growing, amount of research currently available on primary geography education in Ireland.

This study may encourage principals and teachers to reflect on and either continue with or amend their teaching methodologies and to share good practice. As this research is the first of its kind in Ireland it is my hope that it may inspire further studies in this area in other settings, perhaps even on a wider-scale.

Ultimately, I hope to provide a basis for increasing the successful implementation of the Primary Curriculum: Geography (GOI, 1999) by beginning to identify some of teachers’ professional needs with regard to future professional development and support. By extension, it is hoped that pupils learning will be learning outcomes and experiences will be enhanced.

12. Table of Abbreviations

BEd - Bachelor of Education.

CnB - Curaclam na Bunscoile/Primary Curriculum.

CPD - Continuing Professional Development.

DES - Department of Education and Science (Ireland)

GA - Geographical Association.

GIS - Geographic Information Systems.

GOI - Government of Ireland.

HA - The Historical Association.

ICT - Information Communication Technology.

INSET - In-service education and training.

INTO - Irish National Teachers' Organisation.

IPPEA - Irish Primary Physical Education Association.

ITE - Initial Teacher Education.