GeoCapabilities 2: Teachers as Curriculum Leaders/ «GeoCap2»

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Executive Summary

This is a Progress Report on the project *GeoCapabilities2: Teachers as Curriculum Leaders*. It has been written by the leading/coordinating partner (P1) on behalf of the whole partnership, consisting of ten organisations. All partners have contributed materials, but in particular partner 3, who leads the evaluation workpackage.

Written in Month 18 of the 36-month project this report summarises progress at the half-way point. It shows that the Project is broadly on course in relation to the deliverables laid out in the initial project proposals.

As partners testify in their own words in section 7, the Project is seen as challenging and highly significant. There is a high level of commitment to the Project’s aims and purposes, and a feeling of optimism as the project moves towards its final phase, of implementation, dissemination and exploitation.
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1. Project Objectives

**Overarching concept**

The ‘capabilities’ approach we have developed is based on idea that educational experiences and acquired knowledge and expertise should expand people’s capabilities to think for and beyond themselves. This is rooted in a conceptual framework for education drawing on the ideas of the economist Amartya Sen and philosopher Martha Nussbaum in the field of human welfare and development economics.

A capabilities approach is therefore much broader and more holistic than the competencies approach to education. While the competencies approach focuses on solving problems and is orientated to tasks and outcomes, the capabilities approach considers how the individual in his or her context can lead a life that she or he has reason to value. Competencies are intended to provide the individual with the appropriate skills to solve problems that arise from outside. In contrast, capabilities are not primarily task oriented. They are guided by the exercise of individual freedom to choose and develop desired values individuals consider appropriate.

The project is especially interested in the role of knowledge, and what in our major publication we call powerful disciplinary knowledge (PDK). The project has been influenced in this perspective by writers in the field of social realism, who have argued that there is a need to reclaim knowledge, and overcome knowledge-blindness in education. However, we are also mindful of the limits of using a purely sociological analysis and the importance of perspectives from curriculum studies. This has led us to open up the concept of fine grained ‘curriculum making’ as a means to conceptualise the notion of distributed curriculum leadership in schools.

In summary, and following Young and Lambert, the project is oriented to supporting teachers in the creation of a Future 3 curriculum. The challenge is to develop a capabilities framework to enable this.

**Future Three Curriculum**

When the project refers to a ‘Future Three’ curriculum it is a device that helps us distinguish three very broad curriculum characteristics. It is a ‘heuristic’: a device to facilitate thinking about the kind of curriculum we want.

Three possible future curricula, according to this device, are:

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This is a curriculum of subject delivery – the transmission of ‘given’ knowledge for its own sake; The curriculum is based on traditional subjects. In Future 1 knowledge is ‘under-socialised’.

This is a curriculum led by skills and ‘learning to learn’. All knowledge is constructed, but in a Future 2 curriculum it looks like the only knowledge that counts is that constructed by the students themselves. This is over-socialised knowledge; subject divisions appear as arbitrary and artificial. The curriculum is based on themes. It is ‘experiential’.

In Future 3, subjects are not given (as in F1), but not arbitrary (as in F2). Knowledge development led by ‘... the epistemic rules of specialist communities’ to provide ways to understand the world and take pupils beyond their everyday experience. A F3 curriculum is led by the idea that subjects induct students into “powerful disciplinary knowledge” (PDK).

Powerful Disciplinary Knowledge (PDK) is usually:

- evidence based
- abstract and theoretical (conceptual)
- part of a system of thought
- dynamic, evolving, changing – but reliable
- testable and open to challenge
- sometimes counter-intuitive
- exists outside the direct experience of the teacher and the learner
- Discipline based (in domains that are not arbitrary or transient)

Thus, in summary, F3 has these characteristics:

- It is a knowledge-led curriculum (this does not exclude ‘skills’ or ‘competences’, but knowledge selections are paramount, in the ‘driving seat’).

- It is based on ‘powerful (disciplinary) knowledge’ (providing student with opportunities for ‘epistemic ascent’ and therefore to new ways of thinking and engaging with the world)

- An F3 curriculum is progressive – motivated by social justice (and the ‘pedagogic right’ of all young people to PDK)

- It distinguishes curriculum from pedagogy (Conceptually the what and the how are different, although in practice may be indistinguishable in the classroom)

- Pedagogic selections need to be fit for purpose (what we are trying to achieve with students is a prior question to ‘how shall we teach?’)
Clarifying the main conceptual resources of GeoCapabilities, as summarised in this section, has been one of the essential achievements of the first 12-18 months of the Project.

**More particular objectives**

The primary objective of the *GeoCapabilities 2: Teachers as curriculum leaders* Comenius multilateral project will be to create a teacher training course to develop teachers as curriculum leaders in geography education internationally. The GeoCapabilities platform will be developed to supply a variety of resources to enhance geography teacher preparation in Europe (and beyond). These resources will include:
- instructional materials that guide teachers through a process of curriculum making within the context of capabilities concepts, and
- videos and other multimedia created by participating teachers to showcase examples of the GeoCapabilities approach to curriculum making.

The GeoCapabilities 2 Comenius Project aims to:
- examine the potential of the capabilities approach to improving the professional development of in service teachers and student teachers;
- develop a GeoCapabilities teacher training course, with international reach and credibility to make capabilities more visible under the LLLP;
- develop a Web portal for the establishment of technology-mediated communication and collaboration between teachers and trainees;
- produce a curriculum making methodology that provides enhanced leadership potential for teachers in their own classrooms, and for middle management teams as curriculum developers in schools and other settings.

Ultimately, the ambition is to provide a blueprint for other subjects to implement capabilities training and support for teachers of different subjects.
2. **Project Approach**

The GeoCap2 Project takes place over a three-year period. It can be thought of as having three distinct stages:

- conceptualisation and research
- critique, evaluation and design
- implementation, dissemination and exploitation

**The conceptualisation and research phase**

The GeoCap2 Project began with an examination of geography standards through three selected ‘capabilities’:

i) Promoting autonomy: to use the imagination and to be able to think and reason

ii) Identifying and exercising choices in how to live: based on worthwhile distinctions

iii) Understanding their potential as creative and productive citizens.

These had been identified in the pilot project\(^3\), and were derived from the work of Martha Nussbaum. There are other potential capabilities that could also have been selected and developed such as: ‘Making healthy allegiances: being able to live with respect towards others and to be able to imagine the situation of others’. However, an early finding of the project was that to impose pre-determined lists of capabilities awarded them the wrong ‘status’ in this project. The list became to resemble educational outcomes - like competences - whereas this project was more interested in *what* shall be taught. The focus was to be on aims of a knowledge-led curriculum rather than outcomes.

This tough conceptual work is reported in D1.1 and also in the major academic article (D1.2), which discusses the intellectual and theoretical resources of GeoCapabilities in terms of:

- Capabilities, ultimately to do with growing human agency and ‘freedoms’
- Powerful knowledge, the basis of what this project is calling the significance of being able to think geographically
- a Future 3 curriculum, which is a progressive, enabling, curriculum of engagement with powerful knowledge
- curriculum making, the realisation of the essential responsibility that falls to teachers to create a Future 3 curriculum.

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\(^3\) This was supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. BCS-1155255, and was led by the Association of American Geographers (2011-12)
Certain materials in the form of documents, Powerpoint slides and introductory video have been placed on www.geocapabilities.org for information and instruction on these essential (D1.3).

In parallel with this conceptual work was some empirical research. The target group for the small-scale research was a selection of geography teachers and teacher educators who responded to a questionnaire (electronically when possible) on the aims and contents of geography teaching, and teachers’ ideas of central themes for the subject. This survey was undertaken in most participating countries: Belgium, Finland, Greece, Turkey, UK and the US - and other too: Germany, Netherlands, Sweden.

In addition the teacher/teacher educator investigations were enhanced literature reviews, by identifying some of the best practices in geography teacher education across Europe and by producing more detailed analyses of a selection of case studies.

The findings of the research are reported in Deliverables 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 (available on the project Web site). An academic article is also being prepared (D2.4), with co-authors drawn from Partners and Associate Partners.

Critique, evaluation and design

This phase of the project refers to the creation of an on-line teacher-training platform on which to base a GeoCapabilities ‘course’. This consists of four modules organised in such a manner that they can be picked up by teachers and teacher educators in any number a settings and incorporated into their own training programmes: that is, they can be adopted, adapted, or used as a platform for localised innovation.

This work still in a relatively early stage of development, the rationale being reported in D3.1 in May 2015 and the first Modules being trialled (by School Partners and Associate Partners) by November 2015. This phase of development incorporates a formative evaluation process based on criteria identified and refined by partners at the face-to-face project meeting in Helsinki in May 2015.

Following the Partnership meeting to be held in Sheffield UK in November 2015, which will incorporate a launch workshop with teachers and teacher educators, the course will be more widely available.

Implementation dissemination and exploitation

In addition to producing the project reports and academic articles cited in the previous sections, during the initial 18 months the project team has been heavily occupied with presentations, panel sessions and workshop events designed to explore, develop and refine the GeoCapabilities approach and methods. The events page of www.geocapabilities.org has recorded these, taking place in, for example, Tampa, Chicago, Manchester, London, Krakow and Shanghai. In addition, school
partners (e.g. Viikki School in Helsinki and Doukas School Athens) have held local events.

As a result of all this activity GeoCap2 has excited significant interest in Europe and the wider world. This is reflected in the recruitment of 20 Associate Partners (granted access to the project Moodle workspace) some of whom have already been extremely productive in contributing to discussion and have attended project meetings, workshops and presentations with their own funding sources.
3. Project Outcomes & Results

The GeoCap2 Project is on target according to the proposed deliverables set out in the original project plan and application.

Achievements according to plan

The GeoCap2 Project has established an electronic workspace for the partnership (using Moodle) and developed an effective way of working across 6 work packages. Establishing this way of working has not been entirely problem free and some careful negotiations have had to take place owing to changing personal circumstances of Partner 5: thus, work package 3 (to design and produce a teacher training platform for developing GeoCapabilies principles and approaches among teachers and teacher educators) has shifted to Partner 3 (Eurogeo). Unforeseen difficulties and challenges such as this sometimes occur of course; but the Project Partnership is pleased and proud to be able to report that the issue has been dealt with to everyone’s satisfaction and that the potential upset has not disrupted the schedule of course is any substantial way.

The GeoCap2 Project has established a website (www.geocapabilities.org.uk) which is populated with a variety of instructional documents and video materials, plus information and updates on events. Two issues of the project Newsletters have also been produced and circulated via Facebook, Twitter and established networks on Eurogeo, GA and AAG. Active social media activities for the project have also been initiated via Twitter and Facebook.

During the first 18 months of GeoCap2 approximately 12 national and international events have been contributed to. Furthermore, one major academic article has been published (Lambert, Solem and Tani, 2015) in addition to shorter professional articles.

These aspects of dissemination are outlined in a detailed dissemination plan (D5.1) and the Project Partners are pleased to report no fewer that 20 additional ‘Associate Partners’ have been recruited - and indicator of some success in the dissemination of the key ideas and principles that underlie GeoCap2. This recruitment is of mainly European colleagues, but also beyond, including for example China and Singapore. It is to be noted that a further 20+ Associates could also be recruited from names on a waiting list. These names will undoubtedly be helpful in evaluating and trialling GeoCap2 materials in the next phase of the Project’s development.

The main deliverables during the first 18 months have been the research and conceptualisation outputs of the GeoCap2 Project (work packages 1 and 2). A substantial project Report (D1.1 - available on the website) outlines the conceptual and theoretical resources of the project, subsequently reorganised and developed into the academic article cited above (D1.2). The website has also been populated with materials that are derived from this work - which also, of course, informed the seminars, workshops and panel events mentioned above (and listed on the website).

Under the leadership of Partner 2 three research Reports have been written, which are publicly available on the project website. This research has investigated the efficacy of the capabilities approach with small groups of teachers and teacher
trainers in national settings. In addition the work has attempted literature-based reviews of geography education and best practice teacher education strategies (plus constraints and possibilities), again in a range of national settings. Together these Reports provide an informed basis for proceeding with the development of teacher training materials (work package 3). In summary, what we can say looking forward is that materials the GeoCap2 project develops need to:

- engage teachers, including new teachers, quickly and effectively with the main ideas. The materials need to be, in the words of one partner, ‘seductive’.
- be flexible enough in order to fit into existing teacher training structures and processes. Teaching, as well as teacher training courses, is highly intensive and there is little ‘free space’ in which to make substantial additions.
- communicate to teacher trainers internationally the possibilities to integrate key ideas and approaches into their work, and that they can manipulate materials as they see fit.

In other words, taking these principles together, the materials will have the look of ‘work in progress’ to adopt and adapt, rather than top down and highly refined finished products to implement.

The other key deliverables in first eighteen months of the Project have been to identify and implement a process of formative evaluation. In essence, what we mean by this is that the internal evaluation of the Project involves all Partners and that it is integral to what we do. Thus, although the evaluation work package is led by Partner 3, all partners are involved in the identification of evaluation criteria and in processes leading to formative feedback on the training platform and its contents and activities. The overall approach is described in detail in the Evaluation Plan (D4.1) and the initial evaluation report (written before any substantial progress in establishing the platform and the contents and processes) is provided in D4.4.

Where GeoCap2 needs to catch up

In most areas the GeoCap2 Project has met or exceeded its targets and deliverables. Nevertheless, there are a couple of aspects where the project has to make up ground and to prioritise in the coming year:

- The website, though informative and impressive in some ways cannot yet claim to be multilingual. Several key documents and transcripts will be identified for translation in a range of European languages and Chinese.
- The development of teacher training materials, plus the accompanying formative evaluation of these, is slightly behind schedule. The next six months of the project, concluding with the fifth project meeting in Sheffield UK, are therefore key and will be an intensive development period.
4. Partnerships

The GeoCapabilities Consortium has been composed of 10 partner institutions from 6 European countries and one, third country partner.

The consortium was built on:

a) The **common interest and priority** for the exploration of the links between Geographical Education, Capabilities, Powerful Disciplinary Knowledge (PDK), Curriculum Making and teachers as leaders. Concern is related innovation in teacher education, development of an innovative approach and support materials for educators, trainers and teachers.

b) **Diversity** in the nature and composition of project partners, with leading higher education departments of teacher education, national and international professional associations and schools.

The partnership consists of leading European institutions in the field of geography and geographical education and schools from three different European countries committed to improving teacher preparation in geography. The partners are highly recognized in various fields of teacher training, education and research and professional development in geographical education.

Working relations between partners have been very effective based on face-to-face partner meetings, attendance at dissemination workshops and conferences and also online through the partner Moodle platform and where necessary the use of Skype and email.

The project partners have already involved many other organisations, as associate partners, from different parts of the world, including those from developing regions. These have had access to the project Moodle space and have contributed to discussions and developments. Their role in peer review will become much more significant in the second half of the project. Many more institutions are keen to join GeoCapabilities as associate partners.

Due to specific institutional issues, one partner (partner 5) has been required to leave the consortium by mutual agreement due to personal circumstances. All the tasks have been reallocated within the consortium, with agreement from EACEA.

List of Partners

[P1] Institute of Education, University College London, UK
[P2] University of Helsinki, Finland
[P3] EUROGEO, Belgium
[P5] Eskisehir Osmangazi University, Turkey
[P6] Viikki Teacher Training School, Finland
[P7] Doukas School, Greece
[P8] City of London Freemen’s School, UK
[P9] Twycross School, UK

+ third country partner

[P10] Association of American Geographers, USA
5. Plans for the Future

As this Report shows, the GeoCap2 project has reached a critical moment. The research and conceptualisation phase has been accomplished, and considerable interest has been generated internationally - albeit, largely within the geography education community.

Furthermore, the design and development of the teacher-training platform, through which the GeoCapabilities approach can be explained and demonstrated, has been started.

Beginning with the fourth Project meeting in Helsinki, in May 2015, the GeoCap2 Project moves into an intensive creative phase that focuses on implementation, enactment and dissemination. School partners become key, as evaluators and informants on ‘what works’ - and we hope the impressive list of official Associate Partners which has the potential to reach 40 individuals across the globe.

The fifth Project meeting in Sheffield, November/December 2015, will focus on finalising the trial period with a review the formative evaluation processes and the proposed platform and materials with a number of ‘cold participants’. This provides the foundation on which the Project can base its final phase of work, moving toward the launch of the teacher training course in 2016.

During the final phase a further priority emerges, which is to ensure that the GeoCapabilities approach is ‘translated’ into wider contexts, namely:

- To other subject specialists, so that teachers of school subjects in general can benefit from the capabilities approach to curriculum leadership (or curriculum making). In essence, this approach is enabling because it provides a means to ‘bridge’ between the knowledge-led priorities of a subject specialist curriculum with the notion of broad educational aims and outcomes (expressed as capabilities)

- To policy makers and educational leaders, so that the role of specialist knowledge (‘powerful knowledge’) is better understood in the context of the ‘Future 3’ curriculum scenario. The reason this is important is that it has implications of teacher preparation and continued support.

The final phase of the project also, of course, demands renewed focus and vigour on dissemination. As the Dissemination Plan (D5.1) shows, the Project’s key strategy in this regard is to utilise and exploit existing networks and associations: the salient point is that the GeoCapabilities approach needs to be incorporated into existing teacher training and support structures.
6. Contribution to EU policies

GeoCapabilities 2: Teachers as curriculum leaders addresses both higher education, through the initial training and ongoing professional development of teachers, as well as school education. In higher education, systems and individual universities organise their own courses and curricula. In most countries national teacher education standards apply, but the challenges facing higher education are similar across the EU and EU policy encourages universities and teacher training organisation to work together. GeoCapabilities 2 supports this through its central partnership, but also in already involving more than 20 associate partners in the project activities.

GeoCapabilities 2 is concerned with the changing nature of 21st century learning and the many innovative opportunities on offer. It thus contributes significantly to a number of current EU policies.

The project applies a GeoCapabilities framework to develop and pilot an online professional development communications platform for teacher preparation in geography. The GeoCapabilities platform is being developed to supply a variety of resources to enhance geography teacher preparation in Europe. These resources will include:

(a) instructional materials that guide teachers through a process of (for example) identifying ‘powerful disciplinary knowledge’ (module 1), designing ‘curriculum artefacts’ with which to enable effective ‘curriculum making’ (module 2) and adopting ‘lesson study’ techniques in order to advance professional leadership (module 4). All these materials help articulate the application of capabilities concepts,

(b) videos and other multimedia created by participating teachers (a) to showcase examples of the GeoCapabilities approach to curriculum making, and (b) to help new teachers interrogate and think deeply about the practical application of the Project’s key ideas, and

(c) the implementation of Cloud-based communication technologies to connect teachers for trans-European collaborative learning projects, subject-based and pedagogical discussions, sharing of information and ideas, and exchanges centred on professional development in European geography education.

GeoCapabilities 2 supports all four goals of the EU’s Strategic Framework for Education and Training 2020 (http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/index_en.htm). It helps make lifelong learning a reality for teachers and educators and potentially other groups like NGOs. Teachers doing elements of the course will improve the quality and efficacy of education and training in their classrooms. The materials enhance creativity and innovation in the classroom.

GeoCapabilities 2 focuses on raising the quality of teacher education and training by creating a course and materials to develop teachers as curriculum leaders in European geography education. Improvements in the quality education will contribute to Europe 2020 policy targets to reduce drop-out rates through the use of innovative and active approaches. Through the adoption (and possible adaptation) of GeoCapabilities approaches, teachers and educators will be encouraged to establish
authentic, profound geographical learning experiences for their students, while raising levels of engagement, participation and understanding.

The project explores innovative approaches to learning and teaching of geography in schools. It encourages teachers to deal with and relate to powerful disciplinary knowledge, dealing appropriately with complex issues and challenges facing Europe, for example by relating to subjects such as Climate Change, Landscape and Economic policies, where challenging targets have been established under Europe 2020.

GeoCapabilities 2 provides one step towards helping raise awareness of Digital Agenda in Europe policy (http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en). The training course being developed will introduce and use innovative technologies to enable teacher reflection, identification of ‘powerful disciplinary knowledge’, creation of ‘curriculum artefacts’ and supporting teachers as leaders in curriculum development. This embraces the Digital Agenda for Europe: key initiatives (2010), which stated: “The digital era should be about empowerment and emancipation; background or skills should not be a barrier to accessing this potential.”.


7. Extra Section: The Partners’ Voices

In this final optional section of the public Progress Report, we wish to share some reflections on the GeoCap2 Project at approximately its half-way point. Partners were asked independently to compose some personal reflections, guided by the following questions:

“GeoCapabilities2: Teachers as curriculum leaders”
- What does the Project mean to you (and/or your organisation)?
- What is the Project’s significance in your view?

In what follows, we have not attempted to synthesise or even edit contributions. We offer these comments unexpurgated and as they were submitted (in May 2015).

Partner 1

This project is manifestly one of the most important elements of my recent professional life, not least in relation to my recent role as leader of a large and influential ‘subject association’ (the Geographical Association). It is not simply about ‘promoting’ the subject in the school curriculum. It is more about asking some very tough questions about why geography should be taught in schools at all (in ‘this day and age’).

Geography is a ‘weakly framed’ school subject, and one of the outcomes of this is that it appears to take different forms in different national settings. Indeed, it may even assume different definitions between individual teachers in the same school, depending on their own background and training! One of the bold and imaginative aspects of GeoCapabilities is that the Project has absolutely no desire to impose a definition on geography (as if this were possible) or flatten out these differences. We want to operate on a higher or meta level and ask local communities (or even individuals) to use the capabilities approach to articulate a ‘bridge’ between the geography (being able to think geographically) on the one hand and educational outcomes (the capable citizen) on the other.

This is quite difficult work and assumes that teachers are able and willing to engage in this - the mental preparation that underpins their practical and creative interaction with young people. The Project is deeply optimistic in this regard. Teachers are by a mile the most important educational resource, and this project wants to release and enhance their agency - not as technocrats who can deliver a curriculum, but as professionals who can lead a curriculum of engagement.
Partner 2

I have found this project very interesting and eye opening for me personally. At first, it took a while before I started to understand what was meant by some key concepts of the project: ‘capabilities’, ‘beings and doings’, ‘full potential’, ‘powerful knowledge’ and ‘curriculum making’ were some of the many concepts that I found very challenging to translate from English to Finnish and thus to understand their real meaning. This made me think carefully of the need to gain some deeper understanding of the educational systems, status of geography in different countries and the role of curriculum and teachers in relation to curriculum planning and executing. I feel that I have learned a lot and have been able to apply some of this understanding in my work at the department of teacher education. I am now more convinced of the need to participate in international research projects; they can give some new (and often much needed) views for local settings in each country.

I have started to see the relevance of the capabilities approach to geography education. It has been very positive to see how participants in the workshops that we have organised in different conferences (IGU, AAG, GA, etc.) have been reacted to the GeoCapabilities as an idea.

Partner 3

I believe GeoCapabilities 2 is challenging teacher education and training from many perspectives. GeoCapabilities is primarily concerned with building the capacity in teachers to develop high quality, relevant learning and teaching of Geography in schools. The project focuses on valuing the professional abilities of teachers and respecting their input to educational development processes.

At its core GeoCapabilities 2 has a focus on leadership built on capabilities, subject knowledge and professional collaboration. The goal is to empower teachers to be able to take the lead in curriculum development work that impacts directly upon the quality of teaching and learning. The teachers should be able to demonstrate leadership within and beyond the classroom. They should identify with and contribute to a community of teachers and influence others in establishing improved educational practice.

From my perspective, GeoCapabilities is an excellent example where building the potential for change in educational perspectives (capabilities approach, curriculum making, leadership, powerful knowledge) has been derived as a result of an initial period of deep research and reflection that took place during the NSF funded project. GeoCapabilities 2 thus illustrates how innovative projects take time to evolve and that the normal three-year project lifecycle is too short for development and implementation. Making GeoCapabilities the norm in teacher education and training remains a major challenge. Understanding and engaging with decision-making processes will be important in the remainder of the project.
For many years in my capacities as practitioner and a teacher educator I have advocated similar principles to those that underpin the project – of geographical thinking, powerful disciplinary knowledge and curriculum making - although perhaps in more rudimentary forms. I think this is also the case for the GA as a partner organization. The theoretical exploration of what these principles mean, how they enhance thinking about the value of the subject – to both teachers and students, and how they might inform classroom teaching has provided stronger insights and argument as to the role and value of geography in the curriculum.

An important aspect for the GA is the debate stimulated by the project about the relationship between young peoples’ geography and disciplinary knowledge. The ‘triangular’ conceptual relationship between what it means to be geo-capable, pupils’ own experiences and disciplinary knowledge is very challenging (and unresolved). The relationship to teaching and learning approaches is likewise challenging and ‘problematic’. However, these are essential relationships that need to be wrestled with if a workable/coherent curriculum is to be devised that enable geography teachers to play a stronger professional role in creating high quality geography teaching experiences and ‘geo-capability’. The GA can provide a means of raising the profile, debating interpretations, sharing ideas and the means by which teachers grapple with developing geo-capability.

The project has provided the beginnings of a strong canon of literature arguing for the value and role of geography as a school subject, or where curricula are framed as broader areas of learning, making a case for teaching geography as a robust and distinct perspective discipline within more broadly defined curriculum areas. Consequently, in writing a recent submission to a government debate on proposals to change the curriculum (on behalf of the GA) I was able to provide a coherent case arguing why geography and curriculum-making are essential to a curriculum in a complex and changing world, grounded, in large part, in work undertaken by the GeoCapabilities project. Perhaps this is an expression of curriculum leadership – which is a key aim of the project.

So in my mind the project has significant credibility and in return it has given a greater legitimacy to my personal philosophy of and for geography education. I believe this is likewise for the GA, in its chief roles of representing and supporting geography teachers. In this sense it is a privilege to be part of and work on the project. I suspect that my thinking is similar to a number of other geography educators, which is perhaps why the project has been able to attract interest and many associate partners from across the globe.

(Partner 5 had to leave the project by mutual consent and with agreement from EACEA owing to personal circumstances)
Partner 10

GeoCapabilities is one of the most interesting projects I’d had the pleasure to work on and become associated with over the past few years, starting with the NSF-funded pilot project and now the EU-funded expansion.

What makes it interesting to me personally is the dual strength of its theoretical framework and practical products. The project partnership is using capabilities principles to thread heretofore fragmented ideas in geography education: powerful knowledge, curriculum making and teacher education. The fact that it working so successfully in multiple European contexts (and increasingly in Asia) is a remarkable achievement. I have learned a great deal about different international approaches to geography in school education, and the project has facilitated dialogue that is long-overdue -- how we can work better as an international community toward the improvement of geography teaching and learning in schools.

GeoCapabilities is paving fruitful research paths at the intersection of geographical thought and educational theory and practice. As such, I believe the project offers other disciplines a model for exploring and understanding the contribution of disciplinary knowledge to the education of young people -- and the development of teachers as curriculum leaders.

SCHOOL PARTNERS

Partner 6

Geocapabilities approach has been challenging me (my thinking and my teaching) to ask: what is the aim and focus of geography education? I teach geography in upper secondary school and in high school, and I am also a teacher educator. During the GeoCapabilities project I have been paying more and more attention about trying lead the curriculum in a way that my students are learning knowledge and skills that can be defined as ‘powerful’.

How to support students to reach their full potential (despite of their backgrounds) is the main question to me as a teacher. Despite the clear ideal, I am struggling with the dilemma how to connect ideals and practice. But the moments when I have noticed that students are dealing with powerful knowledge, and they are becoming more and more ‘geocapable’, are awesome. Those moments have shown me the importance of capabilities approach also in geography education.
Partner 7

At the beginning, the GeoCapabilities project was not entirely clear to us. We couldn’t realize how the teaching of geography was intended to develop human capabilities. To be more specific, we believed that some other subjects, such as history and philosophy, were more appropriate to achieve such goals. We assumed of course that geography refers to social and environmental issues affecting people, places and environments worldwide. Frequently in our lessons, we refer to all these issues whenever we consider it necessary. We have been however persuaded (by the Greek educational system) that relatively little of the curriculum should be taught through the academic disciplines such as geography.

Of course, we should not forget that the Greek school partners are biologists (not specialist geographers) and we have been educated in a different way than the ‘geocapabilities’ approach.

As time goes by, it has become easier for us to adapt to the different way of thinking that the Project encourages. We still try to organize the teaching and the material according to our students’ needs. We seek to avoid generalizations that are not self-evident or obvious. We refuse to be boring for our students, since their everyday habits (e.g. surfing on the internet) offer them interesting knowledge. We try to deal with our students’ specific needs and questions. We also give students the initiative to help with the curriculum development. Overall, we have stopped being interested only in our performance in class as we try to accommodate the requirements of the Ministry of the education.

Editorial

David Lambert adds: Although the above paragraph could be interpreted as Future 2 rather than Future 3, the significance is that the analysis presented uses the ‘curriculum making’ framework. This opens up the opportunity for dialogue to continue about the place of powerful disciplinary knowledge (in this particular case, with non specialist teachers of geography)

Partner 8

The GeoCapabilities 2 project has challenged me intellectually to really think deeply, and critically, about my everyday work as a geography teacher in school. Running concurrently with my own part time Doctoral research into GeoCapabilities, being part of the project has enabled me to discuss the ideas in my research with others who understand and are working with the concept. My thesis is providing an empirical basis to the idea of GeoCapability, and the initial findings will be fed into the project and discussed with the other partners. This has benefitted my research by enabling critical reaction to my findings, and I have been able to use the findings
from my research to inform discussions as part of the project.

The project has provided a way to think about the importance of subject knowledge in geography education, as well as keeping a focus on the broader ‘outcomes’ of education which are more than simple examination grades, and includes how young people think and behave in the world. This grand thinking enables teachers to take responsibility for their actions and, in short, to become ‘curriculum leaders’. The implication of this for geography teachers is significant. Geography teachers need to be subject specialists, with a degree in geography. Geography teachers need to be actively engaged with the world and with the discipline of geography. Geography teachers need to be at the forefront of curriculum thinking so they are able to enable young people to engage with the subject and the world. The GeoCapabilities 2 project enables a framework for these thoughts to take place.