

AG5.0 AGTA CHAIR REPORT: OCTOBER 2010

Malcolm McInerney, AGTA Chair

2010 has been a dynamic and significant year for geographical education in Australia. Most significantly, 2010 has seen the release by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) of the draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: geography. Although the development of an Australian Curriculum has continued to dominate much of our work this year, AGTA has been very active in promoting geographical education in Australia.

Key activities have been the release of the *Professional Standards for Accomplished Teaching of Schools Geography*, the Australian Geography Competition, planning for the 2011 AGTA conference, managing the *Geocareers* site and continuing work with the incorporation of technology in the teaching of geography.

In this report I will briefly report on the key AGTA initiatives and happenings, to give a context for the reader to gain an appreciation of why AGTA exists and how it is advancing the teaching of geography in Australia.

The Professional Standards for Accomplished Teaching of School Geography

Geography teachers are often asked the question; "What makes geography teaching geography teaching?" In 2006 key geography teaching and educational bodies (Australian Geography Teachers' Association, the Geography Teachers' Association of Victoria, Melbourne University and the Victorian Institute of Teaching) worked with the Australian Government (Australian Research Council) to scope a research project to identify examples of outstanding geography teaching. The project was an attempt to document and clarify the nature of exemplary geography teaching in our schools and culminated in the recently released "Professional Standards for Accomplished Teaching of School Geography".

The research process involved:

- Throughout 2007-2009, accomplished geography teachers at work in government and non-government schools were videotaped in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia. Each of the ten geography teachers, with a reputation for accomplished practice were filmed across two lessons
- Interviews were then conducted with these teachers and their students towards identifying features of accomplished geography teaching
- Panels of experienced geography teachers were conducted across Australia during 2009. These panels viewed the video footage of the teachers and provided advice to the researchers to develop the professional standards for accomplished teaching of school geography.

As a result, the project has developed a dynamic set of professional standards for teaching school geography, which are built on a platform of classroom practice. The standards posted at <http://www.geogstandards.edu.au> provide an important resource to enhance the quality of teacher professional learning in geography. In particular the standards are an important professional learning resource for the clarification of content pedagogical knowledge in geography to support the delivery of the Australian Curriculum for geography in Australian schools. We also help that the standards and the *Geogstandards* website will inform teachers and the community of what makes geography teaching geography teaching.

This work is seminal and ground breaking for geography and I am sure will provide excellent and necessary research based standards for the implementation of the Australian Curriculum for geography. Congratulations to AGTA's Jeana Kriewaldt for all her dedicated and outstanding work on this project.

Geocareers Website

One of AGTA's important promotional activities is the Geocareers website at www.geocareers.net.au. The site, developed by Rob Berry, is proving to be an outstanding resource for educators and students, linking our discipline with potential careers. At present the major sections include Meet a Geographer, Studying Geography, Using Geography and Resources.

Geographical competitions and events for students

The National Geographic Channel Australian Geography Competition is a joint project between AGTA and the Royal Geographical Society of Queensland (RGSQ), with support from long-term sponsor National Geographic Channel. The number of students entering the 2010 Competition was 85,131. The competition continues to be a great success in promoting geography in schools around Australia. All students participating in the competition received a detailed results sheet and a certificate in one of four categories – High Distinction, Distinction, Credit, and Participation. Very high-scoring students across Australia and winners of states and territories each received a special certificate and a book prize.

The Under 16 Final for the competition was held on 7 June at the Foxtel Television Centre in Sydney and compered by ex-*Temptation* host Ed Phillips, in front of a crowd of students, teachers and other invited guests. The results of the Final were:

First	Riley Kernaghan, MacGregor State High School, Brisbane
Second	Allan McManus, Thomas More College, Adelaide
Equal third	Chris Krushka, The Hutchins School, Hobart
	Amelia Rowe, home-schooled, Maldon Vic
	Tiffany Wu, The Hills Grammar School, Sydney

Riley won a place in the Australian team which will compete in the 2011 National Geographic World Championship in San Francisco, USA. National Geographic Channel broadcast a one-hour programme on the Final on 18 June. The Competition also received a lot of newspaper coverage – around 80 items this year.

The 2009 Geography's Big Week Out was a week of fun, friendship and hands-on geography from 7 to 11 December in Perth and at Rottnest Island. The focus was on fieldwork and GIS. It was organised by a group of dedicated Perth teachers from the Geographical Association of Western Australia including AGTA Directors Emmy Terry and Trish Harris, and under the leadership of Mike Fazio. The student participants were the highest-scoring male and female Year 10/11 students from each state and the combined territories, plus two other high-scoring students, who took part in the senior division of the competition.

Australia came second in the **International Geography Olympiad** held in Taipei, Taiwan, from 29 July to 4 August 2010 (twenty-seven countries took part – Australia, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hong Kong, Hungary, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Romania, Russia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Taiwan, Tunisia, United Kingdom).

Australia's team was chosen from the students at Geography's Big Week Out, based on their performance during the week and an assessment item at the end. Australia's team was supported by the Australian Government through the Quality Outcomes Program, administered by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Samuel Buttenshaw, All Saints College St Mary's, Maitland won Australia's first ever gold medal.

Baris Dilaver, John Paul College, Kalgoorlie just missed out on gold, winning a silver medal, as did Emily Thoday-Kennedy, Modbury High School, Adelaide. The Australian team received the second highest combined score, with Singapore first.

A great effort by all those involved in these events. AGTA thanks Kath Berg, Margaret McIvor, Trish Harris, Mike Fazio and Emmy Terry for their outstanding work on these important initiatives for geography students and geographical education in Australia.

AGTA's representative work

AGTA has an important role in representing geography teachers on a range of national committees to ensure that the voices of geography educators are heard. Such roles are increasingly important in terms of the national focus and the national curriculum developments.

Portfolios for the purpose of representation were allocated as follows:

Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and the Environment: Emmy Terry (voting representative) and Margaret McIvor (AGTA representative).

Institute of Australian Geographers: Malcolm McInerney

Australian Academy of Science's National Committee of Geography: Grant Kleeman

National Education Forum: Malcolm McInerney

National Geographic Channel Australian Geography Competition: Margaret McIvor

Surveying and Spatial Sciences Institute (SSSI), Spatial Education Advisory Committee: Malcolm McInerney

Big Week Out: Margaret McIvor, Mike Fazio and Emmy Terry

ACARA's curriculum development process

On June 21 2010 ACARA released for consultation the draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: geography. The release was followed by two months of intensive consultation with geography teachers across Australia. ACARA received an enormous amount of feedback from geographers around Australia which showed the interest in the development of this very important curriculum for the future of geography in Australia. At the AGTA Board meeting in Adelaide during October 2010 all the responses from the geography teachers associations in Australia were discussed with the goal of developing an AGTA position on the direction of the Australian Curriculum for geography.

The following ACARA timeline (a proposed timeline at this stage) will give an idea of the 2010-2011 curriculum development process for the Australian Curriculum: geography. Naturally, the timeline may change as time goes by but at this stage these are the dates, events and milestones ACARA has mapped out for the process.

- **October – November 2010**: Shape of the *Australian Curriculum: Geography* to be released.
- **November – December 2010**: Appointment of writers and an advisory group to develop the scope and sequence for the national geography curriculum. The writing to be accompanied by a consultation process for the scope and sequence document.
- **January – July 2011**: Course writing in line with the final scope and sequence document for national geography curriculum.
- **August 2011**: Publication of the national geography curriculum.

AGTA encourages all Australian geography teachers to keep informed of the ACARA process via their website at <http://www.acara.edu.au> and take advantage of the opportunities provided by ACARA and geography teachers' associations to feed comments and ideas into the process. AGTA with other Australia associations has been particularly active over recent

months to ensure our voice is heard by government. Such a profile and lobbying of the 'powers' determining the nature of the Australian Curriculum is crucial when discussing indicative times and elective status of subjects. 2010 has seen unprecedented lobbying by the geography community to ensure that geography has sufficient status and time in the Australian Curriculum to meet the needs of the 21st Century student.

Way back in May 2009 ACARA commenced its work on the Australian Curriculum for geography when it appointed Lucie Sorensen as the Senior Project Officer Geography. Lucie has finished working at ACARA and has returned to Brisbane to continue her great work in geography. AGTA would like to thank Lucie for all her hard work with ACARA and wish her all the best with the next stage of her career.

Towards a National Geography Curriculum (TNGC) continues.....

The work of the TNGC was not completed with the handover of the report to ACARA. The steering committee has now turned its attention to the issue of implementation and is still meeting to develop strategies to support the 'roll-out' out of a national geography curriculum. This has included writing a submission to the Federal Government requesting funding to ensure that whatever geography curriculum is developed by ACARA, there will be appropriate and adequate teaching resources and professional learning opportunities for teachers. AGTA, IAG and RGSQ consider that they have an important role to play in both the development of resources and providing professional learning during the implementation phase of national curriculum. However as non-profit organisations run by 'time-poor' professionals we require government support to fund much needed implementation strategies for the new curriculum. Over the next few years, issues associated with the implementation of Australian curriculum: geography is likely to dominate the work of AGTA and affiliates. This work of AGTA and TNGC will be critical in 2010 as we move from the curriculum development phase to the implementation of the geography curriculum for Australia.

AGTA Conference 2011 – Geography going National, Adelaide

The AGTA conference in Adelaide from January 8-13th 2011 is almost a reality. The conference is being held at Scotch College in Adelaide and is being convened by the Geography Teachers' Association of South Australia. The convenor for the conference is the highly competent and enthusiastic Mark Manuel. Mark has developed a great program with plenty of field trips and classroom relevant workshops. The response to the conference program (<http://www.agta.asn.au/conf2011/index.htm>) has been very positive and we are expecting to see one of the biggest and best AGTA conferences in Adelaide in January.

Considering the increased profile of geography and the Australian Curriculum for geography being imminent in 2011 we are expecting this event to be pivotal in the development of geography in Australia into the future. As one of our keynote speakers, Dr Peter Hill, ACARA CEO says in his abstract:

“Over the years, geography as a discipline has undergone profound changes which in turn have impacted on the teaching of geography as a school subject. With the renewed focus on geography as a discrete subject within the Australian curriculum, there is an unprecedented opportunity to ensure that geography in schools reflects amazing developments in ‘neogeography’. At the same time, it is timely to reassess the role geography should play in the broader curriculum of students in the 21st Century.”

For many reasons this should be an exciting time for the geographers attending the conference in Adelaide. This feeling of optimism for the future is eloquently described in the abstract of our other keynote at the conference, Dr Rita Gardner, Director of the Royal Geographical Society in London when she says;

“... geography continues to hold such a fascination for her and why it is one of the most relevant and important subjects for young people to study in the 21st Century. With reference to her leadership of the UK’s Action Plan for Geography, and her involvement as government advisor and in recent curriculum reviews and using examples from South and East Asia, the Middle East, and South America she will argue that, more than ever, geography offers an education not only about life, but also for life.”

Geospatial technology and geography

AGTA has continued to promote the need to incorporate ‘state of the art’ spatial and other technologies into the geography classroom in the following ways:

- All workshops at the 2011 AGTA conference have a spatial technology component and AGTA’s good friend George Daily from ESRI US is one of our keynote speakers. George in his abstract says:
“Imagine a world where young people are strong problem solving, geographical thinkers who actively contribute to the good of their local and global communities. Bringing this ideal from model to action requires us to understand and embody the robust and far-reaching nature of geography; embrace and leverage the relentless pace of technological advancements and their application in the world; inspire and instil geocuriosity and a passion for action great and small, near and far... and recognise...“it’s fun!”
- AGTA secretary Rebecca Nicholas hosts a wonderful technology in geography blog called *Minds Wondering* at <http://mindswonderings.blogspot.com/>. The site is full of great innovative ideas on using technology in the geography classroom.
- AGTA as a member of the *Surveying and Spatial Sciences Institute (SSSI)* national education committee has continued to play an important role in providing input to the spatial Industry and help inform the industry’s response to the development of the Australian Curriculum for geography.
- The *Spatialworlds* blog at <http://spatialworlds.blogspot.com/> continues to explore technology in geography and the needs of the 21st Century student.
- A Google Group titled ‘*21s Century geography in Australian schools*’ at <http://groups.google.com/group/21st-century-geography-in-australian-schools> has been established to be a forum for information dissemination and discussion on the Australian Curriculum for geography.

If we are to have a 21st Century Curriculum in geography it is imperative that AGTA continues to promote to ACARA and teachers the benefits and professional expectation that we incorporate spatial technology into the curriculum and in turn geography classrooms around Australia.

As this report shows, there is plenty going on in the world of Australian geography! We are facing the challenges of being closely involved in the development of an Australian Curriculum for geography, promoting the ‘brand’ of geography in the community, integrating modern technologies into our teaching, whilst continuing our essential role as an association supporting teachers. Thanks for the support and hard work of all directors on the AGTA Board and teacher members of affiliates for making AGTA a key organisation in the promotion of geographical education in Australia.