



Dr Grant Kleeman, Editor

Welcome to the first of four issues of the Geography Bulletin for 2015. This issue features three articles by Susan Caldis, President of GTA NSW, and one each by Grant Kleeman and Lyndon Kleeman. Susan's contributions include *Geography comes alive through fieldwork* and a personal reflection on a recent visit to regional NSW and Central Australia. Also included is an excerpt of Susan's opening address at the Arthur Phillip Awards: Australian Catholic University, Strathfield. Lyndon contributes an article *India: An emerging economic giant* and Grant contributes the first of a series of articles focusing on *India: A nation in transition*.

AGTA News

AGTA's principal focus in 2015 is supporting the implementation of the *Australian Curriculum: Geography*. A key element of this support is the provision of professional learning opportunities for classroom teachers (the AGTA Geography Roadshow). Other elements include the promotion of *GeogSpace*, and the publication of a skills-based text to replace *Keys to Geography Skills*.

AGTA Geography Roadshow

The first of the AGTA Geography Roadshows took place in Brisbane on Saturday 21 March. The one-day professional learning event included both a primary and secondary program. Topics addressed included 'thinking geographically', 'inquiry in Geography', fieldwork, ICT in Geography, and developing literacy through Geography.

More than 80 teachers participated in the Roadshow. Multiple events are planned for NSW in the weeks following the release of the new NSW Geography Syllabus. Other states and territories will follow.

GeogSpace

The *Geogspace* website is an initiative of the Australian Geography Teachers' Association (AGTA) supported by the resources of Education Services Australia. *GeogSpace* has been designed to support primary and secondary teachers implementing the *Australian Curriculum: Geography*. Developed by AGTA's team of practising Geography teachers, the site ensures that all schools across Australia have access to a unique resource that reflects best practice using current technology and pedagogies.

Geography skills book

Work is progressing on a replacement for *Keys to Geography Skills*. The yet to be named text will provide students with an up-to-date resource aligned to the requirements of the *Australian Curriculum: Geography*. Publication is scheduled for early 2016.

Other activities and initiatives:

AGTA Conference

The 2015 AGTA Conference was held from 11–16 January 2015 in Rotorua, New Zealand. The Conference proved a great professional learning opportunity for teachers. The Conference featured an extensive program of keynote presentations, workshops and fieldwork. There were also pre- and post-Conference tours.

Participants were impressed by the quality of the Conference presentations, the fieldwork (White Island was amazing), extra-curricula activities and the catering. Nick Hutchinson, ably assisted by Rob Berry, did a terrific job organising the conference. Victoria has agreed to host the 2017 ACTA conference.

Reports by two of the GTA NSW-sponsored participants accompany this issue of the *Geography Bulletin*.

Geographical Education: Current issue

Geographical Education, Volume 27, is now available on the AGTA website. The 2014 issue features two reports related to the Review of the Australian Curriculum: Geography – the *Submission to the Review of the Australian Curriculum Submitted by the Australian Geography Teachers' Association Limited* from Dr Grant Kleeman and *Comments on the recommendations relating to geography in the Review of the Australian Curriculum* by Associate Professor Alaric Maude.

There are also four peer reviewed articles:

- Sustainability in the *Australian Curriculum: Geography* by Associate Professor Alaric Maude;
- *Investigating the impacts of global education curriculum on the values and attitudes of secondary students* by Dr John DeNobile, Dr Grant Kleeman and Ms Anastasia Zarkos;
- *Post-primary education and energy literacy: An analysis of the potential for geography curricula to contribute to Australian students' energy literacy* by Mr Brad Maddock and Dr Jeana Kriewaldt; and
- *Interested and influential: the role of a professional association in the development of the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography* by Ms Susan Caldis.

Geographical Education is the professional journal of AGTA and is on the DEST Register of Refereed Journals. The journal was published in print form until Volume 25, 2012. Since then the journal has been published in a digital format and is available on the Association's website. The ISSN for *Geographical Education* is ISSN 0085 0969.

Australian Curriculum: Geography

The Federal Government (Minister Christopher Pyne) recently announced that ACARA would develop a Humanities and Social Sciences curriculum for Foundation (Kindergarten) to Year 6. The proposed curriculum will seek to integrate Geography, History, Business Studies and Civics and Citizenship into a single subject area. It appears, however, that education ministers have agreed to nothing other than having ACARA come up with some proposals. They have not committed to accept any new curriculum. Indeed, NSW has already announced that the State's new Geography and History syllabuses, aligned with the Australian Curriculum, will be implemented as planned.

I have attached AGTA's response to the draft Humanities and Social Science curriculum for your information.

Australian Alliance of Associations in Education

AGTA is proud to be a founding member of the newly formed AAAE. This is a body specifically formed to represent the interests of teacher professional associations at a national level. There are 23 founding member associations and the AAAE will be able to lobby at a Federal level on issues affecting teachers and their professional practice. The AAAE has begun to develop Position Statements on a variety of issues of interest to educators. AGTA is delighted to offer teaching resources to support the implementation and delivery of the Australian Curriculum: Geography in classrooms.

Primary Geography Challenge

AGTA and the Royal Geographical Society of Queensland are developing a Geography competition for primary school students. At this early stage, organisers are planning an online competition that tests a wide range of geographical skills and knowledge in an engaging way, using a variety of questions and graphics. The competition will be aimed at Year 6 students, at least initially.

The Primary Geography Challenge will complement the highly successful Australian Geography Competition.

Decadal Plan for Geography

AGTA has agreed to help fund the development of the National Committee for the Geographical Science's strategic directions paper for the discipline. AGTA is also keen to contribute to the School Geography element of the plan.

Dr Grant Kleeman

AGTA Chair

Responding to the Federal Government's proposal to integrate Geography into a Humanities and Social Science curriculum

The Board of the Australian Geography Teachers Association (AGTA) met in Hobart on 2–3 May to consider the proposed F–10 *Australian Curriculum: Humanities and Social Sciences*. Before outlining our principal concerns we offer the following observations:

- AGTA believes that the rigour and veracity of the *Australian Curriculum: Geography* has been compromised the proposed changes published in the *Draft changes to F–10 Australian Curriculum: Humanities and Social Sciences* (April 2015).
- *Australian Curriculum: Geography* was developed through extensive consultation with Geography teachers around Australia from 2008–2013 and is considered to reflect the stated ACARA aim of developing a world standard 21st Century Geography curriculum.
- The conceptual progression and quality of the Geography curriculum has been recognised internationally by academics and jurisdictions and received positively by teachers involved in the F–10 implementation of the Geography curriculum across Australia.
- Beyond the anticipated and required monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum as it is implemented, AGTA sees no grounds for the drastic changes to the curriculum as appears in the draft revision document. Many of the revisions are at odds with the comprehensive and considered consultation undertaken by ACARA and AGTA with academics, jurisdictions and classroom teachers during the years of development.
- This document does not set out to provide item-by-item commentary but rather provides key messages to ACARA on our major areas of disquiet and concerns raised by the revision document.

Key concerns

1. Diminished conceptual quality for the curriculum

The proposed revisions to the Geography content descriptions have had a significant impact on the intent and conceptual development of the curriculum. For example:

- in Years F–4 there seems to be a reduction in the importance of the Space and Scale concepts with the removal of references in the content description to proximity, arrangement and spatial levels. As a progression of understanding of the Space concept such removals are problematic and need to be addressed.
- in Years F–3 the richness of the Place concept has been significantly reduced by the frequent removal of references in the content descriptions to the perception of place and the impact of such perception on the nature, use and caring (protection) of places. Such removals show a lack of understanding of the place concept. Place is a concept that reflects modern Geography and is embraced by primary teachers as something students can relate to.
- in Years F–6, the focus and quality of the concept of geographical Interconnection involving the idea of interdependencies has been diminished with references being made to a more generic view of interconnection between events and places.

2. Impact of generic skills strand on quality geographical inquiry and skills development and progression

The generic Inquiry and skills strand removes important skills in Geography and the progression of skill development across the curriculum. These subject skills must appear in the curriculum to ensure that Geography is not just about learning content – the doing of Geography is critical. Surprisingly many of the skills continue to appear in the achievement standards but are not present in the content of the curriculum. Particular concern has been raised regarding the following changes to the Inquiry and skills strand:

- The removal of the Reflecting and Responding stage from the *Inquiry and skills* strand until Year 8 is a backward step for the teaching of modern Geography with a focus on active citizenship and futures. Considering students are still required to propose action in the achievement standards, it should be a stage of the generic Inquiry process.
- Removal of any reference to spatial technologies in the Researching stage of the *Inquiry and Skills* strand is a significant loss to the 21st Century quality of the curriculum. All references to satellite images and spatial technology and other opportunities to use modern geographical technologies such as GIS/GPS have been removed from F–8). Such omissions have removed the requirement of a 21st Century Geography curriculum to engage with spatial technology in some way. There is a need to refer in some way to the use of modern technologies in the skill strand, and in turn the achievement standards, with reference to the capacity to use modern technologies such as spatial technology.
- The important area of fieldwork has disappeared from the curriculum as a result of the removal of the subject specific skills in the Inquiry and skills strand.

3. Loss of geographical rigour by the combined Year level achievement standard

The combined achievement standard for HASS will make it harder for teachers to understand what they are assessing, and to design tasks that enable students to demonstrate the intended learning. The attempt to reduce the number of achievement standards has resulted in one achievement standard that is often dense and difficult to navigate. Statements such as *'They identify and describe the interconnections between components of environments, and between people and the characteristics of places, both human and environmental, past and present* (Year 5) are wordy and will require considerable unpacking by teachers to understand what students are expected to demonstrate. The attempt to reduce the length of the achievement standards by an amalgam of terms and phrase has often resulted in the standards not clearly relating to what is described in the Year level descriptions and content descriptions for that Year level. The amalgam process has also resulted in inappropriate use of language across subjects i.e. *Students develop narratives about the past and present findings in a range of texts using language related to time, distance and location* (the term narrative is not relevant language for describing the geographical terms of distance and location).

4. Geographical focus lost in overarching themes and inquiry questions for all subjects

The overarching theme across HASS for each year level is problematic for teachers and planning. Whilst workable for F–3 (my personal world, my changing personal world etc.), from Year 4 onwards the themes become quite contrived, complicated and inaccessible. For example the Year 4 theme of *How people, places and environments interact, past and present* is too broad to be very useful and diminishes or even removes the subject focus of the published curriculum e.g. the original Year 4 Geography theme was *The Earth's environment sustains all life*.

The intent of the learning is lost in some year levels by reducing the inquiry questions for each year level of HASS to 4 inquiry questions. If there is to be inquiry

questions there needs to more than four to provide appropriate coverage of the four HASS subjects/strands at each year level.

5. Loss of opportunities to address Cross Curriculum Priorities

Significant changes and deletions to content descriptions and Inquiry questions focussing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the Asian region will jeopardise the opportunities and imperative for teachers to incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples perspectives into teaching and learning in Geography.

6. Other interventions that detract from the contemporary nature of Geography

Other changes appear to have been made on a rather ad hoc basis. For example, the reference to 'human environment systems thinking' has been replaced with 'systems thinking' in Year 10. A systems-based approach to Physical Geography was popular in the 1970s.

Also unexplained was the deletion of 'the decisions people make about where to live' (Year 7) which is the entry point of study to a consideration of peoples' perceptions about the liveability of places.

AGTA respectfully requests that ACARA address the concerns raised in this letter. We would be more than happy, as we have been throughout the development process, to work with ACARA to remedy the serious inadequacies of the revision document.

