



Australian
Human Rights
Commission

everyone, everywhere, everyday

Strengthening human rights education in the Geography Curriculum

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Recommendations on Draft *Geography Curriculum*
24 February 2012

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1 Introduction

The Australian Human Rights Commission welcomes the development of a national school curriculum (Curriculum). We believe that the development of the Curriculum is a unique opportunity to ensure all young Australians develop an understanding and appreciation for human rights.

The Commission congratulates the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) on the steps taken to incorporate human rights into the *Australian Curriculum: Geography* (Geography Curriculum).

The Commission has previously provided suggestions to ACARA regarding how human rights can be integrated into the Geography Curriculum (during the Consultation on the *Shape Paper*) and is pleased to see many of these suggestions reflected in the draft Curriculum. In particular, the continued focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures throughout the draft Curriculum strongly supports the cross-curriculum priorities and human rights.

In this submission, the Commission makes some more specific recommendations that can be integrated into the draft Curriculum. Most of the recommendations are in relation to two overarching content areas:

- Accessibility of space, especially in relation to how people with a disability are excluded from inaccessible space
- The gendered nature of space, especially public space and the discriminatory impact on women.

The Commission recommends each of these content areas be integrated throughout the entire Curriculum in the same way that content regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures has been integrated from Foundation to Year 12. In this submission, the Commission also provides some examples of how these can be integrated into the geographical concepts as well as under each content description area or unit of study.

Besides these recommendations, the Commission has also made some minor suggestions to ensure that content is articulated in ways that support the general capabilities and human rights.

Throughout this submission, the Commission has identified its changes and suggestion in *italics* and included the page references in brackets. The Commission has placed any existing ACARA draft Curriculum within single inverted commas.

2 Strengthening and fully integrating relevant general capabilities

The draft Curriculum correctly conveys the importance and central relevance of geography as a vehicle for conveying a rich understanding of the general capabilities especially in regard to:

- ethical behaviour (including respecting human rights)

- intercultural understanding
- personal and social competence.

The Commission is pleased to see that many of our earlier recommendations have been reflected in the draft Curriculum explanation of how the study of geography will develop students 'ethical behaviour', 'intercultural understanding' and 'personal and social competence'.

Following are specific suggestions for further strengthening the descriptions of the links between the general capabilities and the Geography Curriculum.

(a) *Ethical behaviour*

The Commission recommends the inclusion of the following to the description of the 'ethical behaviour' capability:

- 'The draft Australian Curriculum: Geography provides opportunities for students to investigate current geographical issues and evaluate their findings against the criteria of environment sustainability, economic viability, social justice *and human right standards and indicators*' (page 21, paragraph two, sentence one).

Given the focus on the interconnected world throughout the Geography Curriculum, it is appropriate to focus on the binding international human rights laws that are relevant and helpful to assessing geographical understanding.

(b) *Personal and social competence*

The Commission recommends the inclusion of the following to the description of the 'personal and social competence' capability:

- 'Students develop person and social competence as they learn to understand and manage themselves, their relationships, lives, work and learning more effectively. This involves recognising and regulating their emotions, developing concern for and understanding of *and respect for* others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, working effectively in teams and handling challenging situations constructively' (page 21, paragraph three, sentence two).

Understanding builds the emotional and intellectual capacity of students and leads to the ability to act in a rights-respecting manner and promotes a sense of active citizenship.

3 Suggestions for strengthening the link between general capabilities and the objectives of the Geography Curriculum

3.1 Rationale and Aims

The Commission recommends the inclusion of the following to the aims of the Geography Curriculum:

- 'to ensure that students develop a sense of wonder, curiosity *and respect* for places, people, cultures and environments *in Australia and* throughout the world' (page three, paragraph two, sentence one).

This Commission recommends that including *respect* as a major aim of geography ensures that the draft Curriculum is more consistent with the general capabilities of ethical behaviour, personal and social competence and intercultural understanding.

3.2 Organisation – geographical inquiry and skills

The draft Curriculum details five key skill areas that deepen geographical knowledge and understanding. The Commission recommends the inclusion of the following additions to the explanation of the skills:

- Planning, collecting and evaluating – '... and evaluating information for reliability, bias, *inequality and exclusion*' (page six, paragraph three).
- Reflecting and responding – '... by applying the criteria of environmental sustainability, economic costs and benefits, and social justice *and equality*; and reflecting on the actions' (page six, paragraph six).

The Commission recommends ensuring that inquiry skills include assessments of inequality and exclusion ensures that the draft Curriculum is more consistent with human rights and the general capabilities of ethical behaviour, personal and social competence and intercultural understanding.

3.3 Organisation – concepts for geographical understanding

The draft Curriculum details seven concepts of place, space, environment, interconnection, sustainability, scale and change.

The Commission recommends that in order to develop students' critical thinking regarding these concepts it is important to acknowledge the different ways that these concepts are conceived and to include consideration of the very construction of these concepts.

The Commission makes the following recommendations to the concepts:

- space concept
- scale concept

- change concept.

(a) *Space concept – public and private spaces*

The space concept should include an acknowledgement of both **public and private spaces** to enable a robust understanding about the gendered nature of space and that some people and groups are excluded from various spaces. For example, the draft Curriculum prioritises public space over private space. Although there is some discussion of linking space to the concept of home (particularly in Foundation to Level 2), the larger concept of private space, and the artificial separation of public and private space, is not explored.

This is particularly important because the nature of public and private space remains gendered. Women have historically disproportionately been excluded from public space which has had significant impacts, including on decision making processes at the highest levels of government and society. In addition, the focus on public space devalues the activities and functions of private spaces. This is an important concept that needs to be integrated across all years of schooling.

The Commission recommends the inclusion of the following additions to the explanation of the **space concept**:

- ‘investigating the ways that space is structured, organised and managed by people for different purposes *including assessing the differences between public and private space*’ (page eight, dot-point four).
- ‘recognising that people *and society* perceive and use spaces differently, and may feel accepted and safe in some and ~~unwelcome~~ *excluded* or unsafe in others’ (page eight, dot-point five).

(b) *Scale concept*

The **scale concept** describes the ‘hierarchy of division of spaces’. As above, there is scope to include the concept of private space in this concept. In addition, the description of the scale concept could also include recognition of the discriminatory nature of hierarchical concepts. Hierarchies benefit those whose spheres of influence are conceptualised at the top of the hierarchy. Hierarchies also discriminate and are detrimental to others whose spheres of influence are conceptualised at the bottom of the hierarchy. The assumptions in the scale concept negatively impacts women who have historically been linked with private space and will smaller and lower spheres of influence. Those living in remote and rural areas are also negatively impacted by their position in the scale hierarchy.

The Commission recommends the inclusion of the following additions to the explanation of the **scale concept**:

- ‘*recognising that identifying phenomenon at different scales establishes hierarchies that benefit and disadvantage different people and impacts decision making processes*’ (page 10, new dot-point 5).

(c) *Change concept*

The **change concept** describes the changes that occur over time and space and create a dynamic world. The concept is described in neutral terms without acknowledgement that 'uneven change' may bring about inequality. The Commission recommends the following additions to the explanation of the **change concept**:

- investigating the typically uneven spatial pattern of technological, economic and social change, and the consequences of this ~~unevenness~~ *inequality* (page 11, dot-point three).

4 Suggestions for strengthening the human rights content

Following are specific suggestions for how the human rights content in the Geography Curriculum can be further strengthened by year of schooling.

4.1 Foundation

The Commission recommends that in the elaboration 'investigating spaces such as classrooms, playgrounds and school grounds', the activity should specifically assess the accessibility of these spaces (space elaboration, page 28, dot-point three).

The concept of public and private space could be explored through the investigation of special and favourite places (place elaboration, page 27, dot-point six).

4.2 Year 1

The Commission recommends that in the 'exploration of the different ways in which spaces are used', and the 'way places can change over time', a specific activity description should include class discussion concerning accessibility (space elaboration, page 33, dot-point one and two).

The concept of public and private space could be explored through the 'characterisation of different spaces for residential, retail and recreational purposes' (space elaboration, page 33, dot-point one).

4.3 Year 2

The Commission has no recommendations regarding the Year 2 content description and elaborations.

4.4 Year 3

The Commission recommends that in 'describing built features', a discussion of public and private space is included as an activity (place elaboration, page 43, dot-point one).

The Commission recommends that in analysing places and thinking about why places are 'visited, liked or avoided' by different people, it is important to recognise that these are not always choices that people make and sometimes people and different groups in society are excluded from different places such as people with a disability. It is equally important to recognise that some people are 'pushed' into different spaces such as public spaces in the case of homeless people and young people (place elaboration, page 44, dot-point one).

4.5 Year 4

The Commission recommends some phrasing changes to the concept of religion to put the context of this discussion as a *right* to practice religion. The phrase 'influence of religion upon people's lifestyles' should be replaced with the '*role religion has in peoples lives*' (place elaboration, page 48, dot-point one).

Content should also investigate culture as well as religion, and make reference to the investigation of 'different *cultures* and religions in Australia and Asia' (place elaboration, page 48, dot-point one).

4.6 Year 5

The Commission recommends that when discussing that 'places are locations for a range of activities and functions', it is important for students to consider the value of the activities and functions of private spaces (place elaboration, page 53, dot-point one).

4.7 Year 6

In 'investigating that global population, wealth and health is unevenly distributed', the Commission recommends that it is important for students to recognise that this is also the case within Australia. In addition to exploring why uneven distribution exists, the inequality that flows from that distribution should be considered (space content description, page 59, paragraph one).

Bushfires within Australia is an important case study to Year 6 Curriculum content and there is scope to strengthen the themes of equality and access within the environment content description. The Commission recommends that discussion regarding 'recovery after a bushfire' should explore more specific issues to bushfire safety regarding access of people with disability and other vulnerable groups to bushfire warning systems, and explore how adequate these systems are in alerting residents in the case of a bushfire. Further, this discussion should include topics regarding rescue and access to people with disability and other vulnerable groups in the event of a bushfire, and the effectiveness of rescue operations (environment elaborations, page 59).

4.8 Year 7

(a) Unit 1 – environmental resources, water as a case study

The Commission recommends that in referring to water as a resource, draft Curriculum content should make reference to the right to water found in Article 11 and 12 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. The Commission recommends the following addition, ‘recognising that all people have a right to access fresh water’ (page 65, new dot-point three).

Discussion regarding water as ‘a difficult resource to manage’ should also include the political dimensions of water as a resource and the inequalities in access and usage (content description, page 65, paragraph one).

(b) Unit 2 – why people live where they do

In the content ‘differences and similarities of life of people’, the Commission recommends that the discussion occurs in the context of government obligations to provide certain services regardless of people’s choices or location. For example, health and education are important human rights that the government is obliged to ensure for all citizens including though the provision of services under Articles 12, 13 and 14 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (elaboration, page 67, dot-point six).

In the content ‘exploring the locational choices of Australians and those in other countries’, the Commission recommends the following phrase, ‘the reasons why ~~many of the world’s people~~ do not have much of a choice about where to live’ (elaboration, page 68, dot-point one).

It is important that this unit not be too focused on ‘choice’. For example, ‘safety’ could be explored in terms of domestic violence which is a major cause of homelessness and not a choice (content description, page 68, paragraph three).

There is scope in this unit to create a new content description area, ‘*what makes a good living arrangement*’ (page 68, new paragraph five). An elaboration for this new content description area could be ‘*understanding laws and standards for a good living arrangement*’ and ‘*identifying government obligations to provide good living arrangements*’ (page 68, new elaborations). The Australian government is obliged to ensure the right to an adequate standard of living under Article 11 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. By including a new content area that explores what makes a good living arrangement, this unit would draw links with human rights issues are required under the general capabilities.

It may also be appropriate to include homelessness in Australia as an example under this unit more broadly.

4.9 Year 8

(a) Unit 1 – landscapes

The Commission recommends that the elaboration including ‘mitigation and adaptation’ should include ‘*recognising the need for accessible communication as well as considering how the needs of vulnerable groups are met*’ (elaboration, page 74, new dot-point six).

(b) Unit 2 – personal and community geographies

The Commission recommends that in the content description area ‘exploring young people’s perception of space’ there is an opportunity to raise various rights that young people have including the right to participate and be in public spaces. The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* would be very helpful framework for this work. An elaboration for this new content description area could be ‘*understanding the rights that children and young people have*’ (elaborations, page 75, new dot-point three).

The Commission recommends that in the content description area ‘different types of communities can be identified’ there is an opportunity to expand discussion of virtual and online communities by considering cyber-bullying and cyber-activism around human rights issues.

4.10 Year 9

(a) Unit 1 – biomes and food security

The Commission recommends that in the content description area ‘capacity of the world to feed population and the role of government law and policies’ it is appropriate to consider the right to food as articulated under Article 11 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. The Commission recommends the following elaboration addition, ‘*recognising that all people have a right to food*’ (elaboration, page 82, new dot-point nine).

(b) Unit 2 – navigating global connections

In the content description area ‘people are connected to places in the world through their purchase of consumer goods’ the elaborations currently look at ‘fair trade’ but not the concept of fair work. Coffee and chocolate are good examples of fair trade but there are many others that might better focus on the right to safe and fair work such as soccer ball manufacture (a fair trade variety is made in Pakistan). The government’s obligations to ensure the right to fair and safe work is protected by Articles 6, 7 and 10 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*.

This would enable students to explore the issue of ‘sweat shops’ in a way that coffee and cocoa plantations might not. The Commission recommends the following

elaboration addition, *'recognising that all people have a right to safe and fair work'* (elaboration, page 83, new dot-point six).

In the content description area 'economic characteristics of places can be analysed through the industry or employment of their populations' the Commission recommends that in addition to recognising 'different employment structures' it is necessary to consider the implications of these from a human rights perspective and the impact on family/social relations, community sustainability and job security. The Commission recommends the following elaboration addition, *'considering the impact of different employment structures on family/social relations, community sustainability and job security'* (elaboration, page 84, new dot-point ten).

4.11 Year 10

(a) *Unit 1 – Environmental challenges and geography*

The Commission has no recommendations to make regarding this unit.

(b) *Unit 2 – Global well-being*

The exploration of global inequalities within Year 10 draft Curriculum content could be further strengthened in regards to responsibility and causation. The Commission recommends the following elaboration addition, *'considering the causes of global inequalities and identifying obligations to address inequalities'* (elaboration, page 94, new dot-point five).

4.12 Senior secondary

(a) *Unit 1 – The changing biophysical cover of the earth*

In the content description area 'land cover change' the Commission recommends the following elaboration changes, 'methods of classifying land cover from remotely sensed images and aerial photographs *and considering land rights, including Native Title*' (page 103, dot-point eight).

(b) *Unit 2 – sustaining places*

In the content description area, 'metropolitan and regional centres' as well as 'regional centres and rural places', the Commission recommends that in exploring 'challenges such as housing, transportation, employment and water/energy' it is useful to put these in the context of human rights laws and standards, and government responsibility.

The Commission recommends the following addition to the content description, *'understanding laws and standards in relation to housing, transportation, employment and water/energy and identifying government obligations'* (page 106, dot-points six and 12).

(c) *Unit 3 – environmental risk management*

The Commission is pleased that this unit seeks to explain why some people are more vulnerable than others. The Commission recommends that it would also be appropriate to analyse how different countries and Australia meet their responsibilities in order to ensure that vulnerable groups receive the same outcomes in terms of safety and risk mitigation and have access to equal services.

The Commission recommends the following addition to the unit outcomes, '*identifying obligations to ensure that vulnerable groups receive the same outcomes in terms of safety and risk mitigation and have access to equal services*' (page 108, new dot-point six).

(d) *Unit 4 – a world in the making*

The Commission recommends that the learning outcomes for this unit are changed to 'students will propose and justify approaches to achieving a better world for all, based on an understanding of an integrated global society, *international laws and standards including human rights, obligations of governments*, the resilience of people and the power of place' (page 111, dot-point four).

The content descriptions regarding 'explaining the networked world' should include '*discussion on international standards, human rights laws, obligations of governments*' (page 113, new dot-point six).