



Geography Teaching Standards and the Development of Teacher Expertise

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Geographical education is now mandated for students K–12 from 2012 in Australia. Parallel to this there is a Federal Government project of developing teaching Standards for Geographers. That is, two critical components of education are being addressed at about the same time:

1. Curriculum, and
2. The design and implementation of student learning experiences in Geography.

So *what* students learn, and *how* they learn this through professional teaching of Geography are being worked on almost hand in hand. This should assist in closer alignment between the curriculum and how it is taught and learnt not only through the current developments, but future likely developments as teachers take up these initiatives with their students.

Of particular interest is the proactive work of leading Geography teachers and academics in Australia to get Geography on the national curriculum agenda. This included a key strategy of having an informed and authoritative paper *Australians need Geography* (AGTA, 2006) to articulate formally their positions and provide indicative content and skills for the new Geography curriculum. Compared to other

subjects, Geography started on the front foot with this two-pronged approach.

The focus here is to provide a model on the ‘*how to*’. In their implementation, the Geography Teaching Standards will most probably use a professional model based upon a consensus approach. Figure 1 provides an overview of this and is informed by the work of Professor Royce Sadler (1986). While his work examined the professional interpretation by teachers of assessment standards in the context of actual student work, the current implementation of the Geography Teaching Standards may draw upon this work that is informed by both research and theory.

To begin with in Figure 1, there is the move from a more introductory and beginning level of implementation (novice) to a more expert model. In this, the interaction and alignment of the words on a piece of paper (the Standards), becomes much more closely aligned with teacher work and informs both conversations about that and the actual work. Through seeing and talking about the work of other Geography teachers, the teacher increases their professional knowledge and understanding of the *Geography Teaching Standards*. They more easily recognise high

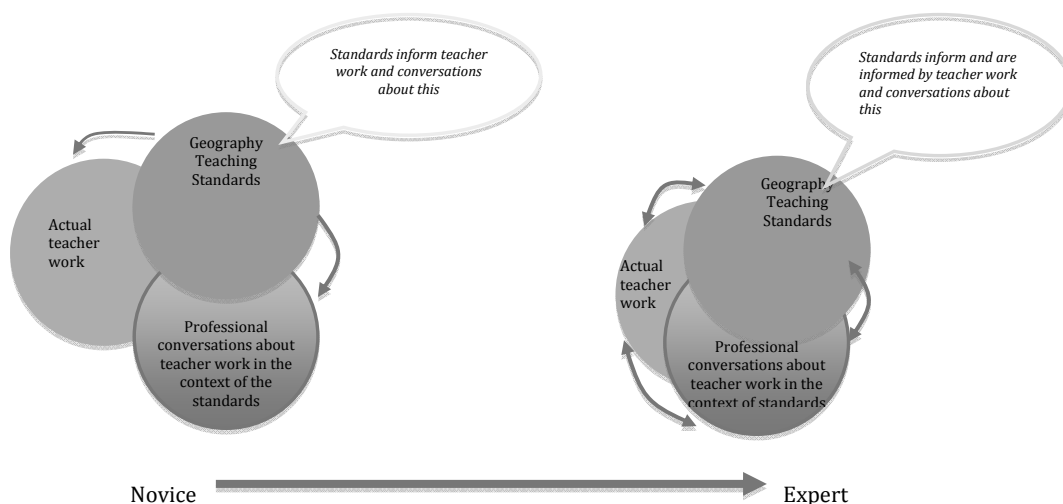


Figure 1: Implementing the Geography Teaching Standards using a professional consensus model

quality and work towards achieving it themselves as they know what it looks like. A close analogy is where a student usually has a sample of one response to assessment (their own), whereas their teacher who is making judgments about the quality of the student's work will have seen possibly hundreds, if not more, samples of quality. So an expert marker makes judgments of standards evidenced in the novice student work. By having students view what high quality is like, and mark and justify the mark of the work of peers using criteria, the student is 'let into the secrets' of quality and marking. It is reasonable to assume that over time, such movement from 'novice' to 'expert' will occur with judgments of Geography teachers' work by Geography teachers.

Over time, as knowledge and understanding of the Standards increases, so too does their

alignment as illustrated in Figure 1. The Standards themselves may be occasionally refined and updated with a new version becoming available. While there may be a variety of sources for those updates and further refinement, the most powerful will come from the substantive professional conversations that Geography teachers have about their work as they seek continuous improvements to the quality of learning and teaching.

References

- AGTA. 2006. *Australians need Geography*. Retrieved 20 August 2009 from www.agta.asn.au/resources/index.htm
- Sadler, D.R. (1986). *The case for explicitly stated standards*. Retrieved 20 August 2009 from www.qsa.qld.edu.au/publications/3520.html

Vale Professor Michael Williams

With sadness we note the passing of one of the stand out Geographical Educationalists of modern times: Professor Michael Williams of Oxford University.

As Professor Diana Liverman at the University of Arizona noted in a recent email to IAG members:

"Michael Williams who retired from Oxford Geography a few years ago.

Professor Michael Williams had a life-long research interest in Historical Geography and the formation of landscapes, and published widely on these themes, in recognition of which he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1989. Early work was on land draining and landscape evolution in *The Draining of the Somerset Levels* (Cambridge, 1970), and then on initial settlement and environmental and landscape perception and understanding in *The Making of the South Australian Landscape* (Academic, 1976). Other works on Australian humanized landscapes appeared in *Australian Space, Australian Time*, (Oxford University Press, 1975) with J.M. Powell, and *The Changing Rural Landscape of South Australia* (Heinemann, 1977, and State Govt. Printer, SA, 1991). Shifting focus to global land-use/land cover transformation and change, especially in North America, he wrote *Americans and their Forests* (Cambridge, 1989), followed by *Wetlands: A Threatened Landscape*, (Blackwell, 1991), and *Planet Management* (Andromeda/Oxford University Press, 1992). Returning to the

practice of historical geography and geography in general he was lead editor (with T. Coppock, H. Clout, and H. Prince) of *The Relations of History and Geography; Studies in England, France and the United States* (Exeter, 2001) and co-edited with Ron Johnston the British Academy's centennial volume *A Century of British Geography* (British Academy/Oxford University Press, 2003). His latest work was a global account and interpretation of deforestation entitled *Deforesting the Earth: From Prehistoric to Global Crisis* (Chicago, 2003).

These more recent works were awarded international prizes including the Weyerhaeuser Prize of the American Forest and Conservation Society (1990) for *Americans and their Forests*, again in 2004 for *Deforesting the Earth*, which was also awarded the Meridian Prize of the Association of American Geographers for "the most scholarly work in geography" (2004), and was runner-up in the annual British Academy's Book Prize (2004).

Most recently he was working on a biography of the life and work of Carl Ortwin Sauer (1889–1975), American geographer, environmental thinker, student of Latin America, and many other interests including plant and animal domestication, and entry of early man into the Americas, the relationship of geography and the Social Sciences, and the nature of landscapes and change."

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