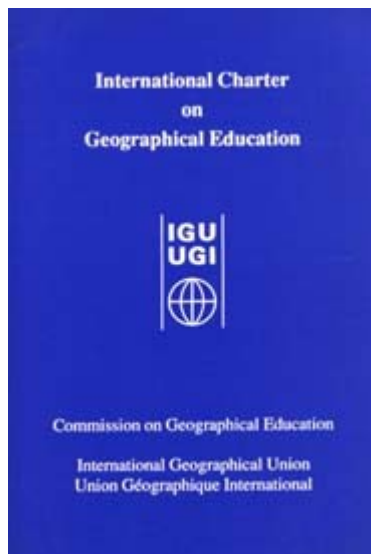


Charters: International Charter on Geographical Education

The Commission is reviewing the International Charter on Geographical Education and invites all geography educators, acting as individuals or at the organization level, to participate in this process by commenting on a re-conceptualized IGU Charter for Geography (draft available for download [here](#)).

Please submit your responses to Commission Chair Lex Chalmers (geog7061@waikato.ac.nz) August 2007.



International Charter on Geographical Education

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Preface

The Commission on Geographical Education of the International Geographical Union,

Convinced that geographical education is indispensable to the development of responsible and active citizens in the present and future world,

Conscious that geography can be an informing, enabling and stimulating subject at all levels in education, and contributes to a lifelong enjoyment and understanding of our world,

Aware that students require increasing international competence in order to ensure effective cooperation on a broad range of economic, political, cultural and environmental issues in a shrinking world,

Concerned that geographical education is neglected in some parts of the world, and lacks structure and coherence in others,

Ready to assist colleagues in counteracting geographical illiteracy in all countries of the world,

Supporting the principles set out in:

- the Charter of the United Nations;
 - the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
 - the Constitution of UNESCO; the UNESCO Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace;
 - the Declaration on the Rights of the Child; and
 - many national curricula and statements on geographical education,
- Recommends this International Charter on Geographical Education to all people of the world.

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Challenges and Responses

The resolution of major issues and problems facing our world requires the full commitment of people of all generations. All of the following issues have a strong geographical dimension:

population dynamics, food and hunger, urbanization, socio-economic disparities, illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, refugees and stateless persons, violation of human rights, disease, crime, gender inequalities, migration, extinction of plants and animals, deforestation, soil erosion, desertification, natural disasters, toxic and nuclear waste, climatic change, atmospheric pollution, water pollution, ozone holes, limits of resources, limits to growth, land use, ethnic conflict, war, regionalism, nationalism and

globalization on "Spaceship Earth".

The conflicts created by these problems and issues present a challenge to geographical educators who are committed to giving all people the hope, confidence and ability to work for a better world.

In the endeavor to contribute to peace and justice amongst the people of the world on the one hand and between human beings and the natural world on the other, geographical educators look towards the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** and in particular to:

Article 25

1) "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of him[her]self and of his[her] family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widow[er]hood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his[her] control."

Article 26

(1) Everyone has the right to education ... (2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace."

In the context of problems facing humanity, the right to education includes the right to high quality geographical education that encourages both a balanced regional and national identity and a commitment to international and global perspectives.

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Questions and Concepts in Geography

Geography is the science which seeks to explain the character of places and the distribution of people, features and events as they occur and develop over the surface of the earth. Geography is concerned with human - environment interactions in the context of specific places and locations. Its special characteristics are its breadth of study, its span of methodology, its synthesis of work from other disciplines including the physical sciences and the humanities and its interest in the future management of people - environment interrelationships.

Geographers ask the following questions:

- Where is it?
- What is it like?
- Why is it there?
- How did it happen?

- What impacts does it have?
- How should it be managed for the mutual benefit of humanity and the natural environment?

Pursuing the answers to these questions necessitates investigating the location, situation, interaction, spatial distribution and differentiation of phenomena on earth. Explanations of current situations come from both historical and contemporary sources. Trends can be identified which indicate possible future developments.

Some of the central concepts of geographical studies are:

- Location and distribution,
- Place,
- People-Environment Relationships,
- Spatial Interaction,
- Region.

Location and Distribution:

People and places have different absolute and relative locations on earth. These locations are linked by flows of goods, people, information and ideas and help to explain distribution patterns on earth. Knowledge of the location of people and places is a precondition for understanding local, regional, national and global interdependence.

Place:

Places have different natural and human characteristics. Natural characteristics include landforms, soils, climate, water bodies, vegetation, animal and human life. Humans develop cultures, settlements, socio-economic systems and lifestyles according to their beliefs and philosophies. Knowledge of the physical characteristics of places and people's environmental perception and behavior are the bases for understanding the interrelations between people and places.

People-Environment Relationships:

People use environments in a variety of ways. Thus they create varied cultural landscapes through different patterns of activities. On the one hand, they are influenced by their physical settings, but on the other, they transform their surroundings into different culturally created environments, including landscapes of harmony and landscapes of conflict. Understanding these complex interactions within space provides an important basis for responsible environmental planning, management and protection.

Spatial Interaction:

Resources are unevenly distributed across the earth. No country is self-sufficient. Places are linked by transport and communication systems in order to exchange resources and information. Insight into spatial interactions leads to understanding of the current cooperation of people through the exchange of goods and information and

by migration. This insight also leads to the detection of current problems and to ideas for improving regional, national and international interactions and cooperation.

Region:

A region is an area characterized by selected criteria. Political criteria define, for example, states and cities; physical criteria define climatic and vegetation zones; socio-economic criteria define "developed" and "less developed" countries. Regions are dynamic in both space and time. Regions are manageable units for studying and developing environments. Geographers define regions at different scales from local and national to continental and global. The integrated system of regions leads to the concept of a planetary ecosystem. The understanding of the structure and processes of different regions within the global system is the basis for the regional and national identity of people and their international perspectives.

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The Contribution of Geography to Education

Geography is both a powerful medium for promoting the education of individuals and a major contributor to International, Environmental and Development Education.

Geography and the education of the individual

Although the development of knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes and values constitutes the holistic process of education, these aspects may be grouped into three classes of objectives. Through their studies in geography, students are encouraged to explore and develop knowledge and understanding, skills, and attitudes and values. In particular they should develop:

Knowledge and Understanding of:

- locations and places in order to set national and international events within a geographical framework and to understand basic spatial relationships;
- major natural systems of the Earth (landforms, soils, water bodies, climate, vegetation) in order to understand the interaction within and between ecosystems;
- major socio-economic systems of the Earth (agriculture, settlement, transport, industry, trade, energy, population and others) in order to achieve a sense of place. This involves understanding the impact of natural conditions on human activities, on the one hand, and the different ways of creating environments according to differing cultural values, religious beliefs, technical, economic and political systems, on the other;
- diversity of peoples and societies on Earth in order to appreciate the cultural richness of humanity;
- structure and processes of the home region and country as daily action space; and
- the challenges of, and opportunities for, global interdependence.

Skills in:

- using verbal, quantitative and symbolic data forms such as text, pictures, graphs tables, diagrams and maps;
- practising such methods as field observation and mapping, interviewing people interpreting secondary resources and applying statistics; and
- using communication, thinking, practical and social skills to explore geographical topics at a range of scales from local to international. Such a process of inquiry

will encourage students to:

- identify questions and issues;
- collect and structure information;
- process data;
- interpret data;
- evaluate data;
- develop generalisations;
- make judgments;
- make decisions;
- solve problems;
- work co-operatively in team situations; and
- behave consistently with declared attitudes.

In this way geographical education contributes to literacy, oracy, numeracy and graphicacy. It also aids the development of personal and social competence, particularly with regard to the spatial dimension of daily life and to international understanding.

Attitudes and Values conducive to:

- interest in their surroundings and in the variety of natural and human characteristics on the surface of the Earth;
- appreciation for the beauty of the physical world, on the one hand, and of the different living conditions of people, on the other;
- concern for the quality and planning of the environment and human habitat for future generations;
- understanding the significance of attitudes and values in decision making;
- readiness to use geographical knowledge and skills adequately and responsibly in private, professional and public life;
- respect for the rights of all people to equality;
- dedication to seeking solutions to local, regional, national and international problems on the basis of the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights"

Geography and International, Environmental and Development Education

International Education

Geographical Education contributes strongly to International Education as described in the Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human rights and Fundamental Freedom (18th UNESCO Conference, November 19th, 1974). In particular, Geographical Education promotes understanding, tolerance and friendship amongst all nations, racial and religious groups and furthers the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace by actively encouraging:

1. "an international dimension and a global perspective in the education of people at all levels;
2. understanding and respect for all peoples, their cultures, civilizations, values and ways of life, including domestic ethnic cultures and cultures of

- other nations; awareness of the increasing global interdependence of peoples and nations;
3. ability to communicate with others;
 4. awareness not only of the rights but also of the duties incumbent upon individuals, social groups and nations towards each other;
 5. understanding of the necessity for international solidarity and cooperation;
 6. readiness on the part of the individual to participate in solving the problems of their communities, their countries and the world at large."

Environmental and Development Education

The Preparatory Committee for the U.N. Conference on Environment and Development, which met in Geneva on 18 March 1991 reported that environmental and development education at all levels and for all peoples is crucial in ensuring the sustainable development of the world.

"The more knowledge available in the hands of educated people capable of understanding the information the greater the chances are of significantly reducing environmental damage and preventing future problems. Accordingly, there is a primary need to strengthen in all countries, especially the developing ones, their entire educational system as a prerequisite to environmental and development education."

Geographical Education contributes to this by ensuring that individuals become aware of the impact of their own behavior and that of their societies, have access to accurate information and skills to enable them to make environmentally sound decisions, and to develop an environmental ethic to guide their actions.

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Content and Concepts of Geographical Education

Geography curricula around the world are commonly structured in two main ways: as regional studies and as thematic studies.

At their best, both regional and thematic studies are strongly theory-oriented. In the context of teaching children, theories are used to illuminate the real world. In their studies, children should be encouraged to adopt a questioning or enquiry approach which will lead them towards the statement and application of generalizations and principles.

Regional Studies

Regional Studies select from the following areas:

- Local community
- Home region
- Home country
- Home continent Other continents and regional groupings
- The world

- Global structures

Principles guiding the selection of regions at all levels may include:

- decentrism - regions should be chosen to avoid national or continental centrism;
- motivation - regions should be chosen to take account of students' interests and the actuality of current events;
- balance of scale - regions should be selected to include experience of a range of scales from local to global;
- diversity - regions should be selected to include a selection of contrasting places, various physical environments, different human activities, cultures, socio-economic systems and stages of development and sustainability;
- relevance - regions should be selected to provide studies which are relevant to public, vocational and private life;
- responsibility - regions should be selected to enable students to recognize and accept their responsibilities for action at a range of scales from local to global.

Appreciation of both national identity and international cooperation are important functions of regional studies. Regional studies should encourage consideration of internationalization and globalization whilst avoiding the pitfalls of regional separatism.

Thematic Studies

Thematic studies should always have a regional base. Thematic studies curricula in geography may be classified as systematic, issues-based and systems approaches.

1) Systematic Approaches are concerned with physical and human geography

Physical Geography may include:

- geomorphology,
- hydrology,
- climatic geography,
- biogeography,
- physical ecology ...

Human Geography may include:

- population geography,
- economic geography,
- urban geography,
- social geography,
- historical geography,

- cultural geography,
- rural geography,
- political geography,
- human ecology ...

2) Issues Based Approaches are concerned with the study of current issues and problems from a geographical point of view. These may be at local, regional, national or global scales. Issues commonly studied include:

- environmental quality,
- socio -spatial disparities,
- hazards and disasters,
- global change,
- population dynamics,
- urbanization,
- hunger in the world,
- energy management,
- inequalities in race, gender or religion,
- limits to growth,
- crisis regions (social, natural, economic),
- conflict
- development problems and strategies,
- sustainable development ...

3) Systems Approaches are concerned with teaching about physical systems, human systems and ecosystems.

Physical System include:

- geomorphic systems,
- soil systems,
- climatic systems,
- hydrological systems, and
- biotic systems.

Human Systems include social and cultural processes in human organization such as:

- agricultural systems,
- industry and service systems,

- settlement systems,
- transport and trade systems,
- societal systems.

Ecosystems

Current concerns for sustainable development may also be investigated through the study of the integration of human and natural systems within an ecosystem.

Choice of approach

The preferred educational philosophy determines whether the above approaches are combined or whether one only is selected. Whichever approach is adopted, studies should encourage students to engage in questioning and enquiry. It is essential that students develop the geographical skills of seeking solutions to current and future problems in the organization of space. In this way, geography curricula play a substantial role within political, social, ethical, personal, humanistic, aesthetic and environmental education.

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Principles and Strategies for Implementation

Specialist Teachers

Geography should be taught in schools and colleges by trained specialist teachers. Teachers are the most valuable resource in education. Because of this and because of the complexity of geographical studies, well-trained, specialist teachers are essential. In face of the challenges of our time and of the objectives of geographical education described earlier, geography teachers should be qualified not only in their discipline, geography, but also in geographical education.

Through a program of initial teacher education and ongoing in-service enhancement, geography teachers should progressively develop:

Knowledge and understanding of:

- the developing discipline of geography (concepts, themes, attitudes and skills),
- the social contexts of education and teaching,
- students' needs, interests, expectations and rights,
- how students learn (cognitive, affective and psycho-motor domains),
- curriculum principles;

The skills of:

- lesson, unit, course and curriculum planning,

- application of appropriate evaluation methods,
- involving students in a range of learning experiences,
- selecting and using appropriate resources and media,
- ongoing course evaluation and revision;

Values and attitudes that foster:

- the potential of geography as a medium for education,
- the geographical education of their students,
- personal and professional growth within geographical education,
- the equal rights of all students to effective geographical education;

An Independent Core Subject

In order to guarantee a sound preparation for the future, geography should be considered as a core subject in both primary and secondary school curricula. Teachers at primary level should be trained to teach geography. At secondary level and above, it should be taught by specialist geography teachers. Geography builds an interface or bridge between natural and social sciences. Geographical questions may require reference to the findings of other disciplines including geology, hydrology, biology, history, sociology, politics and economics. Where local conditions require that students at a particular age or phase follow a combined studies or integrated studies curriculum, the precise contribution of geography should be made explicit in the program, using the framework provided by this International Charter.

Mandatory and Coherent Courses

It is essential that all students across the years of formal schooling follow a continuous program of geographical studies. This will ensure that geography's contribution to both general education and to students' preparation for private and public life will be achieved.

Time Allocation

Geography should be allocated time comparable to that given to other core subjects in the curriculum. The timetable should provide regular geography teaching sessions throughout the school year, with the facility for longer periods of time to permit the completion of project work and field studies. This is needed for teachers to develop sound geography experiences to help students to respond to present and future challenges.

Teaching and Learning Materials

The use of quality media, both traditional and modern, is essential if students are to gain realistic images of the earth. Geography must not be regarded as a low cost subject. The international community of geography educators should assist poorer countries to gain access to quality teaching and learning materials.

Geography: A Subject for All

Geography has a significant role in the education of all students. Close attention must be paid by curriculum planners to learners with special needs as well as to the changing needs of students as they proceed in their development.

While many aspects of geographical education are common to all stages, the specific focus may change from primary, through secondary and higher education to its role in vocational, adult and in-service education.

Primary Education

Young children like to learn-by-doing as they explore their surroundings. They are also open to new experiences and, therefore, teaching about people of other cultures, lifestyles and places should begin at this stage. Thus, geographical education contributes to the basic ideas of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child which states that: "The child shall enjoy special protection, and shall be given opportunities and facilities by law and other means to enable him [her] to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially in a healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity."

Secondary Education

As young people grow, their capacity for abstract thinking increases. Practical experience may then be augmented by increasing use of more abstract sources of information. In promoting concern for the future of the global community, emphasis should be placed on avoiding a separation of knowledge and behavior and encouraging environmental competence, regional and national commitment and multicultural and international perspectives.

Higher Education

Many of those who undertake higher education may adopt key decision-making roles in society which require national and international perspectives and environmental competence. Whatever their main discipline area, all courses in higher education should include studies in geography to ensure that graduates are geographically literate. This is especially important for all those who intend to become teachers. It is advantageous for geography teachers to have competence in a second language.

Adult and Community Learning

Geographical understanding contributes to the education of all people in their daily lives. As workers, employers, consumers and citizens, people must understand the international and environmental impacts of their decisions. Only in this way international cooperation, sustainable development and a more just world order will be attained.

The continued development of such understanding throughout the lives of individuals should be achieved through the inclusion of a geographical perspective within all forms of vocational, adult and in-service education.

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Research in Geographical Education

Research in Geographical Education focuses on the improvement of the teaching and learning of geography in primary, secondary, tertiary, vocational and adult education. It should also contribute to the more general development of teaching and learning theories. In order to achieve these ends, it is necessary to pursue both basic and

applied research.

Basic Research is involved with the development of the basic theories of geographical education. It investigates fundamental aspects of geographical education such as the development of children's spatial understandings, perceptions of the environment and attitudes towards people, places and problems.

Applied Research is concerned with appropriate practice in geographical education such as the development and evaluation of teaching methods and materials in fields including new information technologies, environmental and development education, and multi-cultural and global studies.

There should be close collaboration between researchers, teachers and education systems in the selection of research questions and designs. Applied research findings should also be disseminated effectively to encourage appropriate implementation.

Methodology

Research is an important aspect of the role of geographical education at all levels. While empirical research may be undertaken primarily within higher education institutions, classroom-based action research provides a means for all teachers to contribute to the development and evaluation of teaching programs, processes and resources. A full range of qualitative and quantitative research approaches may be employed.

These may include:

- action research,
- empirical research,
- hermeneutic research...

The choice of methodology to be adopted depends on the topic of the research and the questions to be investigated.

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International Cooperation

Geographical Education makes a unique contribution to the creation of global perspectives. In order to promote international co-operation geographical educators should support the aims of the Helsinki Accord (1977) to promote the bilateral or multilateral exchange of experience, in teaching methods at all levels of education, including compulsory, further and higher education, the exchange of teaching materials, and the findings of research on curriculum development, pedagogy, methods of evaluation and epistemology. Geographical educators and teachers in all countries are encouraged to promote such exchanges through the work of the **Commission on Geographical Education of the International Geographical Union** and through the many other international institutions and specific research projects which have geographical relevance and an educational dimension. Some of the international bodies and projects currently active are listed in Appendix A to this document.

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Proclamation

This International Charter, drafted by the International Geographical Union Commission on Geographical Education and discussed with Geographical Educators around the world, was endorsed by the General Assembly of the International Geographical Union at the 27th International Geographical Congress Washington, D.C., U.S.A. in August 1992.

Accordingly, the International Geographical Union Commission on Geographical Education proclaims this Charter to all governments and peoples of the world and commends the principles and practices presented in the charter as the basis on which sound geographical education in all countries should be maintained.

Prof. Dr. Hartwig Haubrich

Chair, International Geographical Union

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