



GHAQDA GHALLIEMA TAL-ĠEOGRAFIJA (MALTA)

GEOGRAPHY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION (MALTA)

c/o Dr J Mangani , Curriculum Centre, The Mall, Floriana

The Committee, National Curriculum Framework as part of the consultation phase launched by the mentioned committee.

Summary and Key Statements

- 1. Geography is a highly-respected academic discipline and geographers have been at the forefront in addressing pressing problems of environmental management.**
- 2. Geography is characterised by a very broad scope and an essentially multi-disciplinary approach in dealing with a wide range of issues. Its practitioners gain unique skills which have been appreciated by organisations and agencies involved in research, management, planning and policy formulation.**
- 3. The GTA believes that current efforts aimed at pigeon-holing this discipline into a highly optional, learning area entitled “Citizenship” is extremely counter-productive.**
- 4. Such efforts will deprive students of badly needed skills which have proved crucial to Malta over the last few decades.**
- 5. It is ironic that, while similar mistaken experiences in other countries have been reviewed and are now being rectified, the Maltese educational authorities seem to be insistent in repeating the same mistakes.**
- 6. Geography is a core learning area which is crucial in the formation of our children and young adults. It deserves enough time in school time-tables to ensure that this can be done adequately**

THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF GEOGRAPHY: THEIR STATUS AND PROSPECTS WITHIN THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK 2011

WHAT IS GEOGRAPHY: AN OVERVIEW

Geography is literally and originally the *illustration or description of the earth*. However, the modern definition would be *the study of the location, extent, distribution, frequency and interaction of all significant elements of the human and physical environment on or near the Earth's surface, particularly its features and of the distribution of life on earth, including human life and of the effects of human activity*.

Physical geography examines the natural environment and how the climate, vegetation and life, soil, water and landforms are produced and interact.

Human geography focuses on economic, political and cultural processes and features in their spatial dimension.

Environmental geography combines physical and human geography and looks at the interactions between the environment and humans.

The main aspects or major topics of physical geography include: biogeography; climatology; coastal geography; geodesy; geomorphology; glaciology; hydrology and hydrography; landscape ecology; oceanography; pedology; paleogeography; and quaternary science.

The main aspects or major topics of human geography include: cultural-; development-; economic-; health-; historical and time-; urban-; tourism-; transportation-; social-; religion-; political-; and population-geography (demography)

Environmental geography and management lies astride the two main subdivisions.

It is important to underline the fact that, despite these specialisations, Geography is the quintessential multi-disciplinary academic area of study. Geographers take great pride that, far before it became fashionable to speak of the breakdown of narrow disciplines, most geographers had been putting that into practice for several decades.

THE VALUE OF GEOGRAPHY IN SOCIETY

(1) The economic stature and competitiveness of a modern country requires increasingly sophisticated levels of geographic knowledge and mastery of geographic tools.

(2) Geographic literacy is essential to a well-prepared citizenry in the 21st century because geographic factors assume greater importance as the world's economies, societies, and political structures grow more global in scale.

(3) It is important to improve and expand geography education so that students in Malta can attain the necessary expertise to fill and retain the hundreds of geography-related jobs.

Occasionally public opinion may be sceptic about the vocational value of geography. The following list of jobs related to geography proves otherwise since there are many types of positions that fit well with a qualification in Geography, including:

Administration and politics (local and general)

Archaeologist;

Armed forces;

Cartographer;

Computer programming involving GIS;

Demographer;

Diplomacy;

Distribution;

Emergency management (e.g. civil protection);

Environmental management

Farming;
General business and trade;
Geologist and mineral exploration;
GIS specialist;
Librarian;
Marketing and market research;
Meteorologist and climatologist;
National parks service management;
Oceanographer
Police corps;
Real estate;
Seismologist;
Teaching;
Transportation management;
Travel agent;
Urban planner and community development;
Volcanologist;
Waste management;
Writer / researcher.

THE PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING GEOGRAPHY AT THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY LEVEL

The purpose and objectives of teaching and learning Geography are

- (1) to promote geographic literacy and improved understanding of global, European, Mediterranean and local cultures among schoolchildren through the application of programmes that employ the geographic knowledge and expertise of fully trained teachers in the subject
- (2) to enable school children to employ a high order of thinking skills to face enquiry-based tasks, which are practicable in life.
- (3) to enable school children to become better informed and more productive citizens
- (4) to instil in schoolchildren a high level of sensitivity, ownership and empowerment towards a sustainable management of the environment
- (5) to increase practical application of Geographic concepts to economic, social and political structures in this and other countries.

(Refer also to 'The Aims of the Geography Curriculum' in 'The Handbook for the Teaching of Geography, page 8 section 2.2, published by the CMeLD (Malta), 2011

GEOGRAPHY AND THE PRESENT

During the past few years a new generation of young and enthusiastic teachers of geography, who are very knowledgeable, dedicated, qualified and ably led by education officers and heads of department, have professionally implemented a geography curriculum that was based on a specific number of learning outcomes with such motivation and verve that the subject has become increasingly popular with most students. As from 2011 it is envisaged that the teachers will put greater emphasis on an enquiry and activity based new geography curriculum.

All the previously-mentioned aspects of geography are studied not only in their global dimension but also in their local context. Therefore, a study of the geography of the Maltese Islands provides students with a knowledge and understanding, as well as proper skills and attitudes for them to become discerning and responsible citizens of Malta. It is only geography that affords learning outcomes about Malta's locations, tourism, settlements, demography, agriculture, weather and climate, landscape, soils, industry, trade, transportation systems, water and environment.

This learning process based on the geographical enquiry not only draws on traditional research in books, archives, articles, and the internet, but is also based on the scientific method of hypothesis testing through data collection, analysis and interpretation with the use of statistical, cartographic and graphical techniques.

GEOGRAPHY AND THE FUTURE

It is therefore proved that, as has been the case for most of the past twenty-seven centuries, geography should stand by right as an independent subject discipline. It should be taught in all classes of all Maltese schools, be they state, church or independent, and all students should be given the real opportunity to choose geography as an optional subject at Form III even if the number of students in any particular college may be low. It is regrettably noted that Geography has been omitted, hopefully inadvertently, from the list of option subjects to be made available in the senior secondary years. (refer to *'Towards a Quality Education for all: The National Curriculum Framework 2011 – the three cycles, p.55. English version*).

The GTA notes well that the Curriculum Framework Committee in the NCF document is proposing 3 model timetables for the Primary and 5 Curriculum Framework Timetables (CFTs) (two of the latter envisage a 6 day week instead of the traditional school week of five days).

It seems that the different colleges, and perhaps even individual schools, would be left to choose any Primary model from those suggested and so within the Secondary schools. The NCF committee even suggests a flexible approach in the choice of the timetable exemplars provided. This may mean that, faced by any presentations to the NCF committee, this will pass on the buck to the Principals and the Heads, since these are being given the responsibility to finalise the timetables. Aware of this strategy, the GTA, just the same, has decided to send this memo to the NCF committee as it considers this committee as the prime mover of the document and any reaction should come directly from it. In the light of all this,

- GTA committee hereby strongly disagrees that the subject be solely put under the learning area of Citizenship (which obviously focuses on 'attitudes). Geography includes core aspects astride the sciences and the humanities and as aforementioned bases its enquiry-based learning process on the scientific method, it should also lie with the ambit of Science learning area.
- The GTA would have suggested a specific learning area entitled 'Social, Environmental and Scientific Education' (SESE) as in the Irish Curriculum since 2001.
- The GTA also disagrees with any attempt at integrating geography into under an umbrella subject title (with the declared aim " to bring together, the subject areas of

- Social Studies, History and Geography..” see page 53, (not to mention aspects of other subjects.) in this hotchpotch of a ‘new’ subject labelled as Citizenship Education. With the major focus turning on ‘attitudes’ as this new subject indicates, most physical aspects and skills afforded by geography will be excluded if such a curricular policy is implemented. Besides this, the declaration on page 59 that “in the proposal C, Citizenship Education **retains** three lessons a week as is customary in Area Secondary Schools” is manifestly false, since the present subject structure in secondary schools does not include Citizenship Education at all.
- The GTA also suggests that Citizen Education be incorporated within the list of cross-curricular themes mentioned in Document 2 of the NCF page 45 section 2, under Principles, Areas and Learning Areas. Indeed the GTA would also wish to refer you to the document entitled ‘Citizen education, Secondary School Curriculum, produced and published by the Department of Curriculum Management, 2004 where it declares clearly that ‘Citizenship is not a discrete subject area for students in Malta. But elements of Citizenship are integrated across the curriculum and are reflected in such subject areas as European Studies, History, Personal and Social Education, Social Studies and Religion’ .
- This Association favours CFT D (as in Table 5 in page 60 of the NCF) which, for the reasons mentioned in this memo, Geography in the Secondary schools merits to retain two lessons a week in Forms 1 and 2.
- GTA strongly opposes the planned reduction of Environmental Studies (under the subject heading of Geography, History and Social Studies, refer to NMC page 80) from a compulsory subject in Forms 3, 4 and 5 to merely an optional subject. (as in page 53 of the NCF).
- GTA strongly disagrees that any optional subject is allocated less than 4 lessons a week, as envisaged by the CFT C (page 61 of the NCF)

Relevant Events

The GTA is below reproducing *verbatim* relevant extracts of a Bill presented in the U.S. Senate in the 2nd of March of 2011. The importance and essentiality of geography in the national curriculum is therein expressed loudly and clearly and no more comments from our side are needed.

TEACHING AND LEARNING GEOGRAPHY IN THE USA

Senate Bill S434 extract: ‘TEACHING GEOGRAPHY IS FUNDAMENTAL ACT’

Mar 2, 2011 - Introduced in Senate. This is the original text of the bill as it was written by its sponsor and submitted to the Senate for consideration.

<http://www.govtrack.us/embed/sample-billtext.xpd?bill=s112-434&version=is&nid=t0%3Ais%3A2><http://www.govtrack.us/congress/?bill=s112-434&version=is&nid=t0%3Ais%3A2>

112th CONGRESS

<http://www.govtrack.us/embed/sample-billtext.xpd?bill=s112-434&version=is&nid=t0%3Ais%3A3><http://www.govtrack.us/congress/?bill=s112-434&version=is&nid=t0%3Ais%3A3>

1st Session

S. 434

<http://www.govtrack.us/embed/sample-billtext.xpd?bill=s112-434&version=is&nid=t0%3Ais%3A5><http://www.govtrack.us/congress/?bill=s112-434&version=is&nid=t0%3Ais%3A5>

To improve and expand geographic literacy among kindergarten through grade 12 students in the United States by improving professional development programs for kindergarten through grade 12 teachers offered through institutions of higher education.

<http://www.govtrack.us/embed/sample-billtext.xpd?bill=s112-434&version=is&nid=t0%3Ais%3A6><http://www.govtrack.us/congress/?bill=s112-434&version=is&nid=t0%3Ais%3A6>

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

March 2, 2011

Mr. COCHRAN (for himself and Ms. MIKULSKI) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

A BILL

To improve and expand geographic literacy among kindergarten through grade 12 students in the United States by improving professional development programs for kindergarten through grade 12 teachers offered through institutions of higher education.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

This Act may be cited as the 'Teaching Geography Is Fundamental Act'.

<http://www.govtrack.us/embed/sample-billtext.xpd?bill=s112-434&version=is&nid=t0%3Ais%3A20><http://www.govtrack.us/congress/?bill=s112-434&version=is&nid=t0%3Ais%3A20>

GEOGRAPHY EDUCATION

<http://www.govtrack.us/embed/sample-billtext.xpd?bill=s112-434&version=is&nid=t0%3Ais%3A21><http://www.govtrack.us/congress/?bill=s112-434&version=is&nid=t0%3Ais%3A21>

'SEC. 261. FINDINGS.

<http://www.govtrack.us/embed/sample-billtext.xpd?bill=s112-434&version=is&nid=t0%3Ais%3A22><http://www.govtrack.us/congress/?bill=s112-434&version=is&nid=t0%3Ais%3A22>

'Congress makes the following findings:

<http://www.govtrack.us/embed/sample-billtext.xpd?bill=s112-434&version=is&nid=t0%3Ais%3A23><http://www.govtrack.us/congress/?bill=s112-434&version=is&nid=t0%3Ais%3A23>

'(1) The economic stature and competitiveness of the United States requires increasingly sophisticated levels of geographic knowledge and mastery of geographic tools.

<http://www.govtrack.us/embed/sample-billtext.xpd?bill=s112-434&version=is&nid=t0%3Ais%3A24><http://www.govtrack.us/congress/?bill=s112-434&version=is&nid=t0%3Ais%3A24>

'(3) Data from the Department of Labour identifies geotechnology as 1 of the 3 fastest growing employment fields serving industries such as insurance, banking, real estate, forestry, and agriculture as well as Federal, State, and local governments.

<http://www.govtrack.us/embed/sample-billtext.xpd?bill=s112-434&version=is&nid=t0%3Ais%3A26><http://www.govtrack.us/congress/?bill=s112-434&version=is&nid=t0%3Ais%3A26>

'(4) Geographic literacy is essential to a well prepared citizenry in the 21st century because geographic factors assume greater importance as the world's economies, societies, and political structures grow more global in scale.

'(6) The National Academy of Sciences urged creation of a national program to improve the geographic competence of the United States general population and the school age population.

'(7) Geography is one of the 'core academic subjects' defined under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

'(8) A recent National Geographic Society survey found that all 50 States and the District of Columbia recognize geography in their curricula or content standards, and an increasing number require geography for graduation and include geography in mandated state-wide assessments.

'SEC. 262. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES.

'(a) Purpose- The purpose of this part is to--

'(1) promote geographic literacy and improved understanding of global cultures among kindergarten through grade 12 students by expanding programs that employ the geographic knowledge and expertise of faculty members in institutions of higher education for the benefit of kindergarten through grade 12 teachers; and

'(2) otherwise advance geographic literacy.

'(b) Objectives- The objectives of this part are the following:

'(1) To increase students' knowledge of, and achievement in, standards-based geography to enable the students to become better informed and more productive citizens.

'(2) To increase the number of highly qualified teachers of United States and world geography and to enable the teachers--

'(A) to improve student mastery of geographic principles; and

'(B) to increase practical applications of those principles.

'(3) To encourage geographic education research, to develop and disseminate effective instructional materials, and to promote replication of best practices and exemplary programs that foster geographic literacy.

'(5) To leverage and expand private and public support for geography education partnerships at national, State, and local levels.

<http://www.govtrack.us/embed/sample-billtext.xpd?bill=s112-434&version=is&nid=t0%3Ais%3A50><http://www.govtrack.us/congress/?bill=s112-434&version=is&nid=t0%3Ais%3A50>

*The GTA committee retains the right to publish this memo.

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20th August 2011

CC

The Hon Minister of Education Dolores Cristina
Opposition Spokesman for Education, the Hon. Evarist Bartolo
The Director General Prof. Grace Grima
The MUT