

Australian 2021 National Summit on Teaching Out-of-field, Online



<https://oofas-collective.squarespace.com/s/TOOF-National-Summit-Report.doc>

Connecting geography education to national priorities: A national report which demands action about out-of-field teaching

Dr Susan Caldis, President GTA NSW & ACT; Lecturer, Macquarie School of Education, Macquarie University

Teaching beyond subject-specialisation is prevalent across subjects and schools in Australia and has implications for teacher well-being and student learning outcomes. A recently released national report reveals the urgent need for a response to out-of-field teaching and calls for a cultural shift in the way this concerning and ever-present phenomenon is acknowledged and responded to.

A definition for out-of-field teaching is not clear-cut. However, it is acknowledged through the eminent scholarship of Hobbs (2013) and Du Plessis (2015) to be understood as (i) teaching beyond subject specialisation, and/or (ii) teaching beyond stage of schooling specialisation, and/or (iii) through self-identification, and/or (iv) also at scale where teachers recruited into Key Learning Areas such as HSIE will be specialised in two subjects, such as History and Society and Culture but will often be required to teach across the suite of HSIE subjects in a Stage 4 or 5 setting, of which geography is included.

To connect out-of-field teaching as a national priority and concern in education overall with geography education, we can look to policy and research to understand why this phenomenon occurs and what future actions are possible as a response.

Geography: Shaping Australia's Future (National Committee for Geographical Sciences, 2018), identifies several concerns facing the future of geography

education in Australian schools. One of these concerns relate to the incidence of out-of-field teaching in geography. It is proposed that the extensive nature of out-of-field teaching across the secondary education sector in part spirals from a lack of provision within initial teacher education.

That there is insufficient preparation for effective geography teaching in initial teacher education programs, for example only nine out of 37 universities across Australia have a full-time specialist geography educator, and many of the geography or humanities courses are taught by sessional staff and/or coordinated by non-geographers (NCGS, p. 85)

A possible action is for data and information to be gathered which can be used as a foundation for geography education stakeholders such as the National Committee for Geographical Sciences, the Australian Geography Teachers Association and its affiliates to lobby Ministers of Education at a local, state and federal level. Such lobbying could include writing to Ministers about the extent of out-of-field teaching occurring in geography, the urgent implications for teacher confidence and student learning outcomes, and request this circumstance be addressed (NCGS, p. 86)

An Australian Council of Educational Research *Policy Insights* report (Weldon, 2016) proposes, and recent research conducted by Caldis (2022a; 2022b) confirms, that whilst geography teachers are recruited for their

OUT OF FIELD TEACHING

specialisation in geography, they are also timetabled to teach out-of-field within a Humanities and Social Sciences setting. Problematically, geography teachers are not offered a full teaching load in geography even when available and often these geography teachers are put in a position where they are responsible for mentoring colleagues who are teaching geography out-of-field. Also of concern is the 'Teaching In-Field' section of the *Australian Teacher Workforce Data Report* (AITSL, 2021, pp. 88 - 89) where data shows that 22% of teachers who are timetabled to teach within the Humanities and Social Sciences (of which geography is part), have no training in the area.

The incidence of teachers being asked to regularly teach subjects they are not qualified to teach as part of their timetabled teaching load remains an increasingly critical issue in Australian schools. It is likened to a plague. Often, teaching out-of-field can become an administrative solution to teacher shortages, however, this is not an appropriate strategy due to the spiralling implications for student learning outcomes, teacher confidence and wellbeing, and the integrity and rigour of a subject.

A national summit was held in October 2021 to discuss the complexities of out-of-field teaching in Australian schools. The Out Of Field – Teaching Across Subjects (OOFAS) Collective were responsible for devising the summit as a prototype for bringing multiple experiences and perspectives together to affirm the need for change and discuss possible solutions. The summit was attended by academics, school leaders, classroom teachers across various career stages, representatives from curriculum authorities, and representatives from professional associations. The Australian Geography Teachers Association (AGTA) was represented by Trish Douglas (Immediate Past Chair) and Dr Susan Caldis, (Chair, also President GTA NSW & ACT).

Five Summit Themes



Source: Australian National Summit on Teaching Out-of-Field, Synthesis and Recommendations for Policy, Practice and Research (Hobbs et al., 2022)

The *Australian National Summit on Teaching Out-of-Field: Synthesis and Recommendations for Policy, Practice and Research* is an outcome of the national Summit and comprises two parts. Part A synthesises contributions to the Summit into key messages, actions and recommendations across five themes. Part B provides summaries of the presentations.

In response to contributions from Trish Douglas and Dr Susan Caldis, the complexities associated with out-of-field teaching in Geography are specifically explored and addressed within Theme 2 School Management and Leadership, Theme 3 Initial Teacher Education, and Theme 5, Teacher Professional Learning.

A total of 22 Actions and 46 Recommendations to inform policy, practice and research have been further distilled to 5 cross-cutting Key Messages



Source: Australian National Summit on Teaching Out-of-Field, Synthesis and Recommendations for Policy, Practice and Research (Hobbs et al., 2022)

It is our responsibility as geography educators to call out to school leadership about the concerns, extent, and implications of out-of-field teaching in geography. Please be assured that GTA NSW & ACT works closely with AGTA and researchers at a state and national scale to build and share a picture about out-of-field teaching in geography. Once enough data is gathered, a focus on lobbying Ministers of Education can occur. However, this slow, long-haul work, and we all have a part to play in promoting awareness and noting situations evident in our local context and sphere of influence.

References

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. (2021). Australian Teacher Workforce Data: National Teacher Characteristics Report https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/atwd/national-teacher-workforce-char-report.pdf?sfvrsn=9b7fa03c_4

Caldis, S. (2022a). *Out of Field Teaching: New teachers survive under pressure* <https://researchoutreach.org/articles/out-field-teaching-new-teachers-survive-pressure/>

Caldis, S. (2022b). *Transitioning into the profession with an out-of-field teaching load*. In L.Hobbs & R. Porsch (Eds) *Out of Field Teaching Across Teaching Disciplines and Contexts*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-9328-1_13 (Chapter 13)

Du Plessis, A.E. (2015). Effective education: Conceptualising the meaning of out-of-field teaching practices for teachers, teacher quality and school leaders. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 72, 89 – 102 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2015.05.005>

Hobbs, L. (2013). Teaching 'out of field' as a boundary crossing event: Factors shaping teacher identity. *International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education*, 11, 271–297 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10763-012-9333-4>

Hobbs, L., Du Plessis, A., Oates, G., Caldis, S., McKnight, L., Vale, C., O'Connor, M., Rochette, E., Watt, H., Weldon, P., Richardson, P., & Bateup, C. (2022). *Australian National Summit on Teaching Out-of-Field: Synthesis and Recommendations for Policy, Practice and Research*. Deakin University. <https://oofas-collective.squarespace.com/s/TOOF-National-Summit-Report.doc>; <https://oofas-collective.org/toofsummit>

National Committee for Geographical Sciences. (2018) *Geography: Shaping Australia's Future*. Australian Academy of Sciences <https://www.science.org.au/files/userfiles/support/reports-and-plans/2018/geography-decadal-plan.pdf> (Chapter 13)

Weldon, P. (2016). *Policy Insights: Out of field teaching in Australian Secondary Schools*. Australian Council for Educational Research. <https://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1005&context=policyinsights>

GEOGRAPHY AND CAREERS: Making the links

Lorraine Chaffer, Vice President GTA NSW & ACT



Raising awareness every day

As Geography teachers we have an important role to play in showcasing where Geography fits into different careers as well as highlighting the **workplace skills and capabilities** developed through geographical studies and inquiries.

GTA have developed a series of small A3 sized posters showcasing different careers with a link to Geography and are currently developing a **NEW SERIES** of three larger posters.

The first of these is *Where will Geography take you?*
Now available for sale.

The other two posters in the series will include:

- a redesign of the Pathways with Geography (course offerings in tertiary institutions).
- a mind map design showcasing workplace skills developed through a study of Geography.