

## Dynamic Geography: Marketing the Subject

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# Foreword

The teaching of geography in elementary and secondary school systems has moved beyond the more traditional “caples and bays” approach to a greater exploration of how global, cultural, economic and environmental issues shape our daily lives, and in turn, how our human actions impact the sustainability of our planet. Through this exploration, educators strive to develop geographically literate students and to provide these same students with an awareness of opportunities for further geography-related education and/or employment. However, recent curricula changes in Ontario, across Canada, as well as the United States and the United Kingdom, do not reflect the cognitive importance of this discipline as geographic topics are often blended with other subjects under the heading “social studies,” while the few existing geography-specific courses are usually deemed as an “elective.” This trend gives rise to a key question of how to impart the value of geographic education on administrators, parents, and most important, students.

The first step is to clarify the question “what is geography?” *The Monograph*, an O.A.G.E.E. (Ontario Association for Geographic and Environmental Education) quarterly publication states that students are expected to use their “geographic knowledge, skills and values to participate and contribute in a meaningful way to society on local, national, and global scales.” The National Geographic Society’s 1994 publication, *Geography for Life: National Geography Standards K-12*, often referred to as the cornerstone of Canadian and American Geographic education, defines geography as “an integrated discipline that brings together the physical and human dimensions of the world in the study of people, places and the environment.” These standards, or guideposts for curriculum development, are based on six main geographic elements: the world in spatial terms, places and regions, physical systems, human systems, environment and society, and the uses of geography.

Next, as geographic educators, we need to recognize and strengthen the pivotal role that we play in the promotion and effective delivery of geographic curriculum. *Dynamic Geography: Marketing the Subject* is one tool that educators and departments of geography should not be without! This resource provides us with a valuable step-by-step guide that is filled with ready-to-use lesson ideas, concrete suggestions on how to promote geography to students, parents and the school community, and the importance of fostering partnerships with fellow educators, community members, and professional organizations. Randy Wilkie concludes *Dynamic Geography: Marketing the Subject* with a comprehensive checklist that educators can use to reflect and enhance their daily teaching practices and to plan future strategies to promote the value of geographic education within the larger school community.

It is imperative that as educators we strive to ensure the development and delivery of strong geographic curriculum and engaging activities to foster student success and enrolment in geography courses. The need to reinstate the value of geography in the mainstream of the educational system has never been more important than it is today, so that our leaders of tomorrow are well-equipped with a compendium of geographic skills to make informed decisions about the myriad of issues across our global landscape.

Kim Earle  
President of O.A.G.E.E.  
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## Geography in Context

A need to promote geography results from several factors. A key reason is the declining trends in the number of students taking geography. This trend is similar to other jurisdictions, such as the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom. In 2006, the British Government was so worried about geography's decline that it launched a £2 million action plan to:

- ❑ go into schools to tell pupils why geography is important
- ❑ provide better training in how to run fieldwork as well as access to a new website
- ❑ advertise, using Monty Python star Michael Palin, to get people to learn about geography

After poor results in a geography awareness survey in the late 1980's, geography groups, such as National Geographic and the National Council for Geographic Education, launched *Geography for Life* and the National Geography Standards as major foci to build geography in the United States. Over a decade later, a similar survey indicated a minimal change.

In Ontario, overall student numbers are climbing in areas of the province. Geography numbers are declining. Curriculum changes, particularly destination designations, impacted on course numbers. For example, changes in the grade 11 Travel and Tourism course from advanced/ general/basic to an open designation was cited for falling numbers. Parents may have directed or pressured children to take university/college courses to the detriment of this open course.

With a compulsory grade ten Canadian history course, students flow from grade nine geography to grade ten history. With the grade 10 Europe and Asian geography courses, there was a geography option for the students. However, with its elimination with the new curriculum, geography was eliminated from grade ten.

Other issues, either provincial or school, have negative impacts, too. Ontario is the only location in North America where geography is taught essentially in all grades. However, pressure to turn geography into social studies courses is a continuing battle. Geography has been a curricular subject since the 1960s. However, geography falls under the Canada and World Studies umbrella. Despite the fact that there are geography courses in all grades from grade one to 12, grades one to six fall under social studies. The only exceptions are grade five and grade ten, as noted above.

Some principals believe anyone can teach geography. Their geography is a 'dumping ground' for non-specialist teachers. Consequently, students face subject teachers that are non-specialists and may lack the motivation that students need.

Despite these issues and others, the Ontario Association for Geographic and Environmental Education (OAGEE) has taken the lead to teach 'good geography.' As the province's subject association, it has continually lobbied the provincial government to keep geography in the forefront of today's curriculum. OAGEE members are instrumental in writing and reviewing the current curriculum. OAGEE conferences, OAGEE's journal the Monograph, teaching institutes, partnerships, and promotions, motivate, train, and teach teachers and students.

The following booklet has been developed to aid in marketing geography in the school, Board, and community with those innovative approaches that place geography at the forefront.