

DEVELOPING THE INTERNATIONAL NETWORK FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING (INLT) GEOGRAPHY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

Internationalising geography education by sharing ideas and practices and developing joint projects between individuals based in different countries has been one of the major achievements of the International Geographical Union's Commission on Geographic Education (IGU-CGE). This has been particularly effective for geography teaching at school level and geographers involved with training school teachers have formed the mainstay of the IGU-CGE. There is, however, no tradition of training teachers who work in higher education. Staff teaching on undergraduate and postgraduate geography degree courses, who have an interest in pedagogy in higher education, but are not involved with school teacher training, have, with some exceptions, not tended to become involved in the activities of the IGU-CGE. Such staff usually look to their professional geography associations and geography education networks, where these exist within their countries, for support. This has left a significant gap at the international level.

This situation is somewhat paradoxical, because international cooperation is encouraged in university research and it is seen as a high status activity and the pinnacle of achievement for the individuals involved. Teaching and learning in higher education, in contrast, tends to be inward looking and concerned primarily with what goes on within institutions and national systems. This, in part, reflects the lower status of teaching in comparison with research in many universities (Healey, 1999). In the 1990s an international movement began, stimulated by the work of the late Ernst Boyer (1990) from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in the United States, concerned with developing a scholarship of teaching (e.g. Hutchings and Schulman, 1999; Martin *et al.*, 1999). Such a scholarship is characterised by critical reflection on practice, contribution to the pedagogical development of the subject, researching the learning and teaching of the discipline, and disseminating the findings (Healey, 2000). One of the outcomes of this movement has been a realisation that there is much to be gained through international collaboration and exchange of good practice and this can lead directly and indirectly to the improvement of student learning. The International Consortium of Educational Developers was established in 1993. Geography has been one of the first disciplines to establish an international consortium. The International

Network for Learning and Teaching (INLT) Geography in Higher Education was established in 1999.

This article has two main aims: first, to outline the origins of the INLT, its aims, how it is organised and the projects it is undertaking; and, second, to discuss the challenges facing the development of the INLT and to suggest ways in which it can support and complement the work of the IGU-CGE.

2. ORIGINS OF THE INLT

Geographers in higher education have accumulated a great deal of experience in developing educational networks. However, that experience has been uneven between countries and most networks have been project-based (Healey, 1998a, b). Moreover, with a few notable exceptions, such as the Erasmus Intensive Courses on Gender and Geography and the National Centre for Geographic Information and Analysis Core Curriculum projects, most of these networks have been insular and have had few, if any, international contacts.

The idea for the INLT emerged from discussions between the three authors of this paper in April 1998. All three of us are on the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education (JGHE)* and ways of effectively internationalising the activities of the journal is a frequent item at Board meetings. Two of us also run national geography education networks - the Virtual Geography Department (USA) and the Geography Discipline Network (UK) - and we were interested in developing ways of collaborating internationally. Importantly all three of us had experience of international networking and personal experiences of the benefits of sharing practices internationally. Using our extensive network of contacts, though these were mainly limited to Anglo-America and Australasia, we invited 50-60 colleagues to an International Symposium to be held the day before the Association of American Geographers conference began in Hawaii in March 1999.

To allow all those who wished to contribute whether or not they were able to attend, we asked participants to prepare short discussion papers around a number of themes and to hold an Internet debate prior to the seminar. Nine themes were identified and three or four people were allocated to each according to their interests. The allocation ensured that there were geographers from at least two different countries preparing each discussion paper. This provided challenges for the authors because, not only were they undertaking a collaborative writing exercise at a distance, but also, with the exception of the overview paper prepared by the convenors, all the groups contained one or more people who did not know each other (Shepherd, 1999).

The resulting papers were put on the Geography Discipline Network (GDN) Web pages in late February 1999 and a three-week Internet debate was promoted over various listservers. A total of 55 comments was received during this period. However, the size of the audience for the debate was much higher, as is indicated by the number of hits on the GDN pages doubling during this period from about 5,000 hits per week to almost 10,000 hits per week. The original papers and the discussion have been archived on the GDN pages and may be accessed at: <http://www.chelt.ac.uk/gdn/inlt/index.htm>.

3. AIMS, PROJECTS AND ORGANISATION

A broad consensus emerged in the preparatory electronic discussions as well as at the Symposium that an international network for the learning-and-teaching geography in higher education should be established. Following small group discussion a concise INLT mission was formulated as follows:

- Goal* To improve the quality of learning-and-teaching of geography in higher education internationally.
- Purposes*
- i. To promote innovative, creative, and collaborative research as well as critical reflection on learning-and-teaching in geography.
 - ii. To facilitate the exchange of materials, ideas, and experiences about learning-and-teaching of geography and to stimulate international dialogue.
 - iii. To create an inclusive international community aimed at raising the profile and status of learning-and-teaching of geography.

Two important points were raised in discussion about the goals and purposes of INLT. First, it should focus on higher education, but from a broad perspective that addresses the concerns of all stakeholder groups including precollegiate, collegiate, teacher training, and adult education audiences. Second, the network should address the learning-and-teaching of geography in higher education in whatever context it occurs, including adult education, distance education, and the private sector.

TABLE 1: INLT PROJECTS

Project	Chair/Organiser	Details and progress
Publication of Symposium papers	Mick Healey	Nine papers published in 2000 in <i>JGHE</i> 24 (2).
Establish a communication network	Brian Chalkley with Iain Hay and Mick Healey	INLT listserv established at Flinders University. Six-monthly <i>INLT Newsletter</i> established. Developed INLT section on GDN Web pages (http://www.chelt.ac.uk/gdn/inlt/index.htm) and established INLT Web site (http://www.inlt.org). Threaded discussion list established at INLT Web site. Plan next INLT Conference at University of Plymouth in Jan 2001 with RGS-IBG.
Develop a database and clearinghouse	Sarah Bednarz and Geoff Robinson with Ken Foote	Developing an easily accessible database containing basic information about geography in higher education around the world; preparing

		country profiles Developing a clearinghouse for educational materials in the WWW.
Establish links with other organisations and projects	David Rich with Mick Healey	Identifying organisations working on related projects and explore establishing alliances or collaborations with them - survey of national organisations supporting the professional development of teachers in HE is underway.
Link student projects internationally	Teresa Ploszajska	Plan is for students from a number of institutions in different nations to collaborate in the creation of 'virtual' fieldtrips or guides of their local area.
Establish a pilot project to explore learning-and-teaching strategies	Ken Foote	Formulating a small-scale pilot study to explore collaboration in teaching-and-learning strategies; funding sources being explored.

Source: Updated from Hay *et al.*, (2000)

Symposium members selected six projects for development and drafted brief development plans for them (Table 1). Many participants also volunteered to continue work on, or chair, projects over the next year. If readers wish to get involved in any INLT projects, please contact Dr Phil Gravestock (Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education; pgravestock@glos.ac.uk). At the close of the symposium volunteers were sought to serve on a steering committee for INLT until the next meeting in Plymouth in January 2001. The co-Chairs of the steering committee are Ken Foote, Iain Hay and Mick Healey. A full list of contact details, steering committee members and project participants is available at <http://www.chelt.ac.uk/gdn/inltrpt.htm> and at the INLT Web site (<http://www.inlt.org>).

4. CHALLENGES AND DEVELOPMENT

Establishing the INLT was the easy bit, the challenge resides in developing and sustaining it to meet its intended aims. Among the challenges facing the INLT are the following:

1. Meeting the needs of participants - The INLT exists to serve those who share its objectives. It is therefore important that we organise its activities as far as is possible to meet the varied needs of the people who wish to participate.
2. Promoting and increasing number of participants - There is a major task in the early stages of the development of the network to make geographers working in higher education aware of its existence. It is from this pool of people that future participants and organisers of the network will be drawn.
3. Extending beyond its Anglo-American and Australasian origins - One of the biggest challenges facing the network is how to involve effectively people from outside the countries of the original participants, especially where English is not their first language (Shepherd *et al.*, 2000).

4. Raising finance and sponsorship to support projects - There are many sources of funding for international subject-based research projects, but far fewer to support pedagogic research and development. Creative ways of facilitating international collaboration will be needed (Jenkins and Healey, 2000).
5. Persuading volunteers to put in the time and effort needed to maintain and develop the INLT - The network is dependent on the willingness of its organisers and participants to commit themselves to making the network operate. The greater the satisfaction and the benefits individuals receive from their involvement the greater the likelihood that the network will be a success.

The INLT wishes to work with the IGU-CGE to develop the quality of learning and teaching of geography. By focusing on higher education and linking with national geographic organisations the aim of the INLT is to complement the activities of the Commission. We would like to invite those with interests in geography in higher education to participate in the INLT's activities. We would also welcome discussion of the strategies and tactics for building international alliances, an area in which the IGU-CGE has been particularly successful. It is hoped that we can take the opportunity of the conference in Korea to explore specific ways in which the INLT and IGU-CGE might support and complement one another that will be beneficial to the participants of both our organisations.

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