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978-1-107-62316-3 - The Teaching of Geography in Secondary Schools: Fifth Edition

Issued by the Incorporated Association of Assistant Masters in Secondary Schools

Excerpt

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THE PLACE OF GEOGRAPHY;
HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT
AND TRENDS

Geography now holds an undisputed place in the curriculum of virtually every Secondary school in Britain. This was not the case in the early decades of the present century, and the status which the subject now enjoys is a measure of the widespread recognition of its unique contribution to a complete education. Until a large measure of agreement had been reached on the content of the subject, and until it had been demonstrated that its study imposed an intellectual discipline comparable to those of the classics and the physical sciences, Geography was ignored by the universities. It is no matter for surprise, therefore, that it failed to appear in the time-tables of the older Public and Grammar schools. By 1900, however, two steps had been taken which paved the way for advance. First, a great deal had been done by enlightened pioneers to rid the subject of the vast unco-ordinated array of facts and place-names with which it had earlier been encumbered. Secondly, the facts and names retained were selected for the significance of their interrelationships. Thus Geography developed into a systematic school subject with a philosophy of its own. The progressive recognition of the subject during the earlier years of the present century as a subject suitable for the award of University degrees led not only to its becoming respectable in the eyes of the schools, but also to a steady increase in the number of qualified teachers capable of presenting the subject in an enlightened and inspiring way.

Apart from its establishment in a secure position in the academic world, however, Geography has come to play an increasing part in the thinking of people in general. Accounts of the great explorations of the nineteenth century no doubt led many people in all walks of life to become interested in distant lands. Participation in the world wars of the present century gave rise to a wider first-hand acquaintance with geographical facts and ideas, whilst the current great expansion in facilities for travel has occasioned even greater public interest in

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many aspects of Geography. This interest has been greatly stimulated by television, with its news items, documentaries and travelogues. Moreover, there is an ever-increasing recognition of the value of geographical training in promoting understanding of the modern world, in facilitating the vital tasks of planning and in affording guidance in relevant cases where governmental decisions have to be made.

The advances which have occurred in geographical thought and geographical teaching since the beginning of the nineteenth century have been associated with, and have to a great extent depended on, three main trends:

(i) the continued increase in factual knowledge of the earth's surface and of the widely varying stages of development reached by human communities in their differing environments;

(ii) the development of a scientific approach to the study of natural phenomena and their interrelationships, accompanied by the evolution of genuine geographical techniques, especially mapping and the use of statistical methods;

(iii) technical advances which, so far as the more developed countries were concerned, increased man's power to transform his natural environment, enabled him to live longer and more healthily and to travel farther and faster than ever before. More recent developments in geophysical techniques helped him to discover important resources in inaccessible parts of the earth's crust. Man's ability to exploit these advances depended on improvements in his recording techniques, the perfection of optical and photographic devices and most recently the application of electronics.

Bound up with the material benefits which follow from technical advance is man's vastly increased power to destroy. The Geographer cannot ignore the deep social and moral issues involved.

DEVELOPMENT IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Throughout the nineteenth century there was a wide gap between geographical thought as expressed by explorers, scientists and philosophers, and the Geography which found its way into the vast majority of schools. Before 1870 elementary education was provided by the 'National' and the 'British and Foreign' schools and by a number of 'Dame' schools. Secondary education was in private schools, some of them endowed Grammar schools, others run on an entirely commercial basis. The Grammar schools in particular were

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concerned almost exclusively with the teaching of Classics whilst in the Elementary schools the geographical knowledge possessed by the majority of teachers was negligible. Thus, during a period when Humboldt, Ritter and Lavalée abroad and William Hughes and Mary Somerville in England were seeking and proclaiming the inter-relationships between the distribution and character of natural phenomena and those of man and his activities, such school Geography as there was consisted largely of learning by rote long lists of facts and generalisations having scant connection with any sort of reality or reasoning.

The following examples are quoted from Major's *Notes of Lessons*, published in 1875 and intended mainly for the use of teachers in elementary schools. The book consists of over two hundred 'object' lessons sometimes in strange haphazard sequence; e.g. in part of the Geography section: New Zealand, the Mauritius, Races of the North American Continent, Races of the Asiatic Continent, The Euphrates, The Mississippi, The Ganges, Ceylon, Belgium and so on.

EXAMPLE I. MOUNTAIN SYSTEM OF ENGLAND

Subject-matter

I. Different systems. (a) The northern, consisting of the Cheviot Hills, and Pennine Chain. The Cumbrian Group, running through Cumberland and Westmoreland. The mountains of Wales, or Cambrian Mountains. The Devonian range, in the county of the same name. The chief ranges of hills are: York Moors and Wolds; Essex and Middlesex Heights; East Anglian and Chiltern Hills; Cotswolds; North and South Downs; Dorset Heights, running through Dorsetshire. Cornish Heights. Clee Hills in Shropshire. Clent Hills, in Worcestershire. Mendip Hills, in Somersetshire, and Quantock Hills, also in the same county. Blackdown Hills on the borders of Devon and Somerset.

II. Description of each. (b) Cheviot Hills, highest Cheviot Hill, 2,670 ft, used for feeding sheep. Pennine Chain, begins near Cheviots, and ends at the Peak, in Derbyshire; chief heights, Cross Fell, 2,901 ft; Whernside, 2,284 ft; Ingleborough, 2,361 ft; and Penygant, 2,270 ft. Cumbrian Group, highest Sca Fell, 3,166 ft and Helvellyn 3,055 ft. The Cambrian Group, highest Snowdon, 3,571 ft. Devonian system, Cawsand Beacon, 1,792 ft. The Pennine Chain is intersected by deep valleys. The York Moors are bleak. The Wolds of York and Lincoln are high tracts of chalk, covered with beautiful grass, used as pasture-land for sheep.

III. Mineral wealth. (c) Present annual produce of coal in England is 120,000,000 tons; iron, 11,000,000 tons; clays, 1,020,000 tons (fine and fire); tin, 14,000 tons; lead, 100,000 tons; zinc ore, 13,000 tons; arsenic, 3,300 tons; ochres, 7,000 tons; copper ore, 160,000 tons, etc. Total value, £35,000,000.

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IV. Drainage of: (d). In the north of England the waterhead is formed between the river basins of the opposite sides of the Pennine Chain. The sources of the rivers of the central, southern and eastern parts nearly meet, and are of trifling elevation. The rivers of Wales run south-east and north-east by the valleys of the Severn and Dee (e).

Method

- (a) Point out different systems.
- (b) Give descriptions.
- (c) Show how important minerals are, and that they are mostly found in mountainous districts.
- (d) Point out drainage and value.
- (e) Question and summarise.

EXAMPLE II. NEW ZEALAND

Subject-matter

I. Situation. (a). South-east of Australia. Breadth varies, average 150 miles, length 1,100 miles, area 99,500 square miles, or one-fifth more than Great Britain. Population in 1871, whites 256,393, natives (Maories) 38,540, total 294,933. Discovered by Tasman, a Dutchman, in 1642 and in 1777 by Captain Cook. Colonised in 1839 by England. Coast line 3,000 miles long.

II. Mountains. (b). Mount Egmont, 8,270 feet high, North Island. Tongariro, an active volcano. Mount Cook, highest in New Zealand, 13,200 ft high. Mount Edgecumbe near Bay of Plenty. These islands are mountainous, with long valleys running between the mountains, which rise in terraces above each other.

III. Rivers. (c). In the North Island, Waikato, Wanganui, and the Manawatu upon the western coast. Hutt, flows into Port Nicholson; Wai-ho or Thames, on the east. In the South Island, Wairau, Molyneux, Buller, and Grey. Rivers are numerous, and are fed by the snows of the mountains, they are rapid, and only fit for navigation for a few miles from their mouths.

IV. Productions. (d). Climate resembles England. Vegetables mostly introduced from Europe—ferns, trees (pines), flax, sweet potato, wheat, etc. Animals: marsupials, and rat, mice, hog, dog. People: British, and natives, the latter are the most intelligent of coloured races. Minerals: gold in abundance, coal, lead, sulphur, alum, arsenic, etc. There are numerous hot springs. The northern island seems to be of volcanic origin. Large quantities of wool sent to England.

V. Towns. (e). Wellington, capital. Auckland, the largest. Otago, famous for gold. Nelson, good farming district. Canterbury, one of the finest grazing districts in the world. Lyttleton, a port. Dunedin, peopled by Scotch. (f).

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Method

- (a) Show its excellent situation.
- (b) Point out mountains.
- (c) Describe the rivers.
- (d) Give a brief sketch.
- (e) Describe the towns.
- (f) Question and summarise.

The recognition, during the greater part of the nineteenth century, of Physical Geography as a separate science allied to Geology but divorced from the human aspects (e.g. political and historical) of Geography, whilst it undoubtedly encouraged a more scientific approach to the physical aspects, nevertheless hindered the development of Geography as a unified subject. Thus the British Association in 1839 included Physical Geography with Geology in Section C, whilst the Universities of Cambridge (1848) and Oxford (1850) recognised Physical Geography as a separate discipline in its own right, a status withheld from Political (or 'Descriptive') Geography. A marked change of attitude late in the century roughly coincided with the ascent to prominence of Commercial Geography (associated with the names of C. G. Chisholm, L. W. Lyde, H. R. Mill, and A. J. Herbertson), which, as a result of its connections with both the physical basis and the grouping and activities of mankind, played an important part in welding the different aspects of the subject into a recognisable and acceptable unity.

By the time this unity was achieved the slow advance of the subject in the schools was at last showing signs of acceleration. This was due to a number of influences amongst which the most important were:

(i) The later developments of the 'Code'. (This consisted of regulations setting the standard for elementary instruction in various subjects, and was first imposed by the Committee of Council for Education in 1860.) Its effects on Geography teaching began to be felt in 1871, and from then until 1897 its syllabuses underwent frequent revision.

(ii) The interest in Geography teaching shown by Geographical Societies, especially the Royal Geographical Society (founded in 1830 to encourage exploration and discovery), the Manchester Geographical Society and the Royal Scottish Geographical Society (both founded in 1884).

(iii) The teachings of eminent scholars, in particular Sir A. Geikie, H. J. Mackinder, H. R. Mill and A. J. Herbertson.

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(iv) The foundation in 1893 of the Geographical Association as a result of a meeting of Public school masters called by B. B. Dickinson of Rugby and presided over by Mackinder.

The association of the 'Code' with the notorious system of 'payment by results' led to widespread cramming and to the publication of many course books in the same vein as Major's, quoted above. Geography syllabuses, however, especially in the 1880s, were relatively enlightened and foreshadowed the modern approach, though their effects were felt only in the Elementary schools and even there did not quickly result in the introduction of enlightened methods. The Public and Grammar schools were completely untouched by the 'Code' and it was not until the early years of the twentieth century that the few prophets of the subject within these schools began to see some reward for their labours.

The efforts of the Royal Geographical Society to improve the teaching of Geography began in 1869 with a scheme for the award of prizes to be competed for by pupils at selected Public schools. This scheme continued for 15 years but did not achieve the hoped-for results and was abandoned in 1884. Of much greater importance was the enquiry carried out for the Society by J. Scott Keltie, into the teaching of Geography in England, in European countries and in the U.S.A. His report, published in 1886 and illustrated by a travelling exhibition of books, maps and apparatus, aroused wide interest and certainly demonstrated the woeful neglect of the subject in most Secondary schools and universities in this country. Though many effects of the enquiry were not immediately felt, an important one was the encouragement given to a small body of schoolmasters who shared the conviction that Geography was important and that, for it to be taught effectively, realism and coherence were essential.

The Royal Geographical Society, through its Honorary Secretary Douglas Freshfield, played a part also in the foundation of the Geographical Association, whose first Chairman was H. R. Mill, the Society's Librarian, and whose first President, four years later, was Douglas Freshfield himself. Mill, as well as Mackinder and Herbertson, played a very active part in the early work of the Geographical Association. In addition, by their writings and lectures on the philosophy and organisation of Geography as well as on methods of teaching it, they contributed greatly towards consolidating its reputation as a valuable educational instrument. In this connection a most important paper described as '... a classic document in the history of the development of British Geography', was that by Mackinder

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‘On the scope and methods of Geography’, read to the Royal Geographical Society in 1887. Thus by the time the 1902 Education Act was passed a great deal of preparatory work had been accomplished, paving the way for the outlook and methods of Geography teaching of the mid-twentieth century. There were still, however, very few University schools of Geography, and only a tiny minority of schools had teachers with the new outlook and with a proper background of geographical knowledge.

TWENTIETH-CENTURY PROGRESS

Although not intended to indicate a teaching approach, Herbertson’s paper ‘The major natural regions; an essay in Systematic Geography’, read to the Royal Geographical Society in 1904, is generally regarded as a landmark in geographical method. It was received with hostility at the time; yet his synthesis of climate, vegetation, animal and human life to produce a unified picture of each of his regional types has had a profound and enduring influence on the outlook of many geographers and on the approach to their subject in the schools. Before his death in 1915 Herbertson had modified details of his original scheme, whilst considerable research and a continuous accumulation of new knowledge have enabled workers to introduce further improvements. The principle remains, however, and although not unchallenged it still provides the basis for a great deal of geographical teaching.

In 1905 the Board of Education published new regulations and recommendations regarding the ground to be covered in a Secondary school Geography course, with valuable suggestions as to methods and apparatus. At the same time university and other examining boards issued new Geography syllabuses. Herbertson himself, writing in the *Geographical Journal* in 1906, warmly commended the Board of Education requirements for a four-year Secondary school course as ‘a substantial mark of progress’, though he criticised the absence of reference to human conditions—‘people, their plants and animals, their industries and modes of life’—in the early stages. He expressed his view that ‘the geographical teaching in early years should be concerned much more with human beings and their surroundings than with a logical presentment of so-called mathematical, physical and biological geography on the lines of the text-book of physiography. The best logical order is not necessarily the best pedagogical order.’ In the same article we also find this small

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paragraph: 'That the Board should recommend field-work and excursions is a great matter, for many teachers who have not tried them declare that it is impossible either to find the time for them or to carry them out with profit. Competent teachers who have tried them tell different stories.' That was in 1906, and much more of the article could well be mistaken for a contribution to a mid-twentieth-century issue of *Geography*.

Yet on the whole in Secondary schools, Public and Local Education Authority alike, Geography was not at that time held in much esteem and was badly taught, largely by verbal methods. Little progress had been made in the universities, amongst which the only established Chair of Geography was that held by Lyde at University College London.¹ There was (in 1906) a School of Geography at Oxford and Lecturers or Readers in the subject at the London School of Economics and in the Universities of Cambridge, Manchester and Liverpool. Even, therefore, in schools where the desire for the enlightened teaching of Geography existed, it was difficult to find teachers sufficiently well trained in the subject to satisfy that desire. There were few, if any, headmasters and no inspectors with a geographical training; Geography did not figure amongst the subjects qualifying for the award of university scholarships; and Geography rooms with satisfactory equipment were virtually unknown.

That there were progressive and forceful personalities at work in the schools is evident, however, from writings and lectures published by the Geographical Association before and during the First World War. The universities were also stirring and it would seem that the tremendous burst of activity which awakened them in 1917 in spite of—or perhaps because of—the war, could no longer be restrained. From then until 1933 there was scarcely a year in which new University Geography courses, departments or professorships were not established. After a lull the process was resumed with full vigour in 1943, in the midst of the Second World War, and has now reached a stage where it is exceptional for a university in the United Kingdom not to possess at least one Professor of Geography. This tremendous expansion in the provision of university Geography courses has had several important effects on the Secondary schools:

(a) a rapid increase in the number of schools in which Geography is well taught, and in the number of pupils who are entered for it in external examinations;

¹ The Professorship which had existed since 1863 at King's College, London, lapsed in 1909.

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(b) the recognition of Geography as an optional subject amongst those qualifying for University entrance, thus supplying heads of schools with an inducement to include it in their sixth-form curriculum. Moreover, although even now there are few entrance scholarships offered specifically in Geography, it is accepted as an optional subject for the purpose of Scholarship awards by most Universities;

(c) the increasing recognition by Local Education Authorities that the efficient teaching of Geography demands the provision of properly designed and equipped Geography rooms.

DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 1944

By the 1944 Act the term 'secondary' was redefined to apply to a stage of education and not to a type of school. In the re-organisation which followed the passing of the Act most Education Authorities developed their secondary schools on 'tripartite' lines; up to the middle sixties the greater part of secondary education was carried on in separate Secondary Modern and Secondary Grammar schools. These were often sharply differentiated in their attitude to Geography and in the accommodation, staffing and facilities for teaching it. During the past twenty years, however, it has become increasingly usual for graduate geographers to take up specialist posts in Secondary Modern schools, and at least in newly built schools Geography room facilities are now equal to the best in Grammar schools. In both types 'streaming' has up to the present been the rule rather than the exception, though the development of individual and team work and, in the larger schools, of 'setting', have reduced the disadvantages of streaming.

Comprehensive secondary education in one form or another was begun by some Authorities within a few years of the coming into force of the Act, and in many areas it may become the only kind available in the late sixties and the seventies. This development, together with the intended raising of the minimum school-leaving age to 16, confronts teachers in general and Geography teachers in particular with a challenge. Immediate steps must be taken to devise integrated five-year courses for pupils of all levels of ability; courses having close relationships, at all stages, with the world outside the school. In some well-established Comprehensive schools providing education for children between the ages of 11 and 18 streaming has been largely abandoned for teaching purposes except, perhaps, for the least able pupils. Children take their places in sets which vary in personnel

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from subject to subject. Movement from one Geography set to another is made possible by using closely related syllabuses all possessing a common basis of essential material. Schemes of Comprehensive education are far from uniform, however; a great deal of experiment will undoubtedly take place for many years to come.

Perhaps the most realistic impression of the present position in schools may be obtained from an examination of the amount of time allocated to Geography in the time-table and of the extent to which it is recognised as a subject for which special accommodation and equipment must be provided.

In the first place it is quite clear that in all types of Secondary school where pupils enter at the age of 11 Geography is taught to all pupils, usually for two or three periods a week, for the first two years—in the great majority of such schools for the first three years—of the course. In most Secondary Modern schools all pupils take Geography for the whole of the four- or five-year course. Most Grammar schools, however, have schemes designed to enable their G.C.E. candidates to concentrate in their fourth and fifth years on fewer than the full number of subjects of the curriculum. In a small proportion of these schools Geography is one of the G.C.E. subjects taken by all pupils; but even where it is not, judging by reports from schools and by the number of 'Ordinary' level entries, a high proportion of pupils do in fact study Geography for the whole of the five-year course. So far as the pupils who enter for the G.C.E. 'O' level examinations are concerned this problem of choice of subjects is the same whatever kind of school they attend; and the introduction of the Certificate of Secondary Education has extended the problem over an even wider range of pupils. There still remain, however, a considerable number of pupils in Secondary Modern schools, in Bi-lateral schools with 'Modern' streams and in Comprehensive schools, who do not sit any external examination. Not all of these study Geography but for the large number who do it must be presented as a fascinating practical subject designed to play a vital part in their education for citizenship.

The Independent schools call, perhaps, for separate mention. So far as educational problems are concerned their tradition of recruiting pupils at the age of 13 instead of 11, and of taking a very high proportion of them from Preparatory schools, differentiates them from the Maintained and Aided schools. The boys have only three years (often less if they are gifted) in which to attain the 'O' level standard. Unless Geography holds a strong position in the Prepara-