



J-READING Arrives at the 10th Anniversary: Reflections

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Abstract

The 10th anniversary of *J-READING* is placed in perspective relative to the development of several other journals that have had significant influences on geography education. Personal reflections regarding the journals that have intersected with the professional editorial role of the author are offered as a segway to highlighting the successes of *J-READING* during its first decade in open source publishing.

Keywords: J-READING, Geography Education Journal, Reflections on Journal Editing

1. Introduction

A decade of time strains the human mind to remember the geographic events that occurred ten years ago. In 2012, the Costa Concordia cruise ship ran aground off the Tuscan island of Giglio. The London Olympics and Paralympics were held at a newly constructed complex, and Xi Jinping became the president of the PRC. An event of importance specific to geography scholars was the founding of *J-READING* – *Journal of Research and Didactics in Geography*, founded to serve a deeply dedicated community of teacher scholars in Italy and other countries. Italy, the land of great operas, great art, great cuisine, and exceptionally great wine launched the world's newest journal for those who consider geography and geography education to be among the most important subjects a person needs not only to survive, but to thrive and enjoy a long life.

2. A Journey among Notable Journals

J-READING is continuing the journey into the second decade of its founding beginning in 2022. It is not only the end of the past decade, but the beginning of a new decade for a journal that has made its mark on teaching, research, and scholarship. *J-READING* successfully joined the ranks of other journals in geography education in 2012. In that year, there were the long-established journals that were well known for their contribution to geography education scholarship. The journal *Geography* (1901 - UK) and later renamed *Teaching of Geography* (1975 - UK), the *Journal of Geography* (1902 - U.S), *Historiens & Géographes, à l'origine Bulletin de la Société des Professeurs d'Histoire-Géographie* (*Historians & Geographers*, originally the *Bulletin of the Society of History-Geography Teachers* (1911- France), *Zeitschrift für Geographiedidaktik* (ZGD) (*Journal of Geography Education* 1973 - Germany), and *Journal of Geography in Higher*

Education (UK – 1977) were prominently established as print periodicals, just to name a few.

Then in 1992, *International Research in Geography and Environmental Education* (IRGEE) was published as the premier journal for the Commission on Geography Education of the International Geographical Union (CGE-IGU). The introduction of a new international journal was consistent with the mission of the CGE and provided a clarion call for educators in geography and environmental education worldwide to submit their scholarly works. The introduction of IRGEE was followed *Research in Geographic Education* (U.S. – 1999) with the mission to encourage research and publish empirical and theoretical articles.

The transition to a new millennium was accompanied by huge changes in the publishing industry. The transition from print to digital publishing was first reported in the early 1970s, and by the 1990s it was becoming the wave of the future. By 2000 scholars were largely able to prepare their documents as electronic files on computers and other digital devices, submit them to editors using the Internet, and receive feedback and markups of papers digitally. Geography journals were making the transition to electronic publishing, but just as importantly the journals experienced a demand to digitally prepare the back issues of their journals as archives that were searchable on the Internet. The expense and expertise required to develop and manage archives were beyond the reach of many journals. However, major publishers had the resources and employees with the skills to construct and make archives accessible – for a fee. The result was that many journals were purchased, or the rights to publish were acquired, by publishing companies and a usage fee or royalty was paid to the professional society or company that was the initial publisher. IRGEE is a good example, having begun publication with a publisher in the UK that was acquired by Taylor and Francis (Informa Group Ltd) several years later. The acquisition set the stage for IRGEE to migrate to an entirely online article submission, review and acceptance process.

New journals were begun that embraced the online publishing model. Publishing online was relatively inexpensive and could produce a steady financial stream for enhancing the journal

and improving the quality of the publication. *Review of International Geographical Education Online* (RIGEO) was first published online in 2011 as an open access journal. It was followed soon after, in 2012, by *J-READING – Journal of Research and Didactics in Geography*, property of the *Associazione Italiana Insegnanti di Geografia* (AIIG; Italian Association of Geography Teachers). As an open access journal, *J-READING* provided reader access online to all of the journal's published articles, reports, and reviews. Open access publishing made current issues of the publications available immediately. With time, it was possible to access the archive of all past issues of the journal., an innovation *J-READING* presented to the readership in geographic education from the first issue.

It was my great pleasure to be invited as an associate editor, as were Sirpa Tani (Finland), Clare Brooks (UK), and Cristiano Giorda (Italy), in addition to Cristiano Pesaresi (Italy), and participate in the introduction and successes of *J-READING* over the past decade. The founder and first editor in chief of *J-READING* was Professor Gino De Vecchis, Professor of Geography, University “La Sapienza” of Rome, and the current editor in chief is Professor Cristiano Pesaresi (since Number 2-2018), of the same University.

3. Charting the Course for a Journal

I met Gino De Vecchis, at the memorable 1987 conference of the *Associazione Italiana Insegnanti di Geografia* (AIIG; Italian Association of Geography Teachers) in Urbino (Figure 1). I also established a collegial friendship that has lasted for many years Peris Persi, and Alberto Melelli, as well as meeting many other geography educators during the conference. The walled city of Urbino, which became a UNESCO World Heritage in 1998, and the conference were new geographic experiences for me as I had not yet visited the Adriatic Sea coast of Italy. The enthusiasm and engagement by the participants in the conference, the variety of papers and discussion sessions that were presented, the field study sessions, and social program were exceptional.

My introduction to the prospectus for *J-READING* came years later, in 2011, and it was quite accidental. The planning phase for the publication had been underway for some time

among Gino De Vecchis and his colleagues. I was living as a guest for several weeks at a villa in Arezzo. In planning my stay, I had reconnected with my colleague, Alberto Melelli, Professor of Geography at the Università degli Studi di Perugia. The university in Perugia was a short journey by train from Arezzo. Alberto Melelli arranged for me to present a lecture in the Department of Geography to students and faculty members who shared special interests in the didactics of geography. The occasion was truly memorable due to the genuine hospitality that is only possible among friends and colleagues in Italy (Figure 2).

Several geographers from Rome also joined my scheduled presentation and discussion in Perugia. Among the guests was Professor Gino De Vecchis, Professor of Geography, University “La Sapienza” of Rome, whom I had met in Urbino years earlier. During our conversations in Perugia, Gino De Vecchis informed me of the plans to begin a new journal devoted to geography education. I concurred with him that it was an excellent idea and the open access concept would make it appealing to a wide range of educators in geography. We discussed the use of “didactics” in the journal title. Didactics is a term not commonly used in educational writing in the United States. However, occasionally when the term is used in the U.S., it usually implies teaching, or providing instruction in a manner that is scientific and carefully planned, but also pleasant for the students. The more commonly used term in the U.S. is “pedagogy,” which includes classroom methodology, strategies, and techniques of teaching. There was every reason to be optimistic that *J-READING* has expanded the discussion through research regarding the didactics/pedagogy divide and their influences on geography education.

During the past decade, *J-READING* has become a well-established journal in geography education that receives international attention and recognition. The range of topics for articles that have appeared in *J-READING* since 2012 has been extensive. The articles have been submitted by authors from Italy, which complements its sponsorship by AIIG and commitment to remain the voice of Italian geography educators, as well as representatives of the international community of geography ed-

ucators. A nationally sponsored journal, such as *J-READING*, has obligations to represent research on didactics that occur within the home country. It is the established way to communicate changes in curriculum research and didactics necessary to maintain a viable geography curriculum. At the same time a journal has an obligation to diffuse the national research to a broader global audience, as well as to inform the national readership of advances and research in didactics that are occurring in other countries.



Figure 1. Urbino (1987) at the conference of the *Associazione Italiana Insegnanti di Geografia* (AIIG; Italian Association of Geography Teachers). Among others, in the photo, we see from the left: Alberto Melelli (the first one), Peris Persi (the third), Joseph Stoltman (the fourth).



Figure 2. Members of the Geography section at the University of Perugia (2011). Joseph Stoltman is in the centre and near him there are Fabio Fatichenti (on his right) and Doretta Canosci (on his left).

4. An Associate Editor's Perspective

J-READING's record of published articles over the past 10 years reflects that obligatory balance that an editor and editorial board seek to maintain. The attachment to the professional society, AIIG in this case, must be maintained. At the same time, outreach must be extended beyond the home country for a journal to demonstrate the power of cross-fertilization of research and didactics among authors internationally.

Over the years I served as editor and co-editor for several geography education journals. The first was (along with John Steinbrink) in a journal editorial capacity for a special section within the *Journal of Geography* entitled Teaching Geography Today, as co-editor (along with John Lidstone) for *International Research in Geographic and Environmental Education* and as editor of *Research in Geographical Education*, as well as on the editorial boards of numerous journals. The role of a journal editor is personally enlightening in many ways, but especially as an editorial radar for new developments in an academic subject. Articles arrive that adhere to the specifications of a journal's mission statement or in the complete absence of the author's attention to the purposes for the journal as presented in the mission statement. A mission statement is a general, but reliable guide to the parameters set by an editor. However, there is leeway and what is referred to as "editorial license" that enables an editor to push the boundaries of a subject as well as to strengthen the core fabric of a journal. A balance between those responsibilities, or "alternative editorial licensure," makes the difference between a journal becoming a somewhat ho-hum reporting mechanism, and its emergence as a dynamic, engaging projectile of ideas, achievements, and future ideas and possibilities for the readership. In turning the pages of *J-READING* or scrolling through the screen display, one gets the impression that the journal and its editors have been able to maintain the balance and necessary dynamism during a successful decade of publishing *J-READING*.

My editorial experience has also provided me with mixed opinions regarding the mecha-

nisms used to rate a journal's prestige. Professionally prepared papers presenting research, philosophy, critical analysis, and many other topics, largely fit into the context of a journal's mission. Those journals are read by numerous people who engage with the contents of a discipline and the topics that emerge as well as the many who pursue the preparation of lessons and the teaching of students (didactics). For some, journal articles represent a means of getting help with content or lesson design. For others, journals provide a reinforcement for their current level of knowledge regarding the professional role they play in the education arena called the school. And, for others, it is the pure joy of learning something new and engaging with content and ideas that may or may not be of use in the work they complete. Much of the rating system is intended for scientific validation of papers and for advancement through the professorial ranks in higher education.

Journals are also awarded recognition for their service to the scientific dissemination of information. Midway through the first decade of its publications, in 2015, *J-READING* achieved prestigious national recognition when the journal was awarded the *Agenzia Nazionale di Valutazione del Sistema Universitario e della Ricerca* (National Agency for the Evaluation of the University System and Academic Research) by the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (De Vecchis, 2015).

In the announcement of the award, De Vecchis stated¹:

We are fully aware of J-Reading's main function: to bring the published contributions to the attention of the widest spectrum of experts and researchers possible, as the selection made by the journal cannot (and must not) replace the judgement of the scientific community. In this sense ANVUR's recognition represents the opinion of the Italian scientific community with respect to the capacity that J-Reading has so far demonstrated in carrying out this function to the best of its ability (p. 6).

¹ De Vecchis G., "J-Reading has been awarded 'Class A' by ANVUR", *J-READING (Journal of Research and Didactics in Geography)*, 4, 1, 2015, pp. 5-6.

The editors and contributors assume the major responsibility for the quality of a journal, and *J-READING* is no exception. The journal is published in English, a second language for many of the contributors over the decade of publication. The preparation and composition of an English language journal submission is challenging, even when the author is a first language English speaker. Having been in the editorial position of receiving article submissions to IRGEE from non-English first language authors, the work of the editor and the editorial staff is enormous. The design of the paper may be perfect, the ideas developed are easily recognized and important, and the paper makes an important contribution to the discipline. However, the grammar, sentence structure, and logical consistency of the paper submitted are not acceptable. Even prior to being distributed for peer review, the editor and staff must work with the author to improve the presentation of the document. Editorial license takes effect and a marginally presented paper is elevated to a meaningful contribution ready for peer review.

In reading the published papers in *J-READING*, I am relative certain that considerable time and intellectual capital was spent by the editors and staff (and referees) to consistently publish the quality papers that populate the pages of the journal. Over the past decade *J-READING* has published exemplary papers by both Italian and international scholars; the journal has heralded the concept of online and open access to the global community; the journal is recognized for its integration of research in geography and didactics within articles published; and the journal has set and achieved a high standard of format and content for every manuscript published.

Congratulations are in order to the people who have made *J-READING* a success. It takes editors with dreams and commitments to pursue a journal's successful journey along the scholarly pathway. It takes contributors who envision the journal as the most appropriate outlet for their research and writing. It takes moral support and capital resources from professional societies, individuals, and other sponsors, and it usually takes an institutional anchorage for an available office, additional

space, and, importantly, it takes institutional recognition of the importance of the endeavor. Each of pieces have to be fitted together just as an architect designs a structure. Like a structure, *J-READING* has required updating, such as GIS and spatial visualization, making additions and structural adjustment, such as the Teachings from the past and Re-reading notable scholarship from geography, and Geographical notes and (practical) considerations, plus several more. Each brings a unique attraction to *J-READING* and the connections it makes to its readership who go about the important task of geographic education.