



Teaching Geography facing current and future challenges. Cross perspectives. Introduction

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1. Current challenges and geographical education. Some possible research questions

The teaching of Geography, like all other school subjects, changes in whole or in part according to the new challenges and issues that scientific Geography has to deal with (Bagoly-Simó, 2021; De Vecchis et al., 2020; Giorda, 2019; Shin and Bednarz, 2019; Legardez and Simonneaux, 2011). Despite this, national programmes or guidelines are sometimes lagging behind in transposing both the progress of the reference science and the issues arising from social, economic and political changes. And what about the transposition of these programmes into the proposals of school textbooks? (Charpentier and Fatichenti, 2023).

This said, although “we are all geographical beings” as stated by Joublot-Ferré (2018, p. 10) and “Geography’s objective as a social science is to study the relationship between societies and the space around them” (Collectif, 2020), what kind of teaching do we want to offer to the students of today’s primary and middle schools? Should this teaching practice evolve? How and under what conditions? For what purposes?

As a rule, in many countries school curricula are developed by joint committees. But what is the opinion of geographers in this regard, assuming they take part in these committees?

As we live in a society where access to information is fast and direct, would not it be vital to “[...] help children explore a world full of complexity with increased awareness; a world affected by so many pseudo- or para-scientific assumptions, by so many impostures that it would be appropriate to be able to identify and if possible to counter”? (Charpak et al., 2005, p. 215).

This being the case, it is worth asking how we could improve school curricula if “the aim is to train future citizens able to debate social issues, to train open minded people, able of questioning the world or themselves” (Giordan, 1999, p. 238). Knowing that “pupils decode what they see (or what they are given to see) through their own analytical grids” (Giordan, 1999, p. 167), we should “[...] go beyond the appearance of things and ideas we have *a priori*” (Charpak et al., 2005, p. 45). Being aware that, as the authors themselves stated, “[...] changes are not sought for the sake of making them, but for the expected results!” (p. 162).

If the teaching of Geography in primary and secondary schools must evolve, then we should be able to identify and define the most useful knowledge for our students. What disciplinary pattern should be offered to pupils? (Develay, 1996). And from a methodological perspective, what innovative teaching methods can be developed? What place should be reserved – and with what possible connection with the proposals to be made – for the more descriptive and encyclopaedic geographical knowledge, e.g. the knowledge of the names of geographical places, which since the late 19th century supports pupils in better understanding their country, the Earth, etc.? (Lefort, 1992). What teaching tools can be adopted to foster a reflective attitude towards current transformations in the functioning of our societies, for example the major themes of the 2030 Agenda or other crucial and interconnected issues such as climate-related problems and/or energy transition? Moreover, is it possible to introduce topics and teaching-learning situations that allow students to rethink such complex issues, to interconnect different geographical scales (local, national, international) in order to understand their relationships, possibilities and limits? In other words, is school Geography ready to train today's students to meet these challenges and answer to new needs?

2. Different approaches, research methods and case studies for a common purpose

The seven contributions presented in this thematic issue offer an articulated panorama of reflections and proposals about Geography education in response to current and future challenges. Although starting from different contexts – national, institutional or disciplinary – all the articles share the purpose of rethinking school Geography so that it is more connected to contemporary issues, more meaningful for students and consistent with the aims of education for citizenship and sustainability.

Fabio Fatichenti (*Teaching and learning Geography in Italian First Cycle of Education: knowledge elements and proposals for a renewed curriculum*) first underlines the marginalization of Geography teaching in Italy,

particularly in the secondary school. Then he focuses on the First Cycle of Education (primary and secondary school) and proposes an update of the curriculum based on a theoretical framework and the results of a research conducted among teachers. The article addresses key issues such as the content to be taught, the role of Geography in an interdisciplinary perspective, the relationship of Geography with Civic education and the issue of teacher training, with particular attention to the complexity of contemporary environmental and social challenges.

Philippe Charpentier (*Teaching Geography in France primary schools using everyday objects and the surrounding environment*) proposes an innovative approach to the teaching of Geography in French primary schools, centered on the use of objects and artefacts present in the environment (inside and outside the classroom) where pupils live every day. This proposal, which invites a reappraisal of what is habitual and often overlooked, aims to push pupils to confront fundamental geographical questions and consequently to develop a more attentive and reflective geographical reasoning. The activation of linguistic resources and the use of tools and methods to gather information and communicate effectively are at the heart of an educational process aimed at promoting a deeper understanding of the world and enabling students to take an active role in their environment.

Sylvie Joublot Ferré (*Pour un renouvellement de l'enseignement de la géographie à l'école par l'approche critique, les spatialités et les territoires. Mise en discussion depuis la formation initiale des enseignants au Québec*) believes that new ways of teaching Geography need to be devised at school in the face of the many current challenges (e.g. cultural and social diversity, climate change and competition between different types of education). The author therefore proposes a renewal of the teaching of this subject based on new conceptual references – particularly the Geography of spatialities, critical Geography and the concept of the learning territory – in an article focused on the discussion of a teaching scenario based on the university's proximity territory and related to the process of metropolization.

Max Meissl, Matthias Kowasch and Jill Tove Buseth (*Ecological sustainability in Austrian and British geography textbooks*) analyze the thematic representation of ecological sustainability in lower secondary school geography textbooks in Austria and the United Kingdom as part of education for sustainable development. The qualitative content analysis reveals different thematic and didactic approaches: while the British textbooks offer a problem-based, contextualized approach to topics of ecological sustainability, the Austrian ones provide neither sufficient reference to geographic content knowledge related to climate change and global warming, nor sufficient contextual information to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of ecological sustainability issues. The comparison also reveals that in both cases the textbooks show shortcomings in terms of both ecocentric perspectives and students' approach to experience.

Bernadette Mérenne-Schoumaker (*L'enseignement de la géographie face aux défis actuels et futurs. Réflexions et propositions au départ d'une expérience menée en Belgique francophone*) draws on her long experience in teacher training in the French Community of Belgium to identify the main challenges and priorities for a renewal of school Geography. The hoped-for renewal of Geography education cannot however be limited to proposing new content, but also requires a rethinking of the approaches to be used to enable students to be actors in their own learning. The article insists on the need to provide students with fundamental knowledge to interpret the complexity of current social and environmental processes, to grasp the interconnections between different scales and to assess the opportunities, limits and implications of the actions to be taken. The desired renewal calls in particular for new digital resources, the development of critical thinking and media and information literacy, and a more effective relationship between Geography education and students' experiences outside school.

Alain Pache, Nadia Lausset, Thibaud Bauer, Marianne Milano and Philippe Hertig (*Learning to construct school knowledge in lower secondary school geography: what are the challenges for teacher training in the Swiss*

context?) present an action-research project focusing on the construction of geographical knowledge by students in lower secondary school. The theoretical framework focuses on a multi-stage knowledge transposition process and the development of critical and complex skills. The results show that students, when processing the construction of geographical knowledge for teaching purposes, begin to put themselves in the teacher's shoes and autonomously and reflectively construct their own knowledge. The article emphasizes the importance of bringing students closer to the epistemology of academic Geography to help them translate it into meaningful classroom experiences, with a positive impact on both disciplinary understanding and teaching skills.

Finally, Francis Veriza (*Teaching history and geography in Madagascar: Between colonial legacies and paths to decolonization*) addresses the case of Madagascar, where the teaching of Geography still occupies a prominent place in school curricula. However, even though Madagascar has not been a French colony for a long time, these curricula are still strongly influenced by a colonial vision, with a prevalence of content referring to France. The author therefore proposes an urgent decolonization of the curricula, emphasizing the importance for students to value geographical knowledge of their own country. Such a change is considered essential to strengthen students' territorial identity and contribute to educational justice.

We hope that, taken together, these contributions can offer an articulate picture of how school Geography can and should evolve in response to current social, environmental and educational transformations. Although moving in different contexts, all the authors converge in recognizing the need for curricular, methodological and epistemological renewal. This thematic issue therefore invites teachers, researchers and policy makers to reflect critically on the way Geography is taught and to collectively imagine new trajectories for the development of Geography education in schools worldwide.

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