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## THE OPPORTUNITY OF THE GEOGRAPHER IN PROMOTING SCHOOL GEOGRAPHY\*

By RICHARD ELWOOD DODGE

GEOGRAPHERS the world over, however closely they may confine their investigations to some specialized field of the vast subject of geography, are all interested in making their favorite subject of more importance and value to the world at large. The development of research in geography, as in any field of science, depends largely upon the financial and moral support that can be obtained from public or private sources. That support is more readily given to a subject that is generally recognized as contributing to the welfare of mankind. Applied science is in many cases therefore more generously supported than pure science, because applied science contributes immediately to the betterment of some of the arts and sciences, while pure science does not seem so to do. Inasmuch, however, as progress in applied science involves the previous development of the principles of pure science to be applied in a practical way, it behooves workers in the science of geography to see to it that the value of their work, in either the pure or applied form, is made manifest to the public that the greatest progress may be made in all phases of geography.

The contributions of investigators in geography gathered from work in the field, the laboratory or the library, are the pure science results which aid in the constant better organization and better understanding of the science of geography. The largest application of pure geography is in educational geography, considering broadly that educational geography

\* Read for the author at the Twenty-first Anniversary Meeting of the Queensland Branch of the Geographical Society of Australasia, Brisbane.

includes all geography which contributes to the general culture and special training of children and adults, whether that training is secured formally in some educational institution or informally through the reading of geographic literature. Training for securing the best results through an informal personal study of geography can only be obtained through a previous formal study of geography in schools and colleges. The work in geography in schools and colleges should therefore be so arranged and organized as to give the best training in the principles of geography, in the methods of classifying geographic facts, and in the use of standard reference works in geography.

Geographers can do no more helpful or valuable work than in assisting in the betterment of educational geography in schools and colleges, working with the officers responsible for the curriculum and showing how applied geography may be used in everyday life in school and out. The better training of pupils in schools in this generation will mean the stronger support of both pure and applied geography by the adults of the next generation. Therefore geographers who aid in educational geography are building for the future and are contributing to the ultimate advancement of the science as much, if not more, than they could in any other way.

We cannot expect leaders in education to be experts in all fields of thought, and but few educational experts have more than a general knowledge of geography. Only the expert geographer can view the whole vast field of the subject, see its perspective and judge as to the relative values of the phases that may possibly be made a part of the curriculum arranged for the training of beginning students of geography.

Hence geographers have a fundamental responsibility in reference to educational geography—a responsibility which they only can properly meet and which presents problems of great difficulty.

No geographer in arranging a course of study for school or college classes can afford to think only of the best, most logical and most scientific order to be followed by adults in special work in scientific geography. He must always face the practical problems that confront the professional educator and frame his steps of progress in geography so as ultimately to lead to the best and most permanent results from the geographic standpoint. He must recognize all the time that the work he proposes must be within the abilities of the students of the age for which it is intended. Otherwise the work will fail of its purpose as a contribution to the knowledge and power of the students, and later work will consequently suffer. He must also bear in mind that but a very minor proportion of the students who begin geography in the earlier years of

the school will ever become trained geographers. The larger number will drop out after a few years of work, and hence the course must be so arranged that at no matter what age the pupil leaves school he will have gained something that will help him in after life.

The problem is also difficult because most schools have few teachers qualified to teach geography as it might be taught and hence the course outlined must be one that the layman can follow with success. Also beginning pupils are studying of necessity several topics at the same time. Hence the geography work to be most effective must be so planned as to help the work in history and literature and be closely related to the other work in science. It is not well to organize a school course to teach geography to children, but one to teach children and to prepare them for later life, in which preparation geography should receive strong and adequate attention.

It is for the geographer therefore to suggest the larger topics in geography that should be included in the school and college courses; to show the best order in which these topics or phases of the subject should be taken up to be of the best immediate usefulness and of the most permanent value to the pupils. He should also suggest in general the way in which the topics should be presented and aid teachers and educational leaders in getting a better grasp of the essentials of geography and in becoming able to teach geography more effectively. In those regions where school geography has come down through the generations unchanged and where a spirit of conservatism keeps in the curriculum many topics of little or no use to the pupils in any way, or which are not essential elements of the science, it is for the geographer to show what topics can replace the old to the best advantage.

Leaders in education are very liable to jump at straws, to insert in their school courses in geography new materials, often of only passing interest, of little or no value in the child's training and frequently worthless geographically, because some educational expert, with perhaps no knowledge of geography as a science, has suggested such topics as valuable as they are so very different from the topics that have persisted through the generations.

After a geographer has fulfilled his duty as outlined above, he must allow the educational leader responsible for the curriculum as a whole to take the initiative in deciding the amount of time to be devoted to geography and to arrange the work by years. The class-room teacher, within the confining but not galling limits set by her superior officers, should have free scope to teach her assignment of work as best she can, bearing in

mind that effective results will only be obtained when the work of her year is based on the work of the previous years, and leads up to that of the next higher year. The details of class-room practice in reference to the teaching of any particular topics cannot be worked out by the geographer unless he has had experience as a class teacher, though he can usually offer many suggestions as to ways of teaching to be tried and tested in the class room. The geographer can suggest the best reference books, the most valuable maps; he can show how maps should be used, how the globe can be made most valuable in the class-room and how the results can be tested from the standpoint of good geography.

With these considerations in mind, the question naturally arises as to what the experience of years and the mandates of good geography have determined as a good course in geography as a preparation for life or for higher work in geography as a science.

It is obvious that in the schools for pupils below thirteen or fourteen years of age, the course of study in geography should be a unit, so divided and arranged as to be of the most value in the training of the youthful mind, and which when completed should lead up to the work of the secondary or high school for pupils from fourteen to eighteen years of age, as that work leads up to the college work.

Ideally there should be a close and unbroken sequence of work in geography from the earlier years of school life through the university. In practice, at least in America, there is a more or less close-knit unit in the elementary school. Unfortunately however there is a long hiatus between this work and the work of the secondary school. The secondary school work, furthermore, is mostly physical geography preparatory to college entrance examinations with an occasional course in commercial geography. Regional geography, which is vital as a part of an adolescent's training for life, is practically omitted from the secondary school, and our graduates of eighteen go out into the world or into college with but little more knowledge of the general geography of the world than they had at the close of their elementary school course four or five years before. This is neither training for further good work in geography in a college or for using geography in everyday life. This great weakness in our plans is now being recognized and it is probable that the ideal condition will gradually be approached more nearly as the years go on.

The elementary school work is at present, therefore, the most thoroughly organized phase of geographic education. Experience and thought have shown that good geography, which can be approved by geographers demands a certain order of study in the elementary schools if we would

make our work practical, strong and disciplinary at every step and as a whole.

The first step in a logical course of study for children should naturally be, as has long been recognized in Germany and England, an analysis of the simpler elements of the vast geographical complex that surrounds a child in any locality and which we call, for lack of a better name, home geography. Home geography is, or should be, the fundamental division of a course of study, because pupils must study the local and familiar phases of the subject in order to appreciate the geography of distant and unknown regions, which can only be interpreted as it can be compared with the known. If the method of science involves "proceeding from the known to the unknown on the well-ordered assumption of the uniformity of nature" (Lloyd Morgan), then good science as well as good teaching requires that beginners should first study their home locality. Home Geography is one of the most difficult phases of geography teaching because any locality presents such a vast series of possible geographic topics and relationships that might be studied. It is obvious, however, that attention should mainly be devoted to those phases of the home environment with which the children come into the most personal contact and the study of which will lay the best foundation for an easy and successful approach to the study of the world or some remote area of the world. Geographers can therefore assist teachers materially by indicating what features of the home locality are most valuable geographically by selecting the vital and world-true relationships and showing how these may be studied so as best to lay a good foundation for all later work in the subject. No two localities have the same environment and hence no course of study can fit any two localities, though the general plan of procedure and the general order of topics may be the same in many contrasted localities. Geographers can help the cause in no better way than by aiding teachers in securing a better understanding of their home locality, and showing how to distinguish between the simple and the difficult and how to lead up to generalizations of permanent value.

Good teaching requires that the foundations laid in the early years should never have to be overturned. The ordinary generalizations of the textbooks are expressed in definitions. The geographers should aid in framing generalizations and definitions that not only define but which may be built upon without overturning the foundations as the years go on.

For instance, the well-worn definition of a river as a "body of water rising at a source and flowing into the ocean," is a bad definition because it is only partly true and because it must be cast aside when in later years

the idea of a river as including detritus and water in varying proportions, as rising in thousands of sources instead of many and as not of necessity reaching the ocean or any body of standing water is developed. This is but one instance out of many that might be chosen to illustrate the point that a definition should summarize the phenomena already studied in reference to a particular topic, and yet be expressed in such a way that future study may be an expansion of the earlier study and not the replacement of the false by the true. Definitions should not only be true for the home locality, but contain the essential ideas of the topic from a world-wide standpoint. Geographers can help good geography teaching vastly by showing how true generalizations of permanent value may be built up through a study of the special cases most immediately at hand.

The study of home geography should lead up to an understanding of the world as a whole in order that beginners may see something of their relations to the inhabited portions of the globe and have a background for the later detailed work on some of the continents. This approach to the world whole should be made through an expansion of the home geography, and there should be no abrupt break between two phases of the subject. By a skillful use of the globe, which is assumed as a miniature representation of the world, children can be led to see their relations to other peoples and distant parts of the globe just as easily and satisfactorily as the relations to local market gardens and manufacturing centers. Through the study of the products of commerce which contribute to their food, clothing or shelter, children may be led far afield geographically and yet feel that the work is personal in that they are studying their own geographical relations to the world.

A study of the simpler reasons why one locality or nation is dependent upon other distant regions for products in everyday use will lead naturally to certain generalizations in reference to world climate and regions of habitability. These generalizations, which may be summarized in the heat belts, give a basis for dividing any continent in later work. Generalizations as to shape and the broad climatic divisions of the world, as to the distribution of the continents in direction and distance in days' travel from the home locality are all that it is necessary to make at this time. Such generalizations can be developed through the study of the relation of the world to the home locality, and these are outgrowths of the normal educational method of studying the unknown through the known. It is not necessary at this time to study the relation of the world to the sun and moon or the motions of the earth or to make broad generalizations as to the divisions of the world into great highlands and lowlands. Such mat-



ters are not necessary at this stage, are too impersonal to be of advantage to the beginners, and if studied will be memorized and not worked out logically and meaningfully, as early generalizations should be. Teachers may have some difficulty in deciding on the regions of the world to be selected as contributing to the home geography and as the best centers through the study of which to develop the larger climatic features of the world. Geographers can be of great service therefore in helping to pick out the strategic points in the commercial geography of the world as related to the home locality and in showing how these selected areas may be studied to the best advantage for the purpose in mind.

Untrained teachers will become too formal in their work, will fail to approach the study from the life side, as it ought to be and will follow a text if possible, instead of making the text their servant, as texts always should be.

The larger part of the later work in school geography must of necessity be the study of the continents. It is usual to study certain of the continents, and in some cases all of them, twice. Unfortunately, however, in many, if not the large majority of schools, the treatment of the continents in both cycles is from the same standpoint, so that the second treatment is merely an expansion of the first treatment. This means that the work in the second cycle is often dry and uninteresting to the pupils because they think they know all that is to be treated. Hence the work is ineffective and does not lead to the best educational results. The fact that many pupils leave school by the end of the fifth or sixth year requires that their own country should be treated early in the course. Those who remain through the elementary school should have as serious and complete a treatment of their own country as possible, as a climax to their school work in geography. The intervening years should be devoted to the other countries and continents, dividing the time according to the relative importance of the different regions from a world standpoint.

The work of necessity, therefore, covering the same general field throughout several years, good geography and good teaching demand that the method of approaching continental study shall not be the same throughout the long time devoted to this phase of the subject. The earlier treatment cannot be as severe as the later because the pupils are not capable of as intensive work. This work should also be as closely related to the earlier work in home geography and the study of the world as a whole as possible, so that the simple facts and relations already considered may be applied and developed. The point of departure, therefore, should be the lives and activities of the people as related to their environment. The

work should be mainly a study of life consequences in a given region through the study of which the physical causes may gradually be developed and shown to be of great importance. It is the life side of geography and not the formal physical side in which young children are most interested and to which they will give the best attention. Because an adult expert geographer would naturally begin with the causal side and work out to the application of his principles in the interpretation of involved life consequences in commercial and political geography is no reason why all students of any age should follow the same sequence. Children under twelve or thirteen years of age are not capable of sustained scientific thinking and gain little value from a method of study that works from causes to consequences in geography. On the other hand, the analysis and comparison of life relations in different regions, through which the pupils gain a knowledge of the facts of geography in everyday life, gives a background of experience and knowledge on which better geography teaching can be based in the later years of the course. The constant bringing out of new phases of the same controlling influence leads the pupils to see the importance of the physical side of geography and the necessity of formulating that side if they would learn to approach the subject of geography as the adult mind ought to approach it.

Hence in the earlier years only those large phases of surface and climate should be emphasized which are necessary as a setting for a study of the life relations of the people. The task then is to study the occupations, industries and inter-relations of the people so as constantly to bring out the causal phases of the subject which make the work knowledge and not mere information.

Later comes a time in which naturally the principles of physical geography, which have been so constantly appearing should be organized and systematized. Then a few months should be devoted to the study of the simpler phases of physical geography as such, in which reference is constantly made to the relations of people to their environment. Such a use of the facts already studied provides the best sort of review because it necessitates the use of materials from a different point of view. Physical geography, or better, the principles of geography, should not be studied in an elementary school as an individual phase of geography. They should be given emphasis and brought for a time to the center of the stage because the logical unity of the course as a whole demands it, and because the succeeding study of certain continents or countries from as serious a standpoint as the age and ability of the pupils permit, necessitates this emphasis. If rightly taught, physical geography becomes practically only a summary,

slightly elaborated, of the essence of the earlier work, and a necessary foundation for the later study of certain parts of the world from a causal standpoint.

In the last years of the course causal geography should prevail. The work should be from causes to consequences, as the earlier work was from consequences to causes, thereby making the later work, not merely an elaboration of the earlier, but an outgrowth of the earlier as a climax to a unified course of study in which at every step the method of presentation has been adapted to the children's abilities, needs and interests.

The causal treatment should be from the large and general features of position, topography, soil, mineral wealth, etc., to the consequent distribution of industries, occupations, centers of population, routes of commerce and trade, etc. Such a method of presentation makes the principles of geography as prominent as the facts, prevents the work from merely being a training in memory skill, gives the pupils habits of study, shows them how to study more geography in later life, either personally or under tuition, and incidentally trains them in the elements of scientific thinking as can no other subject in the curriculum.

Pupils gain most from that course of study which makes them to the fullest extent masters of their own powers, and which does not lead them to become incomplete gazetteers of facts, many of which are erroneous and a large number obsolete. Causal geography rightly taught, and for which the foundations have been carefully laid in the lower grades, is therefore stronger both for present and for future needs than mere memoriter work in which things and not the reason for things are the central thought, and is better geography.

Good geography teaching demands a series of progressive phases in a course of study. At each stage the temptation to roam afield and to waste time on the unimportant details is very great, and only the expert teacher, geographically trained, can test her own plans from the standpoint of good geography teaching. Geographers therefore should help in organizing the subject as a whole, should show what points and principles to bring out, should assist the teacher in deciding between the important and the unimportant, should aid her in securing good maps, should guide her in her study of a map that she may aid her pupils in making map study essential, and should contribute in every way possible toward making geography work in schools of such a character that a geographer cannot stigmatize it as poor or valueless from the standpoint of good geography.

In America we are coming to follow an outline of work similar to that sketched above; our geographers have many of them given their time

freely and abundantly to helping teachers and workers in school geography. The heaven has worked down from the top, as it always must in elementary education, and already the work in school geography has been largely revolutionized in little more than a decade. There have been many mistakes, large and small, and some of the suggestions made by expert geographers have proved unsatisfactory because beyond the abilities of the pupils. But the strong position of geography in our better schools, the much more general distribution of good geography teaching, are largely due to the inspiring and suggestive work of the leaders in geography. This work has proved of great value to the science as a science, and is destined to prove of greater value yearly, so that geography among the adults of the next generation will be in better repute than it has been in this.

Geographers everywhere can well afford to aid in such work, for it brings good geography to the masses and not to the few merely, as it does if they confine themselves wholly to research. Geographers everywhere should recognize their opportunity, if not their duty, in this regard, and put their shoulders to the wheel and work with the leaders of education and the teachers. Growth, improvement, strength, cannot come in school geography if the subject is left entirely to the inexperienced (geographically) workers in education. There is no more important phase of the subject than elementary school geography and no phase in which more good work remains to be done. Let us hope that geographers will come more and more to recognize its importance and help to explore what is still to many geographers a "terra incognita."