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UNESCO
Source Book for Geography Teaching



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Preface

AS PART of its programme to help educators and teachers profit by experience in other countries, Unesco is devoting a series of studies to the main subjects of the school curriculum. These studies are designed for publication in the form of handbooks of suggestions rather than as specific recommendations for any particular method or syllabus.

The present book was prepared by the Commission on the Teaching of Geography of the International Geographical Union. The original manuscript was written by seven co-authors and some 450 copies of a draft edition in English and French were sent for comment to geographers and institutions throughout the world. The final version was then prepared on the basis of comments received.

A large part of the book is devoted to practical suggestions on ways and means of improving teaching methods and to the whole range of materials necessary for the effective teaching of geography at both the primary and secondary levels. The book supersedes Unesco's earlier publication *A Handbook of Suggestions on the Teaching of Geography* (1951). It is hoped that it will help to raise the standard of geography teaching and at the same time enlarge the contribution of this important school subject to better international understanding.

Grateful acknowledgement is made to Professor Benoît Brouillette, Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, Chairman of the Commission on the Teaching of Geography of the International Geographical Union, and his colleagues in the International Geographical Union who have helped to draft the text, as well as to all those who provided comments and suggestions. Although the final work is in every sense a co-operative effort it should be clearly understood that any opinions or points of view expressed by the authors with regard to the facts stated are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Unesco.

Foreword

UNESCO PUBLISHES the present study in the belief that geography can make a meaningful contribution to the advancement of mutual understanding between peoples. Improvements in teaching geography for better international understanding are needed, both in those countries where the subject has long been included in curricula and in those seeking to modernize their education system as a whole. The 1950 International Geography Seminar, organized by Unesco, was a recognition of the need for these improvements, and this recognition has been reflected in related conferences and meetings sponsored by the organization since that time.

Of all school subjects, geography is perhaps the best suited to bring about this understanding, concerned as it is with civics, patriotism, and the information essential to a knowledge and appreciation of other lands and national groups. Geography can show not only how peoples have lived and are living, but also what they have contributed to the common heritage of mankind; most important of all it can demonstrate that despite political divisions, the inhabitants of the earth are becoming increasingly interdependent in their economic and cultural relations.

In asking the authors to undertake this source book, Unesco's main aim has been to aid and guide all those who teach or study in the world's schools. The task has not been easy. To begin with, it was essential to decide what function the source book was to fulfil. Two possible objectives were considered: to try and show how geography helps to improve relations between peoples, or alternatively, to give teachers practical advice on how to improve their teaching methods. The authors chose the second, being persuaded that geography cannot possibly achieve its primary objective unless it is well taught.

The work was carried out in two stages. In 1961 a preliminary version of the source book was prepared and some hundreds of copies were distributed throughout the world. These elicited a wealth of suggestions, which were taken into account in the preparation of the definitive edition. The most constructive of these suggestions came from teachers and educators with experience of geography teaching. Thus a group of Asian teachers, meeting in Bangkok at the end of March 1962, were in full agreement with the principles set out in the source book but wanted more examples taken from outside Europe. Other teachers attending a symposium in Kampala, Uganda, were more severe in their criticism. They considered the first version of the

source book too theoretical and called for an essentially practical guide-book intended for teachers who derive their training from their own experience and are almost without teaching material even in regular syllabuses. 'We teach geography', they said, 'with our "uhuru" in view, that is to say, our attainment of economic and political freedom, and to train our pupils to think for themselves and not imitate others.' In short, what they needed was a regional text-book produced by geographers well acquainted with local problems. It is to be hoped that when adapted to local conditions the Unesco source book will meet this need. In this connexion one could mention the intelligent use made of the source book by an instructor at the Ramullah Teacher Training Centre in Jordan. With only one copy of the preliminary version available, he extracted those passages of most use for his teaching staff and had them mimeographed, at the same time adapting the practical exercises to the local situation. For Chapter III, 'Working around the school', for example, his questionnaire was based on observations to be made in the Palestinian refugee village of Ramullah and the sketch map was drawn from the 1:50,000 topographic map published by the Jordan Government. For the lesson on Malaysia in the next chapter, he substituted one on Egypt from the approved Jordanian syllabus. Another change suggested by him later in the same chapter, for teaching pupils observation through pictures, was to substitute for the views of the Urubamba Valley in Peru photographs of the East Ghor Canal works on the Yarmuk, a tributary of the Jordan (photographs provided by the United States Operations Mission). Finally, to overcome the lack of photographic material, this enterprising instructor had his teachers use the colour illustrations on the calendars distributed free by the larger airlines.

Another correspondent, Mr G. C. Last, head of a teacher-training school in Ethiopia, also urges the teaching of geography along positive lines. Pupils who are starting school today, he points out, are the administrators and technicians of tomorrow, and must therefore be taught that better techniques can be used to master the intransigence of nature. The bush schools Mr Last visits are thatched huts with floors of beaten earth, without seats for the pupils or chalk-board for the teacher. The success of the teaching given depends entirely on the skill and ingenuity of the teacher, which is why it is important that his training should have a strong practical bias. Despite such unfavourable material conditions, Mr Last remains optimistic. During his tours of inspection he notes the progress that is being made and has himself set an example by producing textbooks adapted to the situation, one of which is mentioned in the African section of our bibliography.

The source book is intended for all who teach or learn geography, whether as a separate subject or as one of the aspects of social studies. Both approaches are defensible provided the specific object of the discipline is recognized and respected. It is even argued by René Clozier¹ that the incorporation of geography in social studies, as practised in a number of countries, should become universal, at least at the primary level.

The new syllabus in force in Ethiopia is a good example of the latter approach,² with geography and history integrated from the third to the sixth grades inclusive, on the ground that the essential object of both disciplines is the study of man in his natural environment (geography) and the record of his evolution (history). As the author points out, the foundation of the Axumite kingdom could not be explained without showing how the pioneers found, on the Tigré plateau, geographical conditions similar to those of the uplands of the Yemen whence they came, nor could the survival of a primitive form of Christianity in the heart of Islam be understood unless account were taken of the geographical situation of Ethiopia—isolated on tablelands which held out against the Muslim assaults. The choice of Addis Ababa and not Entotto as the capital of the kingdom can only have been due to the geographical advantages offered by the site of the former (central position, point of junction of land routes, abundant water supply, easily defended position). And briefly, the whole of the country's human geography—agriculture and population distribution—springs from traditional practices which the Sabaeans brought with them from across the Red Sea.

Geography can be incorporated in social studies even at the secondary school level. This is done notably in the United States, where this practice has been current since the end of the nineteenth century.³ But it would not be right to say that, at the upper secondary level, all branches of geography are incorporated in social studies. It is true neither of physical geography nor of economic geography: the former is included in the earth sciences syllabus and the latter is studied amongst the economic sciences. This is one of those many matters that are optional and the happiness of the choice depends on circumstances. Geomorphology, for instance, was highly regarded at the beginning of the twentieth century and, together with meteorology

1. René Clozier; *The teaching of geography and adaptation of syllabi to the mental level of pupils*. Chicago, Denoyer-Gepbert, 1960, p. 15.

2. G. C. Last; *Handbook for social studies teachers in Ethiopian elementary schools*. Addis Ababa, Co-operative Education Press, 1960, p. 4.

3. William D. Pattison; 'Geography in the High School.' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (Washington), Vol. 52, no. 3, September 1962, pp. 280-4.

and oceanography, has been coming back into fashion since the International Geophysical Year. Economic geography has gained a following during the last forty years or so, mainly in institutions training students for careers in business and administration. World geography came in later, at the time of the second world war, in the ninth and tenth grade syllabuses and efforts are being made to incorporate it in social studies, in particular in its relation to world history. But students prefer the latter and the geography option comes far behind it in popularity. Nevertheless, serious endeavours are being made to attract more students to geography and it is planned to make it an independent subject. However, the course that holds out the best promise is that in general geography which will be available in the near future for the leaving classes—the 'senior year elective course in geography'. It has been planned with great care and will give the subject a leading place in the training of those students who plan to go on to university studies.

The Unesco source book may at first sight appear to be intended only for those teaching geography as a separate subject. Obviously, however, even when geography is incorporated in social studies, there can be no other way of teaching it if its identity is not to be completely lost.

The authors¹ of the source book are geographers trained in the school of those who have raised the subject to the honourable place it now has in the academic world. Their thanks are due to the Secretariat of Unesco which initiated the project and to all those—too numerous to mention—who responded to their request for constructive comments and criticism on the preliminary version of the book. Their special gratitude is extended to those who supplied the material for a number of examples taken from extra-European settings, for instance Professors Hisao Aono (texts on Japan), Hassan Awad (town plan of Fez, Morocco), S. P. Chatterjee (quotation on the Himalayas), John P. Cole (lesson on Peru), W. L. Dale (texts on Malaysia), Pierre Gourou (text on the Congo), G. M. Hickman (Saharan oasis and Brazilian fazenda), K. Kularatnam (lesson on Ceylon) and T. W. Luna (text on the Philippines). Finally, they express their thanks to the Council of the International Geographical Union which permitted the members of the Commission on the Teaching of Geography to hold the meetings necessary to carry their work to a conclusion.

In dedicating this book to teachers of geography in schools

1. List of authors, p. xvi.

throughout the world we entertain the hope that it will encourage and stimulate them in their often unrecognized but ever absorbing task of awakening young minds to the realities of today and tomorrow.

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1 Importance and educational value of geography

The highest form of education is that which is not confined to imparting knowledge but which brings our life into harmony with all existence.

Rabindranath Tagore

Importance of geography

IN THE second half of the twentieth century, everyone, however ill-educated, is genuinely in touch with the whole of his planet, and is becoming increasingly well informed about the position the earth occupies in the immensity of space. That is why, like the 'Petit Prince' of the poet-airman Saint-Exupéry,¹ man wants to know more about his vast domain; and of all school subjects, geography is the only one that can give him a picture and an explanation of it which meet the exigencies of a life the horizons of which are almost limitless. Yet the subject would be impossibly overloaded for anyone who sought to learn in detail everything about geographical phenomena, and it therefore becomes inevitable that the teaching of it be selective.

Need for selective teaching

There are now so many maps, atlases, dictionaries and encyclopaedias printed in large and widely circulated editions that the learning of ever-growing lists of geographical features and names of places, countries and products can no longer be regarded as essential. Such feats of memory can be left to those who take part in radio or television competitions. A certain sum of knowledge is, however, essential if one wants to locate geographical phenomena correctly. The pupil is therefore called upon to make an effort which is certainly not negligible but is nevertheless proportionate to his mental level and his own personal experience of life.

1. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry: *Le Petit Prince*, Boston, Houghton, Mifflin, 1946. 108 pp. (Educational edition by J. R. Miller.)