

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 135 711

SO 009 832

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 TITLE Issues Confronting Geographic Educators in Europe and the USSR: The View from IGU.
 PUB DATE Nov 76
 NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council for Geographic Education (San Francisco, California, November 24-27, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 HC-\$1.67 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS Changing Attitudes; *Comparative Education; Curriculum Development; *Educational Change; Educational Improvement; *Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; Environmental Education; Foreign Countries; *Geography Instruction; Higher Education; Interdisciplinary Approach; Political Influences; Process Education; Social Sciences; Symposia

IDENTIFIERS Europe; USSR

ABSTRACT

Major changes in European and Russian geography instruction primarily at the secondary level are reviewed and implications of these changes for American geographic education are suggested. The information on European and Russian education, taken from papers presented at the 1976 International Geographical Union meetings in the Soviet Union, indicates that changes in European geography instruction are widespread and are due mainly to three stimuli: First, the perception of the discipline of geography is changing. For example, Britain and West Germany are moving secondary school geography more towards the social sciences. Specific curriculum changes in eastern Europe are less clear, but a general interest is expressed toward modernizing geography teaching and stressing environmental education. The second stimulus is the increasing attempt of geographic educators to meet social demands such as orienting students towards particular ideologies, preparing them for employment, and dealing with social change and cultural diversity. The third stimulus for change is the integration of modern educational theories and practices such as problem solving, decision making, analysis, synthesis, and program evaluation into the geography curriculum. Suggestions for improving American geographic education include involving teachers in the process of change, diversifying curriculum materials, and preparing geographers for employment in business and government. References are included.
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ISSUES CONFRONTING GEOGRAPHIC EDUCATORS
IN EUROPE AND THE U.S.S.R.:
THE VIEW FROM I.G.U.

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N.C.G.E. Meeting, November 1976
San Francisco

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Introduction

This afternoon, I'd like to discuss with you the work presented by geographic educators at the 1976 I.G.U. meetings in the Soviet Union. I don't plan to review all the papers, but to focus on some issues which recurred throughout the presentations of the European and Soviet geographers who were the main contributors to the sessions. At the conclusion of my review, I'll raise some questions about American geographic education which stem from my reactions to the European and Russian material. I'd also like to have your reactions, both to their work and to my inferences.

First, I should give you some idea of the scope of the meetings. The I.G.U. Commission on Geography in Education sponsored a week-long symposium in Leningrad between July 19-26. The Symposium theme was the training of teachers of geography for secondary schools, and ten papers were submitted on this theme. Another 15 papers covered a variety of topics, mostly on curriculum problems, and there were some research reports, chiefly from the international projects which Joe Stoltman has been coordinating.

Sessions were attended by 100 or so people, about half the participants being Russian. Other geographers were mostly from western Europe and the United Kingdom, with a few Eastern Europeans, several Canadians, four of us from the U.S., and a few individuals from other parts of the world.

In addition to the paper sessions there were two workshops, one organized by Joe Stoltman and Peter Okunrotifa on research in geographic education, and one which Dee Fink and I gave on evaluating geography teaching in higher education. There were also some field trips, and receptions, though these were primarily tourist oriented or social events, rather than geographic. In general, the

symposium provided a good opportunity to get to know Western geographers informally, but relatively few chances to interact with the Russians except in the formal settings. In the sessions, translations made some discussion possible, though frequently the Russian geographers would deliver lengthy, prepared commentaries on papers, rather than interacting in spontaneous discussions.

The sessions the next week in Moscow at the main I.G.U. meeting followed much the same mode. Thirty-four submitted papers were printed, and most of these delivered. Again, Russian contributions accounted for the greatest number, though this time quite a few came from Eastern Europe also. In addition to the paper presentations, there was a report on the work of the Commission on Geography in Education by the chairman, Norman Graves. There was also a written report and one paper from the Working Party on Research on the Geography of Education and some national displays.

Now I'd like to turn to the issues which I think permeated the presentations. One feature readily apparent is that geographic education is undergoing a number of changes, especially at the secondary school level, almost everywhere in Europe and the Soviet Union. A major exception is in France, where geographic educators appear to be clinging conservatively to regional geography and may lose ground as government directed innovations point to the introduction of economics and sociology into the schools (Claval).

The changes which are occurring seem to be responses to three stimuli:

1. First, there is a changing perception of the discipline of geography.
2. Second, there is a desire by geographic educators to meet social demands, whether this be orienting students towards particular

ideologies, preparing them for likely employment or dealing with social change and cultural diversity.

3. Third, there is an attempt to integrate ideas from education into the development of geographic curricula, particularly to move from an emphasis on memorization towards the development of thinking skills in students. Some work is also being done examining the implications for geography teaching of theories of child development.

Changing Perceptions of the Discipline

The greatest response to a changing perception of what geography is about seems to have been occurring in Britain, where the so-called "new geography" has been gaining ground over the last decade. Essentially, there has been a shift from regional geography and man-land themes towards spatial and analytical approaches, moving secondary school geography more towards the Social Sciences, and in some cases combining geography into "integrated studies" programs, particularly with other Social Sciences (Graves; Naish).

The same trend is apparent in a national curriculum project in West Germany, known as the R.C.F.P., in which the shift has been from regional description to systematic geography (Barth; Geipel). Both countries are also focusing more on those aspects of geography which deal with social issues. The R.C.F.P. for example, has units on environmental conservation, on problems of underdeveloped countries and of rural regions in industrialized countries. It deals with questions of regional structure and industrialization, with urban development and with demands for recreation and the development of recreational areas.

The specific content of curricula in eastern Europe is less clear, but again, geographers report that they wish to "modernize" geography teaching and bring school work closer to research. In Czechoslovakia, the Geographical Society in the Czechoslovakian Academy of Sciences is involved with school geography for the first time, and is engaged in the development of new texts and materials for teaching at all levels (Machycek), encouraging analytical rather than descriptive approaches (Mistera). The Russians are making the same general comments, and developed a new syllabus between 1968-72 which they are currently introducing and evaluating in the schools. Their work concentrates in physical and economic geography and deals particularly with human relationships with the environment, with the "rational" use of nature and environmental conservation and with regional economic development. The directions they expect to go include greater emphasis on materials from research, particularly on models, economic theory and mathematical approaches, and increased concern with nature preservation (Andreev et al.). They also have shifted from attempting comprehensive world regional coverage to dealing with selected areas (Maksakovsky).

Meeting Social Demands and Needs

Now I'd like to turn to the geographers' responses to social demands and needs. Ideological goals loom large in the Russian discussions of school curricula, and they stress the importance of using geographic education to shape dialectical-materialist points of view (Matrosov; Maksakovsky). This applies as much to the teaching of physical geography as to economic. Goals include fostering a world outlook, a respect for work, readiness to take an active part in building the Soviet social system, bringing the students to

have confidence in the Soviet social and economic system and inculcating a love of the motherland (Matroosov). Similar statements of goals were made by Bulgarian (Vekilska; Lazarov) and East German geographers (Heinrich Forster; Herrmann) who discussed new curricula in terms of the need to develop socialist personalities. The East Germans particularly are following Soviet models as they prepare materials for their secondary education system which has been extended by one year.

Work in Yugoslavia is also being directed by socio-political objectives, but along somewhat different lines (Apostolov). Again, there is the desire to use geography to form dialectical-materialist views, but there is also an emphasis on directing education towards vocational ends. In the final years of high school geography teaching is organized so that different branches of the discipline are taught in various vocationally oriented schools--for example, agricultural geography in agricultural schools, tourism geography in tourism schools, geology and tectonics in technical-engineering schools and so on.

In almost all the papers from the socialist countries, party congresses or figures were cited to support the direction of geographic work. Political views also emerged in their descriptions of teaching the geography of foreign countries which are invariably grouped into three classes for treatment--socialist, capitalist and developing, rather than being selected on other geographic criteria (Maksakovsky, Andreev et al.).

As I mentioned previously, the view of geography as a "socially relevant" discipline has been an influence on topic selection in the R.C.F.P. project. In the socialist countries, two particular social needs receive attention,

namely, for economic planning and environmental management. Virtually all are concerned with maintaining environmental quality and with using geography to aid in this quest. Nature is to be shaped for human ends, but the concept of ecologic equilibrium is being introduced. This thinking runs through the Soviet School curricula and has also been extended in Soviet higher education, for example, in Irkutsk future economic geographers now receive a course in conservation and "rational resource use" which deals with the evaluation of natural resources, their renewal and optimum use (Ilyina).

In England, social pressures are affecting geographic education in yet other ways. Labour government policy after 1965 modified the system of separating secondary students into grammar and secondary modern schools in favor of comprehensive schooling. This has broadened the range of students with whom the individual geography teacher must deal, both in terms of student abilities and motivations. At the same time, expectations about the teacher's role are changing. Teachers at all levels are becoming involved in designing curricula and with interdisciplinary courses, rather than being oriented to following stable examination syllabi specified from above (Graves). Such expectations of teachers are stimulating new approaches to teacher training (Graves) and also leading to the inclusion of teachers in the major curriculum projects on the assumption that this is essential if materials are to be successfully used and diffused (Naish). Similar thinking has shaped the organization of the R.C.F.P. which has teachers working with academic geographers and educators at a number of regional centers (Geipel). In both England and Germany the emphasis is on pluralistic approaches and expectation of continuing change.

Yet another social pressure for some English schools is the need to teach students of varied cultural backgrounds as "new Commonwealth" immigrants or their children, from the West Indies, India or Pakistan in particular, enter

the schools, and some geography teachers are attempting to adapt their materials and methods for these groups (Sewell). Dealing with a diverse clientele is also a Soviet educational problem. No papers were presented on the theme of multicultural education in the Soviet Union, although on a post-Congress field tour I learned a little of the separate schools operated in Central Asia for different linguistic groups. However, one paper on adult education outlined problems of dealing with a heterogeneous student body in which educational level and student age tend to be inversely related. The author mentioned various problems, including writing suitable texts for adults and taking into account the students' life experiences which may ease or complicate the teacher's task (Fedolova).

Changes in higher education are also following from some of these social pressures. Teacher preparation programs are being modified in England and West Germany, both to prepare teachers for new tasks and to orient them towards team work and expectations of continuing change (Graves; Barth). In Russia, new university curricula are being introduced to meet an increasing demand for geographers in economic and environmental planning. Several programs were described, all essentially calling for five years of study with stress on work in mathematics, economic theory, geographic forecasting and computer science. Significant amounts of practical experience are incorporated, with extended internships with likely future employers (Blazhko; Krasilnikova; Semenski; Raik). In at least one of the universities (Semenski) practitioners have been consulted to help plan programs and in another, an evaluation of graduates has been conducted involving employers as well as the graduates.

Integrating New Ideas from Education

I'd like to continue by looking at the third theme which I saw in the presentations. This was a concern with integrating new ideas from education into the teaching of geography. Many of the speakers expressed the desire to move from an emphasis on memory learning to teaching which stresses skills such as analysis, synthesis, problem solving, decision making and generally "learning how to learn" (Graves; Naish; Panchesnikova; Geipel, Apostolov, Andreev et al., Mistera). Undoubtedly these concepts are interpreted differently in the different countries. In the Soviet Union, field experiences are regarded as particularly important. Efforts are also being made to have students assume a more active role in class. Interestingly, students surveyed in one study expressed strong preferences for passive over active situations, and the suggestion was made that Russian teachers need both more time and more help to prepare good activities (Andreev et al.). In England and West Germany, the types of classroom activities one sees in H.S.G.P. materials are being increasingly developed, with use of hypothetical cases, games and so on.

Some efforts to improve teacher's abilities to handle new content and methods are being made via in-service training. In Russia teachers are required to participate in such programs every five years and assistance is also being made available at local and regional centers (Lukanekova). A system of People's Universities has also been established in which teachers can apparently have a role in selecting and designing courses of study to upgrade their content knowledge and pedagogical skills (Mahlin).

Another aspect of changing educational ideas lies in the area of evaluating learning. In Hungary there is a national testing project underway in

which geographers are directing attention to both formative evaluation of learning and measuring analytical skills as well as students' ability to memorize (Lorencz; Koves). One Russian paper also paid some attention to constructing appropriate tests to measure mental skills in senior class students (Panchesnikova).

Finally, a Romanian report examined ideas about developmental stages in children's learning along Piagetian lines and showed how different geographic concepts might be associated with the various stages (Mindrut).

Implications for American Geographic Education

I'd like to conclude my report with a few comments on my own reactions to the European and Russian work in terms of some implications for American geographic education.

One of the later lessons from the H.S.G.P. experience was a recognition of the need to work with teachers if new materials are to be accepted and used. In the English, West German and Russian work, the importance of systematically including teachers in the change process seems to be well recognized. This is evident in their use in the curriculum development process and in the institution of in-service training. In the latter area it seems to me that we might go further here than we have presently. The wave of N.D.E.A. institutes in the 1960's provided in-service training on a larger than usual scale, but this has since diminished. We make some opportunities available through meetings such as these, and by publishing teaching materials. But we really do not have a widespread, effective and institutionalized structure for upgrading the geographic knowledge and teaching skills of a wide population of teachers. It is hard to say what could be achieved, but it does seem a problem

for which the N.C.G.E. as an organization and through its members, might seek a more effective solution.

Another question which occurred to me was the extent to which the teaching materials we are producing are adapted to the various student groups we encounter. Do we work mainly with a middle class white suburban youthful student as our model client? Given the plural nature of our society and predicted trends towards life-long learning, we may wish to turn our attention to more diverse materials.

The preparation of geographers for employment in business and government is also an area of increasing interest, and although some departments have set up internships, mostly in their master's programs, it seems to me we still have some distance to go in expanding this practice to optimum levels. Also, we might do well to consult more with practitioners as we prepare curricula in applied geography. Again, this is an area where national organizations might provide leadership and coordination to give aid which individual departments might not be able to obtain.

I'm sure there are other inferences which could be drawn from the work reported at the I.G.U. In general, foreign experience is not directly transferable to our situations, and, if anything, the diffusion processes operate primarily from North America across the Atlantic and Russia to eastern Europe, rather than back to our shores. Encounters with other ways of working, however, can provide a stimulus for self-examination, and I think this is one of the major benefits of participating in sessions such as those at the Congress.

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