Future Prospects for Geographical Education in Slovenia

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Abstract

This paper deals with future prospects for geographical education in Slovenia, with special emphasis on the development and aims of the didactics of geography. The author discusses the past development of geographical curricula and of competencies of geography teachers, and the education of future teachers of the subject in Slovenia. Her ideas are based on the nature, purpose and context of geographical education, with an emphasis on lifelong learning, internationally comparable education and work-based learning, due to their relevance for a rapidly changing world of new opportunities.

Keywords: Didactics of geography, geographical education in Slovenia, competencies, curriculum, geography teacher

"Believe those who are seeking the truth. Doubt those who find it."

A. Gide

Introduction: Geography as a school subject

Geography as a school subject is interdisciplinary and educates through a mix of natural and social sciences content. In children and adolescents, geography tends to develop their understanding of the space in which they live, and educates them about the various connections between humans and that space, their social and physical environments, and the causes and consequences of the changes that we see every day, both locally and at a global level (Kolenc Kolnik, Resnik Planinc, 2006). Geographical knowledge can provide valuable assistance to young people in managing and guiding future developments at a local, national or global level and in transferring knowledge from the educational and theoretical into the practical fields of life. Modern geography is not just a science that examines natural and

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socio-economic elements and phenomena and their interaction in a specific geographical area, it is also closely linked with information from everyday life. Regardless of the mechanisms of different school systems, geography should retain a key role in the overall education of children and youth. In Slovenia, it seems that geographers must constantly convince the lay and professional public of the importance of geographical education, despite the evidence that geography develops and matures young minds. The complex and interdisciplinary nature of the subject is enriching. We can only hope that its importance will continue to be recognized by those in charge of designing education for the future. We firmly believe that geography is a subject for the 21st century.

As Haubrich (2005) says, the future is without doubt open, but it has its roots in the past and the present, so learning for the future includes content from the cultural heritage, modern trends and current needs of students and society. A student-centred approach is an important component of learning for the future. The needs of people can be identified through the local needs of students as well as from global trends. Some concerns can be seen locally, while others need to be examined through scientific research on the environmental limits and carrying capacity of the Earth, the globalization of transport, communications, trading and services, the integration of everyday life, science and education, polarization between North and South, between religions, between countries, the countries of origin and destination of migrants, acceleration of innovation, production cycles and the increasing amount of information and total destruction of social values at the expense of individual interests (Bechmann, 1998, 15).

A few years before Bechmann, Klafki (1985) developed a qualification into which he introduced solidarity, the ability to work in teams, empathy, involvement, creativity, flexibility and shared responsibility. In accordance with Klafki, we agree with Habrich (2005) that each individual school subject should contribute to social competence and the ability to use learned knowledge well, although our fundamental task remains to teach students something about the subject itself. Knowledge about the subject, knowing how to use this knowledge, and social skills are not mutually exclusive, but interrelated.

Didactics of geography in the past and present in Slovenia

In talking about school geography, we cannot ignore the didactics of geography. Through its development and importance, we would like to discuss future prospects for geographical education in Slovenia.

As in every science, the didactics of geography has its own basic scientific components: the subject of research, research resources and methods, system potentiality and scientific terminology. As an educational discipline, the didactics of geography has two meanings. Based on empirical knowledge and experience and on its own theoretical starting points, it gives meaning to, and resolves, didactic phenomena, thereby perfecting its theoretical system. On the other hand, the didactics of geography is also a highly applied science and as such, a

fundamental guideline for practical learning activities. In the past it was limited mainly to the questions of 'what', 'how' and 'who' teaches. Later on, the questions have gradually spread to the WHO, WHEN, WHERE, WHY ... do we teach and learn geography? The conceptual background and differences of how to respond to practical teaching issues have multiplied. Moreover, teachers have differing views on the learning process and different experiences, reflected both in an understanding of the fundamental tasks of teaching geography as well as in the theoretical bases for solving these tasks.

According to many, the didactics of geography in Slovenia developed in concert with changes in the educational sciences and psychology, as well as with the needs of society and the development of modern geographical science, transforming it into an independent scientific discipline. In parallel with this, the name has been changing from "the methodology of teaching geography" through "theories of teaching geography" into the "didactics of geography" (Zgonik, 1995). However, in Slovenia the didactics of geography is not yet completely formed. As a young science, it is still developing. The didactics of geography builds its own identity in accordance with the development of modern, complex geography and general didactics. Therefore today, the didactics of geography in Slovenia (as in many other countries around the world) tends to research processes and the development, transmission and acquisition of knowledge of practical, theoretical and scientific knowledge. The few people who are scientifically involved in the didactics of geography in Slovenia are not able to cover all the needs connected with the modernization of teaching geography. Therefore it is not surprising that the well-known Slovenian psychologist and educator Marentič Požarnik (2005) suggests that in-depth research on the permanent effects of geography teaching be done by geographers (rather than by psychologists or educators), which would lead to developing strategies for improving the situation. Accordingly, she mentions the research on the sustainability of knowledge (Marentič Požarnik, 2001) in which students' answers to questions about some of the basic phenomena in nature and society are rather surprising. For example, to the "basic" question "why is it colder in the winter than in the summer?", only 15-20 % of students from different generations are able to answer correctly, while the vast majority do not show even a basic understanding of the phenomenon of the seasons. We agree with her that one of the prerequisites is to decrease the huge amount of content - both in the primary and secondary school geography syllabi and in university programmes for teacher education – in favour of greater depth and more active methods of teaching and learning.

Teaching geography - a part of geographical science

What links the didactics of geography and geographical science? According to Zgonik (1995), both have a common need to present the essential issues of modern geographical science, in short, geographical complexity and integrity.

In this regard, a critical evaluation of general didactic principles and their relevance in the classroom, especially in the selection, arrangement and evaluation of geographical teaching

materials, is very important for special didactics theory and practice. It is imperative that we develop a specific geo-teaching system and special "geographical" teaching principles (e.g. the principles of complexity, integrity and development) deriving from the specific nature of geographical science. At the same time, learning materials of inadequate content and quality should be replaced by something far more flexible and productive. These should correspond to the modern map of the world, to new developments, new qualities, modern thinking and technological trends and their implications, and to the relevant requirements, particularly in specific geographical settings (Zgonik, 1995). This can be successfully done only by employing professional didactics as an empirical-analytical, normative constructive science, with the contemporary concept of geography embedded in teaching practices so that it shows the essence of geography and the changing contemporary reality.

If we want to change the view that still persists here and there, that "school geography is mainly a pedagogical issue", then the didactics of geography must be further developed at the theoretical level. In Slovenia, the prevailing image of geography as a school subject may be partially enhanced by a solid construction and perception of the modern didactics of geography in terms of pedagogical and didactic transfer. Geography is the only school subject in which social and natural knowledge are equally intertwined, and has therefore a strategic position in successfully equipping young people for life in a complex and interconnected world. This is a great challenge and responsibility that demands a fundamental change in long-established and deep-seated views by both experts and teachers, for which neither changes in the normative documents nor recommendations for practice or new textbooks are sufficient (Marentič Požarnik, 2005).

Geography Curriculum

Over the decades, the development of geographical disciplines has also been reflected in the concurrent development of geographical curricula for different levels of education. It cannot be overlooked that schools were always a few steps behind in the development and knowledge of geographic and other disciplines. Although the preparation of the curriculum might look at first glance to be a fairly easy process, this is far from the case.

The development of school curricula provides a background for further discussions on the status of geography within the curriculum and appropriate strategies to ensure successful and effective teaching and learning of geography in the classroom (Chalmers, 2007, 3). Understanding the development of the geographical curriculum is subject to a particular model of curricular process.

The curricular process is not a simple rotational system, moving from objectives through evaluation to new objectives, but an interactive system in which each part affects the other. Graves (1996) also argues that perhaps there is no single starting point, such as 'learning objectives', and the teacher can begin the process at any point in the system. The question is

whether we have actually made a profound shift in the complex process of understanding the curriculum.

It is true that we are much more aware of the importance of the curriculum process in the context of individual school subjects and that within them we recognize the ideas and skills that could be included in education at some stage of schooling. At the same time, we know that curriculum development is not possible without teacher development. No such development can succeed without a significant contribution to the professional education of teachers. However, our expectations for teachers are sometimes unrealistic and therefore unconstructive. It is therefore vital to provide feedback to curriculum developers. We do not have in mind just consultation with teachers, but thoughtful curriculum evaluation, which will also include a student's vision of curriculum development (Resnik Planinc, Kosten Zabret, 2006).

According to Chalmers (2007) educational institutions tend to believe that the curriculum records or dictates the sequence of operations and their content in a rational way. The main purpose of curricula is to systematize learning in order to ensure a balanced and cohesive curriculum, which should be based on expected learning outcomes. At the same time, curricula lead to the coordinated development of teaching and learning materials together with the development of educational programs for prospective teachers (Chalmers 2007, 4). It is entirely understandable why there is an ongoing debate on school curricula among the public, in the media, and in the scientific literature on education. Since the development, implementation, and adoption of curricula are associated with a number of people, it is reasonable to expect both the professional and non-professional public to be involved. To geography teachers, the curriculum by itself is just a guide, a signpost and a catalyst for their work in the classroom, until such time that a teacher in interaction with students gives it meaning, based on their own perceptions. Until then, it is just a "geographical skeleton". It is therefore difficult to argue that the curriculum is a starting point for the formulation of teacher competencies, which are clear from their own skill sets.

However, the curriculum is of fundamental importance, because the written set of learning objectives and suggestions for cross-curricular correlations forms the basis for further work by the teacher. If the curriculum is not well-prepared, if it allows mistakes or weaknesses, if it does not open up new possibilities, then it makes, from the very beginning, a teacher's job harder. In particular, such a situation is difficult for the beginner, because we can assume that a practitioner with years of experience will be able to solve such problems and obstacles in a more confident, determined and successful way. With increasing demands and expectations enshrined in the curriculum, we can, on the other hand, notice shifts in the quality and selection of methods and strategies in the teaching of geography.

Geography Curriculum in Slovenia

Table 1
Simplified version of the school system in Slovenia

Type of school	Age group	Classes/grades
Primary school	6 – 15	1 – 9
Secondary vocational schools	15 – 17 (18)	1 – 2 (3)
Secondary technical schools	15 – 19	1 – 4
Gymnasium	15 – 19	1 - 4

The concept of traditional geography with its division into general and regional geography is the basic characteristic of the geography syllabus and the entire geography curriculum in Slovenia. Slovenia's independence in 1991 also brought changes to the educational system, starting with a reform of the 8-year primary school system. As a candidate for the European Union, Slovenia was required to carry out several reforms that brought its school system closer in line with the school systems in other European countries. Slovenia introduced nine grades in primary school, starting in 1999. Content related to geography is incorporated into syllabi from the first grade on, while geography as an independent and compulsory subject begins in the sixth grade. Table 2 shows the contents of geography lessons from sixth to ninth grade.

Table 2.
Geography contents and the number of academic hours of geography lessons in the 9-year primary school program in Slovenia (Geography Syllabus, 1998)

Grade	Geography Contents	Academic Hours
6th	The planet Earth	35
7th	Regional geography of Europe and Asia	70
8th	Regional geography of America, Africa, Australia and polar regions	52
9th	Slovenia – our homeland	70
Total		227

In secondary vocational schools and secondary technical schools geography is taught for one or two years either as a compulsory subject or integrated into social studies together with history and sociology. In these schools, general geography with selected case studies from Slovenia and other countries is taught.

In Slovenia the syllabus for gymnasiums was reformed in 1998. Geography became a subject aimed at helping young people acquire the knowledge and skills needed for an understanding of the global world (Table 3).

Table 3.
Geography contents and the number of academic hours of geography lessons per year in gymnasiums in Slovenia (Geography Syllabus, 1998)

Year	Geography Contents	Academic Hours
1st	General geography	70
2nd	Regional geography of the world	50
3rd	Regional geography of Europe and Slovenia	50
4th / elective	Slovenia + final exam preparation	40 + 35 (general examination)
Total		170 or 245

General geography, which includes both physical and human geography, is taught in the first year of gymnasium. Its structure is comparable to the scientific approach adopted at the university level, in which it is divided into specific branches, such as geomorphology, water, climate, soils, biogeography, population, settlement, economy, etc.

In accordance with the national curriculum, regional geography is taught in the 7th, 8th and 9th grades of primary schools and in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th years of gymnasium. At the primary level, regional geography systematically deals with the world, Europe and Slovenia. The whole system of general geography is reflected in the approach to all continents, Europe and Slovenia. In gymnasiums, regional geography of the world, Europe and Slovenia becomes more thematically oriented (a problem-solving approach, case studies, practical examples, etc). To a certain extent it is also part of the geographical syllabi for vocational and technical schools.

The basic framework of regional geography in schools is to know the Earth, its continents and their smaller units – regions. This concept of regional geography was established by Hettner in the 1930s. Although the description of individual parts of the Earth was suitable for those times, it does not meet today's needs.

Our understanding of the landscape with all its elements, interrelationships, and processes is becoming increasingly complex; hence a description of its characteristics means an accumulation of facts of varying importance. The result is that textbooks have become increasingly encyclopaedic in nature and they promote *ex cathedra* teaching, because otherwise teachers cannot meet the requirements of the syllabus. Consequently, any syllabus changes always raise difficult questions and comments relating to unnecessary content. What should be reduced, and how, is a growing dilemma not only in primary and secondary education, but also in university courses. This is the situation that Slovenian school geography currently faces and needs to address.

In 2007, a revision of the national curriculum for primary and secondary schools once again commenced in Slovenia. Much effort has been invested in the revision of curricula

across all subjects at both primary and secondary level. In 2006-2007, a number of discussions on the situation of geography in the educational curriculum, especially in light of the projected high school reform programme and revision of all syllabi, were held. The desire to find an "appropriate orientation" of geography teaching with clearly defined developmental factors and educational challenges led to the publishing of various analyses of reform goals on the one hand and of the educational objectives of geography teaching on the other (Kolenc Kolnik, Resnik Planinc, 2006a, 2006b; Resnik Planinc, Kosten Zabret, 2007).

It was found that school geography should "... strive to move away from a teaching-oriented curriculum (the teacher's work-oriented curriculum) and focus on student's learning results (into a learning or learner-centred process), moving towards the individualization and personalization of the curriculum and the intensive development of complex cross-curricular skills such as problem-solving, verbal and non-verbal communication, critical thinking, creativity and the application of information communication technologies" (Kolenc Kolnik, Resnik Planinc, 2006b, 9).

The new curricula was approved in late spring of 2008, at first in secondary schools, and for primary schools beginning on 1 September 2011. We cannot really state that many major changes were incorporated into the revised geography syllabi, although competencies and the upgrading of skills were added, and some geographical errors were removed. At the primary level the same order of content from 6^{th} to 9^{th} grade remains (see Table 2). The same thing happened at secondary level, with the exception of gymnasiums, where the content follows the same order as before but is not split in accordance to the year (see Table 3). Notions were also removed.

It should also be mentioned that in Slovenia, geography can only be taught by a geography teacher graduate. Over the last decade they have been and still are under such pressure that it appears as though they are no longer able to make professional judgements about the content and approach. On the contrary, a lot of personal and professional energy is lost during different "battles" to preserve the status geography has achieved during the last 50 years in the former Yugoslavia and in present-day Slovenia. Thus instead of working on its development and quality, geographers tend to be preoccupied with the "preservation" of geography in primary and secondary schools. Nevertheless, due to some dedicated professionals, we can assert that Slovenian school geography manages to follow the European guidelines. Even a brief glimpse at Table 4 shows a close connection between all-European educational aims and some selected objectives of geography teaching written into Slovenian syllabi.

Table 4.
A comparison of general educational aims and selected objectives in Slovenian geography syllabi

Educational Aims	Geography And Its Objectives
Functional literacy	Independent usage of different geographical sources and

	literature and development of pupils' and students' capability to express geographical knowledge in verbal, graphic and quantity forms by using modern technology.
Learning about space to develop action competencies of students	Pupils and students should gain a spatial concept of today's world and their home region, the ability to connect geographical theory with practice, and capabilities and skills for field research work.
Competencies for gathering and using knowledge	Pupils and students are encouraged to develop abilities and skills connected with the transfer of theoretical knowledge into practice (functional knowledge and skills). They learn to accept responsibilities, take risks, and seize new opportunities.
Critical personality	To understand how society functions (with a certain critical detachment) pupils and students need to be acquainted with chronological evaluation of geographical data, factors, phenomena and processes in different periods of time. They should learn about the location of natural and human geographical phenomena and processes and their impact on the development of selected countries and their socio–economic differences.
Sustainable development	Pupils and students develop the capabilities for the evaluation of differences in the modern world and become aware of the importance of sustainable development and our responsibility to preserve physical and biological conditions for future generations.
Civic competencies and citizens' culture	Developing skills for social and political participation on different levels through basic research of the home region.
Development of national consciousness and readiness to act in inter- and trans-national surroundings	Developing positive feelings towards the homeland, nation, state and its natural and cultural heritage. One's own cultural identity is the condition for understanding and acceptance of other cultural identities.
Capability to sustain identity and intercultural communication	Knowledge and awareness of differences in population, culture and economy on the local, regional and global level develop respect and tolerance towards the others. Learning about national, religious and racial themes, about migrations etc. doubtless develops the capability of cultural and tolerant communication.

Towards a new professionalism and the new roles of teachers

In accordance with the changing perceptions of science and knowledge, an understanding of the professional competence of experts in various fields of activity is also changing. The term

"reflective practitioner" was defined by Schön (Schön, 1983, as cited by Razdevšek Pučko, 2004, 56) who thus legitimized teaching as an intellectual activity, in which teachers analyze their own experience and on that basis construct new knowledge.

The ways in which teachers work in developing individual competencies include the following: enabling an approach 'from the inside', as well as escaping the limits of the four walls of the classroom; facilitating reflection; professional dialogue with their peer group; creating a support group or pairing; and creating a 'professional culture' and allowing the creation of an intellectual environment for teachers that enables them to share their experiences. At the same time we still expect teachers to perform good teaching, with excellent methodological and organizational skills and knowledge of psychology, and to develop learning strategies (Resnik Planinc, Kosten Zabret, 2006).

As a consequence of the changes in society, teachers need to adopt some new roles and modify or abandon older ones. A readiness to change and adapt traditional roles into new ones (mentoring, the organization of teaching and learning, integrating students) and the adoption of certain new roles and the integration of new technologies into teaching are all of crucial importance. At the same time, teachers are faced with a growing number of learning difficulties and difficult student behaviours, which require different teaching methods, as well as having to adapt to an increasing number of forms of external assessment. The fact is that the qualifications teachers have obtained during their studies are no longer sufficient. Teachers must be able to cooperate with other teachers, practitioners and parents, and be capable of reflection, exploration and evaluation of their own work. To successfully take on these new roles, a teacher must be open to change and motivated for lifelong learning and continuing professional development (Resnik Planinc, Kosten Zabret, 2006).

Geography teacher competencies and geography study – teacher-to-be programme

Perhaps more than ever before, geographical education these days faces significant changes. In addition to professional geographic content, the prospective teacher, in the context of professionally-oriented studies that will effectively combine theory and practice and allow access to the teaching profession, must become familiar with the sociological, psychological, political and cultural aspects of the learning and teaching of geography.

Practical experience can only develop from close cooperation with schools, while not necessarily excluding preschool education. Studies should therefore follow the needs of future teachers of geography and offer a stimulating academic programme of study mixed with practical vocational experience. Students must be able to develop their own knowledge, skills and confidence, especially in terms of employment in occupations related to geographic education. The nature, purpose and content of geographical education, with emphasis on equity, lifelong learning, internationally comparable education and work-based learning are of utmost importance, as they must respond to a rapidly changing world of new opportunities, and learn throughout their lives and careers. Training future teachers of geography is therefore a complex process.

At our faculty (Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana), students familiarize themselves with the content of geographical education, such as teaching and learning and the geographic curriculum. They develop communication and critical thinking skills, the ability to deal with information, and familiarity with the various aspects and segments of instruction. During the teaching practicum or internship the work should be practical, in accordance with the school environment, and focused on learning so that students acquire the skills and knowledge needed for employment, personal growth and career planning. We should facilitate the acquisition of knowledge, skills and values that promote a self-reflective approach to professional activities and lay the foundations for continuing professional development (Resnik Planinc, Kosten Zabret, 2006).

At the Department of Geography, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana we conducted research among prospective geography teachers. We wanted to establish whether the students were aware of the importance of a teacher's core competencies, and discover their opinions about them. The survey was conducted in a sample of 38 students between the ages of 22 and 27 who had either just completed their fourth year of study or were already graduates. Data were collected through the administration of questionnaires.

Results showed that 4th-year students are aware of the competencies and their importance. They were asked to evaluate different groups of competencies in two ways. Firstly, they evaluated the importance of each competency and, secondly, their own achievement in each one. The results were of great help in preparing the future academic programme for the didactics of geography.

In Table 5, groups of the key competencies were formed on the basis of research among headmasters of Slovenian schools in combination with the competencies formed by the expert group of the European Commission. According to the results of the survey, students achieved the highest level in the usage of modern ICT either in formal teaching or in other professional spheres. 55 % of students acquired this competency to an adequate extent, while 21 % acquired it entirely. They consider psychological knowledge most important, since it equips them with the know-how for their work with pupils and students, their characteristics and specific features, teacher's choice of methods, approaches, attitude, etc. 87 % of students evaluated it as the most important one. Students do not feel qualified enough for teamwork and cooperation with other teachers and professional co-workers: 58% gained only a partial competence in this area. At the same time, 71 % of them consider it very important (Resnik Planinc, Kosten Zabret, 2006).

Table 5.
Geography students' evaluation of the groups of competencies (Resnik Planinc, Kosten Zabret, 2006, 65)

Competency	Achieved (1 – 4)*	Importance (1 – 3)*
Quality knowledge of didactics and methods which enables the teacher to plan and organize an optimal and stimulating	2.71	2.79

learning environment with the aim to stimulate and facilitate the pupils' and students' learning process		
Being qualified for teamwork (teaching) and cooperation with other teachers and professional co-workers in the educational process	2.03	2.71
Different roles of a teacher in the classroom (teacher as a mentor who organizes individual and cooperation work of pupils and students), which demand more communicational and organizational knowledge	2.24	2.71
Psychological knowledge which equips them with the know-how regarding their work with pupils and students, their characteristics and specific features, teacher's choice of methods, approaches, attitude etc.	2.34	2.87
To prepare pupils and students for lifelong learning in a knowledge society (teach them how to learn)	2.21	2.84
Development of teacher's own professionalism; responsible guidance of personal professional development in the process of lifelong learning	2.39	2.84
The usage of modern ICT either in formal teaching in classroom or in other professional spheres	2.92	2.71

*acquired (1 (nothing was acquired) – 4 (acquired entirely))
Importance (1 (not important) – 3 (very important))

Changes through the Bologna reform in the education of future teachers of geography in Slovenia

The Bologna reform of university curricula brings many changes, but at this point we wish to focus primarily on the changes related to the education of future teachers of geography. Within the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, we managed to achieve an understanding and to a large extent, mutually harmonize, our programmes within the pedagogical module (60 ECTS), which was adopted at the faculty level, and is included in the new teacher training Bologna programmes of individual studies. It should be mentioned that before the Bologna reform, there was no common pedagogical module for different pedagogical studies (e.g. geography, history, sociology, biology, foreign languages etc.). It was up to each discipline to organize the study for their students in the teacher training programmes and, consequently, there were huge differences.

Pedagogical module

In the compulsory pedagogical module, a two-disciplinary pedagogical programme student has to acquire a total of 60 credits, which means that within each discipline they have to obtain 30 credits. A pedagogical module comprises two parts.

Table 6. *Common part of the pedagogical module at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana*
Subjects
Psychology for Teachers
General Didactics
Pedagogy - educational theory and andragogy
Observational practice in general didactics*
Observational practice in psychology for teachers*
Observational practice in pedagogy and andragogy *
Compulsory optional subject: • Humanities and Social Sciences • Slovenian language for teachers • Exploration of the learning process

*Observational practice[1]: A student can choose from any of the common pedagogical subjects, i.e. general didactics, psychology for teachers or pedagogy and andragogy.

Table 7. *Specialized part, planned by individual departments at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana*
Subjects
Special didactics
Teaching practice as part of special didactics

Table 8. *Evaluation of individual learning units with credits*	
Learning Unit	**Credits**
Psychology for Teachers	7
General Didactics	5
Pedagogy - educational theory and andragogy	6
Observational practice in general didactics*	1
Observational practice in psychology for teachers*	1
Observational practice in pedagogy and andragogy *	1
Exploration of the learning process **	5
Slovenian language for teachers **	5
Humanities and Social Sciences **	5

Special didactics 1***	18
Special didactics 2***	18
Total	**60**

* Students choose one subject.
** Students choose one subject.
*** To any special didactics in two-disciplinary study comes 18 ECTS.

Each special didactics module is individually tailored, depending upon the number of class observation and evaluation performances. Given the current situation, it is difficult to predict whether uniformity among all the faculties will be possible. We believe that it is necessary to provide students with at least the minimum standards: a week of observation practice in the frame of the common part of the pedagogical module, and two or three weeks of teaching practice in the context of individual special didactics.

The importance of teaching practice

The requirements of modern times and renewed schools, different educational paths, the difference in training teachers for these requirements and the fact that there are no selection procedures on entry to pedagogical studies which could be used to select potential candidates for the most demanding tasks, all clearly indicate the expectations that today's society has towards teachers. On the one hand, we must provide students with a quality education that corresponds with an equivalent education for prospective teachers. On the other hand, both teacher trainers and teachers themselves should regard the target list of competencies as being the level of skills they need to work in the classroom, school and wider community.

In the area of teaching and teacher education, a shift in the theoretical or conceptual level regarding educational practice has occurred over the past two decades. The traditional scientific approach is giving way to a more reflective approach, in which an important role is given to experiential learning, and research work in an environment where teaching and learning are ongoing. In contemporary teacher training programmes, teaching practice should have an essential role as a link between the theoretical and practical parts of the curriculum (Čagran, Cvetek, Otič, 2006). Teaching practice enables students to enter pedagogical work gradually, and in a controlled environment, and therefore learn how to teach one, two or more subjects. In doing so, the student develops a general intellectual ability that enables them to adapt to changing work environments (Cvetek, 2006).

With the Bologna process, teaching practice will become a mandatory and integrative element of the education programme for future teachers. Through educational practices, students learn how to design, implement and evaluate the teaching of selected subjects and other pedagogical work in the classroom, school and beyond. They also learn basic skills in communication and mastering a classroom situation, they learn to use various teaching forms and methods, and they are introduced to the preparation and implementation of knowledge assessment and to all the tools that are available to teachers in their work.

An experienced and trained mentor should be responsible for the student during their teaching practice. In Slovenia, unfortunately, neither an official network of mentoring schools nor comprehensive training for future mentors exists. So far, mentoring is the responsibility of each discipline and individuals. We hope that we will soon be able to overcome this extremely inappropriate situation and move towards the quality training of future teachers and their mentors.

Professional training means a gradual transformation of secular models of understanding, and responding to events in a professional manner: professional reflection makes for a professional performance. We must learn to name intuitively experienced events, then connect and, if necessary, coordinate personal beliefs with scientific theories. Individual professional management offers a personal perspective – and so a young teacher starts to believe that the knowledge they have acquired makes sense (Bizjak, 2004, 56). This process begins during undergraduate education, especially during teaching practice, and continues into the period of traineeship.

A student's personality and that of the student's mentor have a significant influence on the quality of teaching practice. Students obviously differ in personalities, and in their professional, psychological and technical-didactic knowledge, learning styles, management and social skills and also in their rate of professional development. Therefore, a mentor is obliged to consciously establish a relationship of support that is tailored to the student's individual needs.

At the Department of Geography, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana a system of classroom visits, performance evaluations and teaching practice for students has developed continuously over more than two decades. We must realize that in the given (unregulated) conditions, without the exceptional and selfless teachers of geography at elementary and secondary schools across Slovenia, who have during those years accepted a number of students, this would not be possible. Although teacher trainers and students are very grateful, in a state whose attitude towards mentor work is dismissive or lacking, even the most enthusiastic mentors can eventually lose their motivation. We hope that with confirmed Bologna programmes we will be able to convince both the Ministry of Education and Sport and the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology to finally institutionalize the system of teaching practice.

Future prospects

Teacher competency is subject to participation and working together with others, whilst the education of prospective teachers should see these goals in the lists of core competencies. Disciplines should aim towards such objectives in their teacher education programmes, where many of these desired and required competencies are included. It is necessary to ensure that students in all subject areas enter the teaching profession with the requisite knowledge, skills and values that will arise from their current academic experience. If we are to meet the professional and individual needs of students and introduce these features into their practice

and continuing development, it is necessary to promote active and participatory learning styles in students, and involve them in active forms of training and education.

The three main groups of competencies of a good practitioner have to be kept constantly in mind: transversal skills (generic skills), personal competencies and social or interpersonal competencies.

We cannot ignore the symbiotic relationship between curriculum and teacher competencies. A study conducted within the RAVE Space project (Resnik Planinc, 2008) has confirmed our hypothesis that teachers, despite the awareness of the need to change (either in content or their strategies, methods, forms, etc.) only rarely realize this spontaneously. Most are waiting for a "higher authority" - in our case, for a curriculum or syllabus that demands changes the teacher is obliged to embrace.

The fact is, the sets of competencies in themselves are "dead notes" which, to some extent, can affect the consciousness of the individual, but this does not mean that it will automatically result in any changes in their work. It is essential that the curricula are interwoven with the desired competencies of a teacher or, in other words, that the need for their symbiosis is clear and transparent. Therefore, in the field of education, coordinated cooperation among theorists and practitioners, curriculum planners and writers, and those that define the competencies and those to whom they are addressed, is of crucial importance.

From the perspective of future teachers of geography, as in other disciplines that want high quality and highly qualified educators, we face a challenging but not impossible task. But successfully meeting the challenge requires horizontal and vertical integration and the participation of all educational institutions and bodies responsible for the future of the teaching profession.

Following the last revision of curricula in Slovenia, the educational objectives of teaching geography still required a teacher to master and use different approaches, methods and techniques. Many of the objectives guide students towards independent and cooperative learning; towards a broader range of activities in the search for solutions; the development of argument and both group and individual work. But although the learning content and educational objectives are clearly defined, they do not by themselves tell us how to achieve them. Geography teachers should be trained not only to understand the knowledge, concepts and skills required by the subject of geography, but also to know the position of this subject in school curricula. Today it is not sufficient to just know the information that we collect from different sources. We must be able to understand the situations we are experiencing, and formulate our own opinions. Also, good or even perfect geographical knowledge itself does not by itself guarantee a good geography teacher.

We are aware that to update and recast geography teaching in Slovenia in accordance with social needs and objectives and following the principles of curriculum reform, knowledge of standards and skills is not in itself sufficient. The real reform begins in school, among colleagues and at the individual professional level of each teacher.

The revision that took place in the 1990s aimed at transforming the vertical geographic education from kindergarten to the end of secondary school, as some of the objectives and content were unnecessarily repeated at different levels, while others were not correlated with other subjects (Resnik Planinc, 2001; Lipovšek, 2001). However, due to lack of time and research funds the task remained only partially completed. The debate and, consequently, the final result of the fundamental concepts and the basic inventory also remained in a sort of limbo. The same story was repeated a few years ago, although the experts before the 2007-2008 revision of the curricula warned that it was necessary to evaluate the curricula, which had been in use for so long that their rational and empirical evaluation was possible. An in-depth study has never been made, however, because the state has not been able to provide funding.

Given the concurrent revisions (e.g. of school geography and also of the university geography - teaching courses) and the reasonable fear that neither managed to meet (all) professional expectations, it would make sense to explore in the immediate future whether they are at least going in the right direction. It is a fact that the system of teacher training, the educational policies in individual departments and disciplines, and how non-pedagogical geographers perceive the pedagogical mission of geography, the system of life-long learning and how school geography is organized, all immensely influence the professional development of school geography (Kunaver, 1996, 8). Considering the results of the survey (Resnik Planinc, 2001; Resnik Planinc, Kosten Zabret 2007; Kolenc Kolnik, 2008) it would be reasonable to continue research into school geography in Slovenia, in the following areas:

- Selection and coordination of the degree of complexity of the learning content in keeping with the requirements of the profession and the mental and physical development and abilities of children and adolescents,
- Optimal selection of a number of notions and learning content within geographical education,
- At least a partial vertical unification of the amount and complexity of the learning content in geographical education,
- Development of interdisciplinary cooperation at all levels of schooling (for teachers, suggestions by themselves are not sufficient – they need background and relevant professional materials).

We should also tend towards setting thresholds of complexity in the vertical organization of geographical education, and train (future) teachers to be able to select and use appropriate learning forms and methods and encourage the use of different teaching and learning tools and, especially, become better equipped for monitoring and using innovations in education.

Only through continuous research work, aspirations to improve the existing situation, finding new ways and forms of work, and constant scrutiny and evaluation of school geography will we be able to achieve the goals set and give meaning to our desire for high quality geographical education.

Biographical statement

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