

# 3 Constructing school geographies

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The curriculum is avowedly and manifestly a social construction. Why, then, is this central social construct treated as such a timeless given in so many studies of schooling?

(Goodson 1992: 66)

Dominant social and cultural groups have been able to establish their language, and their knowledge priorities, learning styles, pedagogical preferences, etc., as the 'official examinable culture' of school. Their notions of important and useful knowledge, their ways of presenting truth, their ways of arguing and establishing correctness, and their logics, grammars and language as institutional norms by which academic and scholastic success is defined and assessed.

(Lankshear *et al.* 1997: 30)

## Introduction

This chapter is written in the belief that beginning geography teachers should have an opportunity to reflect upon the history of Geography as a school subject. As the quotation from Goodson (1992) at the head of this chapter suggests, too often the Geography curriculum is simply presented as a given. It is written down and that's all there is to it. Lankshear *et al.*'s (1997) comment reminds us of why we should delve a little deeper into how the geography taught in schools came to be accepted as common sense. He suggests that there is nothing 'natural' about what goes on in school geography. Instead, what counts as geography reflects the interests of powerful social groups.

The first part of this chapter offers an account of the development of school Geography in Britain which stresses that the definition of what is to count as Geography has been a matter of struggle and conflict. Many accounts of the development of school Geography in England and Wales tend to take the form of 'uncritical narratives' (Ploszajska 2000), which chronicle the 'progressive evolution' of the discipline and the institutions that sponsor it. Writing about the development of Geography as an academic subject, Livingstone (1992) argues that these accounts are 'in-house reviews of disciplinary developments for the geographical

community', in which the exploits of heroic figures and epic moments in the history of British Geography are related to the next generation of scholars (Boardman and McPartland 1993a, 1993b, 1993c, 1993d; Kent 2000; Walford 2000).

The second part of the chapter attempts to provide an analytical framework which can be used to make sense of the different forms of geography education discussed in this chapter. It is offered in the hope that, as you spend time in schools and talk to practising geography teachers, you can make sense of the debates and arguments about the purposes of school Geography that (hopefully) pervade the departments you work in.

## Origins

Geography as a school subject is a relatively new subject. Boardman and McPartland (1993a) describe the development of school Geography in the period 1893–1943. They stress the role of Halford Mackinder in promoting the development of the subject at a time when Geography was 'virtually non-existent in the universities'. Mackinder 'realised that if geography teaching was to improve, many more geographers would need to be trained in the universities'. Boardman and McPartland consider that Mackinder's four-point strategy was an attempt by an early pioneer to 'improve the teaching of geography by ensuring that teachers had the necessary knowledge and skills'. The practical success of this strategy can be measured by the expansion of Geography as an examination subject in grammar schools after the 1902 Education Act and the inclusion of Geography in the 1904 Secondary regulations. Boardman and McPartland represent the means by which Geography came to be included in the school curriculum as a victory for common sense, a reflection of the inherent usefulness of the subject. However, Apple (1990) reminds us that any attempt at understanding whose knowledge gets into schools must be, by its very nature, historical. School subjects are the outgrowths of specific historical conditions and, as Lankshear suggests, reflect the interest of dominant groups. In the light of this, Ó Tuathail (1996) re-assesses the role of Mackinder, who, he suggests, saw the function of geography as maintaining an organic social order in the light of disorienting economic, social and political changes that were operating at the end of the nineteenth century. Ó Tuathail shows how Mackinder was a social conservative, and the form of the geography education that came to dominate took on the features of what might be called 'classical humanism'. According to this view Geography was established during a period of arrested imperial expansion and international competition in which many influential figures and associations took the view that greater 'social efficiency' required a renewal of cultural leadership at a national level. It was in this period that a group of intellectually 'second rate' subjects gradually specialised into the component parts of History, Geography and English Language and Literature, and each of these was established as a separate department of 'higher' knowledge with professorial status. In this way, the development of school Geography can be seen as a response to the material conditions of the late twentieth century. For Mackinder, geography had the potential to halt the relative decline of British power and renew the idea of Empire. While the 'old'

geography was concerned with the collection of mere 'useless' information about places, the new geography was about 'training the faculty of sight in a detached pictorialisation of the drama of the world'. The geographical eye is panoptic, elevated, disembodied and able to roam freely over the globe. Mackinder imagined that this type of visualisation would allow British subjects to see the spaces of Empire, and render them meaningful to British interests. Ó Tuathail argues that this view of geography was nothing less than an 'ideological assault' on the minds of British children. Mackinder's geography was based on a 'modernism of reaction' which sought to place Cartesian perspectivalism at its centre. This common-sense or perspectivalist space has 'remained within our consciousness, knowledge, and educational methods' (emphasis added).

Ó Tuathail's argument is important since it stresses the contribution that geography made to broader projects of imperialism, and its political role in maintaining social order. Others have stressed this aspect of the development of geography. For instance, Eliot-Hurst (1985) argues that the 'fragments of social science as we now know them, history, economics, anthropology, geography, and so on, emerged as concomitants to the development of a new socio-economic system, capitalism' (p. 59). Similarly, Hudson (1977) noted that geography was 'vigorously promoted' to serve the interests of imperialism in its various aspects, including territorial acquisition, economic exploitation, militarism, and the practice of race and class domination. By 1870, geography acted as a gazetteer for the ruling class, explorer, and apologist for the inhumanities of the industrial revolution. Hudson's work prompted a range of studies of the intellectual origins of geography. Peet (1985) demonstrated how geography lent scientific legitimacy to imperialistic ideologies such as environmental determinism. Highlighting the importance of imperialism in the establishment of school Geography, Marsden (1996) considers that:

In the nineteenth century European nations were completing their colonisation of places hitherto unknown to the western world. It was therefore regarded as an educationally valuable activity to learn the names of places, recognise where places were and, moreover, where the places ruled by Britain were.

(p. 28)

These concerns with the origins of school Geography may seem far removed from the lives of teachers in schools today. However, this history is important for the argument in this chapter, since the forms of school Geography that were established in this period have continued to be influential. School Geography was established as a subject whose proper object of study was man and his environment. The gender was significant, as feminist historians of geography have argued, since the type of knowledge that was counted as valid was invariably 'masculine'. Forms of writing that reflected what Haraway (1997) calls the 'rhetoric of the modest witness' were favoured, requiring a way of writing that was naked, unadorned, factual and compelling, relying on 'hard' scientific evidence. In the intellectual division of labour, Geography came to be defined as a science, concerned with the description

of the abundant diversity of the world. It is a testament to the power of this scientific model that school geography teachers will readily recognize this view of the subject. As Rose (1993) notes:

Most geographers continue to believe that the true nature of the world can, in principle, be explored and revealed through objective study ... [Livingstone] argues that the contemporary discipline continues to constitute itself as a search for foundational knowledge through the trope of discovery ...  
(1993: 63)

In this way, school Geography established itself as a 'hard' subject, rooted in modernist notions of scientific method. This tradition of Geography was based in the idea of 'classical humanism'. Skilbeck (1976: 17) argues that for classical humanists, it is:

the task of the guardian class, including the teachers, to initiate the young into the mysteries of knowledge and the ways in which knowledge confers various kinds of social power on those who possess it ... classical humanism has been associated with firm and clear discipline, high attainment in examinations, continuity between past and present, the cohesiveness and orderly development of institutions.

This was an approach designed to train the elite, and grew out of the training given to the children of the upper and middle classes in the late nineteenth century. By emphasising certain aspects of the subject, and in the process excluding other ways of understanding the world, school Geography was able to take its place in the academic curriculum. Sinfield (1985) notes that this idea of classical humanism as expressed through the 'competitive academic curriculum' was still dominant in 1944 when the Butler Act was passed, making secondary education compulsory for all children.

### *The regional method*

In the period after World War Two, school Geography retained many of its 'traditional' features. Though the simple listing of places and features associated with 'capes and bays' Geography had been replaced by a concern to classify and describe 'natural regions', Marsden suggests that by the post-1945 period:

... the presentation of material was equally inert and cumulative, and the learning procedures similarly concentrated on memorisation and recall.  
(p. 31)

Smith and Ogden (1977) described the features of the 'traditional approach': the human side of the subject was concerned with describing man's activities in the production of goods and the exploitation of natural resources, along with some facts

on demography and settlement patterns. There was an emphasis on field observation as a method of data collection. The approach that developed in the post-war period has been described as one of 'enlightened traditionalism' (Beddis 1983; Walford 1981). School Geography provided students with knowledge of the physical and human environments. In relation to human geography, this was largely a description of patterns of population, settlement and economic activity, realised through the study of places and regions. Where explanations for these patterns were offered, these tended to be framed in terms of ideas about environmental determinism. Social issues were largely ignored, which reflected a number of factors, including ideas about the strict academic division of labour and the professional responsibility of teachers to avoid political discussions with pupils. Boardman and McPartland note that the dominance of the regional framework in syllabus design continued during the post-war years. They also note the developing popularity of 'sample studies', which were 'grounded in the lives and occupations of real people in real places, giving it the sanctity of authenticity' (p. 65). The focus in Boardman and McPartland's account of this period is the improved range of audio-visual aids developed to 'help the geography teacher to inject a greater sense of reality into lessons' (p. 66). This concern with 'bringing reality into the classroom' needs to be seen in a wider context. The description of the uniqueness of the national space and the activities contained within it was suited to a period in which the political geography of the UK was relatively stable and settled (Gamble 1989; Walford 2000).

## The 1960s

The period from the 1960s onwards is characterised by what might be called the 'de-traditionalisation' of school Geography. School Geography was the subject of a series of important contests and debates which challenged the hegemony of the 'competitive academic curriculum'. The pressure for change came from both developments in the nature of Geography as an academic discipline, and from changes in the wider educational context, notably the broadening of educational provision to those groups who were previously excluded.

Taking the developments in the nature of Geography as an academic discipline first, Mitchell (2000) notes that, 'throughout the discipline of geography from the mid-1960s on, calls for greater "relevancy" were increasingly common' (p. 35). Similarly, Peet (1998) considers that the Hartshonian discourse of Geography as 'an exceptional, synthesising study of regional uniqueness', which had been a hegemonic disciplinary philosophy between 1939 and 1953, came to be challenged in this period. He suggests a number of 'frustrations' with Geography, including: the emphasis on regions; the lack of modern, scientific methodologies; the remoteness of the discipline from practical and social utility; and a lack of prestige on campus and in government and industry. A solution to these 'frustrations' was found in Schaefer's (1953) alternative programme. Regional geography was dismissed as 'ideographic' and geographers were to begin the 'nomothetic' task of finding methodological laws. Schaefer's work led

to the development of Geography as a spatial science which involved a new theoretical structure and the acceptance of statistical techniques in the 'quantitative revolution'. The key to the development of Geography as a spatial science was relevance. From the 1960s, geographers increasingly made claims for their role as spatial planners, providing practical solutions to spatial problems that were well in line with the demands of the corporate state. In the context of broad consensus or 'one-nation' politics, supported by a background of economic growth and Britain's pre-eminence in world affairs, it is perhaps unsurprising that geography took on many of the assumptions and outlooks that characterised the wider polity, society and culture. For example, House's influential textbook *The UK Space* (1973) placed a considerable degree of faith in the capacity for planning. House spoke of the possibility of 'more comprehensive regional planning', and concluded that 'the necessary further management of the UK space ... will not be feasible without ... greater and more decisive public intervention to channel market forces in the national interest'. The faith in rational planning is also found in Chisholm and Manners' (1971) book, *Spatial Problems of the United Kingdom*. They discussed how 'geographical space' was becoming a new dimension of public concern and policy:

the undoubted achievement of the welfare state in demolishing the principle bastions of inequality have exposed more vividly than ever before the causes for equalitarian public concern, amongst which are several characterised by their spatial as much as by their social nature.

(p. 16)

The answer to solving these 'spatial problems' was planning, to provide a 'more relevant framework for the administration of public decisions' (p. 19). Harvey (2000: 77) has recently commented on the development of this 'pragmatic focus' in academic geography from the 1960s. He suggests that the 'attempt to reconstruct geographical knowledge as instrument of administrative planning in Britain' was linked to the political climate of the time characterised by the Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson's rhetoric about the 'white heat of technology'. In this context, the goal of rational planning was linked to ideas of 'efficiency of regional and urban planning as a 'lever of social betterment for the whole population'. Smith and Ogden (1977: 50) commented on the interests served by the 'new' geography:

Like most other scholars, geographers are creatures of their time ... we can now see that the quantitative revolution closely reflected the contemporary preoccupation with technological gymnastics, reverence for cybernetics, and the sense that human ingenuity in an era of general prosperity would automatically generate solutions to our problems.

## Explaining the 'paradigm shift' in school geography

This shift away from the older regional-based approach to the systematic and positivist influenced approach was reflected in school Geography, though, as sociologists of education remind us, it is too simplistic to see this as simply the translation of ideas and concepts in academic geography to the school curriculum. The adoption of the 'new' geography in schools reflected the struggle for status and power amongst subject practitioners. Goodson's (1983) social history of the curriculum suggests that the struggle for geography has been a struggle for respectability. He sees developments in geography as part of a struggle on behalf of vested interests in the pursuit of resources and the career ambitions of individual academics and teachers.

One of the problems of Geography as a school subject faced in gaining status within schools was its expansiveness, its tendency to take on new vistas, with the result that the boundaries of the discipline were ill-defined. The solution to this problem was to hand over power to geographers in universities. This explains for Goodson the impetus behind the 'new' geography of the 1960s. Through its newly acquired methodological rigour, geography's position as a 'real' science could at last be assured. *New geography, in its quest for hard data, represented a move to the technical rationality of positivist versions of the natural sciences.* Thus, the key to understanding the adoption of the 'new' geography was status and resources. Goodson argues that there is a clear link between external examinations for the able student and the flow of status and resources. In other words there is a fundamental drive towards the attainment of academic status:

Academic subjects provide the teacher with a career structure characterised by better promotion prospects and pay than less academic subjects. Most resources get given to academic subjects that are taught to able students. The conflict over the status of examinable knowledge is above all a battle over the material resources and career prospects available to each subject community or subject teacher.

The 'new' geography stressed the 'scientific' and theoretical side of the subject at the expense of 'fieldwork' and 'regional studies'. Goodson is clear about the motives behind these moves. The aspirations of school teachers was about the material gains to be made from having school Geography accepted as a fully-fledged academic subject that was able to command more resources and offer better career prospects for teachers. This meant that the needs of the students were placed behind the needs of the subject's teachers for status. Similarly, Huckle (1985) argues that the new geography was an elitist exercise, an attempt to render the schooling of a minority of pupils more technocratic and vocationally relevant. The new geography was experienced most by the more 'able' students, but elements of positivism infused all the major curriculum documents of the period. For Goodson it was the acceptance of the 'new geography' that allowed Geography to finish its 'long march' to acceptance as an academic discipline:

from now on its future would indeed be determined not in the school classroom but on the 'intellectual battlefields of the universities'.

(p. 79)

What we see here is the way in which a version of school Geography emerged that reflected the needs and interests of a small minority of the school population. However, the establishment of the 'new geography' with its new found status gained through the appliance of science is not the end of the story. For in *School Subjects and Curriculum Change*, Goodson notes another disruptive force on the horizon:

But if by the mid-1970s the teachers of geography had accepted new geography because of its clear benefits in achieving high scientific status within the universities new dissenters were active.

(p. 81)

The so-called 'new' geography was adopted by many school teachers as a means of strengthening the subject's position in schools. However, there were also significant changes in the nature of educational provision which affected Geography as taught in schools. As Sinfield (1985) notes, a notion of education designed for the offspring of the gentry and the commercial bourgeoisie could not survive without adaptation in a society which proclaimed equality of opportunity. As a consequence, from the 1960s, Geography as taught in schools was subject to important changes. This was linked to a series of factors that were influencing the school curriculum in general, including: government pressure for more and better scientists; the anticipated raising of the school leaving age to sixteen; the amalgamation of grammar and secondary modern schools into comprehensives; and the demand for increased student participation.

The period between 1945 and 1960 was one of continued growth of educational spending. In the 1960s successive governments held the conviction that the British economy, in order to compete on a world scale, needed a greater degree of state intervention in economic planning and a thorough overhaul of the social infrastructure of the country. One aspect of this overhaul was the expansion of further and higher education, which required the incorporation of children previously excluded from academic qualifications. These objectives lay behind the growth of comprehensive education. The 1944 Education Act committed the British state, for the first time, to the provision of free education for all. The reforms enshrined principles of equality and access in the political role of the public educational service. Teachers were entrusted both with sustaining a capitalist economy and society, and with providing an egalitarian and universally accessible public service. The contradictions in this role were not experienced on an abstract, theoretical level, but also through concrete, practical conflicts within their day-to-day working lives. As Bonnett (1990) argues, teachers are under pressure to produce a stream of trained disciplined and qualified students on the one hand, and to strive to treat students as equally valuable and valued members of society. Teachers are thus in a

double bind: they are contributing to the reproduction of capitalism at the same time as being committed to values that come into conflict with capitalism. This experience of tension has been resolved through a variety of ideological forms. One of these is liberalism, which offers the hope that significant egalitarian change is possible within a modern 'free market' society. It holds out the possibility that capitalism and equality can go hand in hand. Bonnett identifies a number of strands of the liberal ideology in the work of many teachers. One of these is reformism, which represents a belief in the value of change within a system rather than an opposition to it. It is contrasted to conservatism because of its belief in progressive, egalitarian change, and to radicalism which sees change as coming from the challenge to the existing socio-economic system. Reformism has become a central part of the politics of public professionalism. This is because it brings together a commitment to both equality and to the reproduction of capitalism and thereby resolves the contradictions in public professionals' political experiences. This specific ideology made sense to public educators in the post-war historical context, a time when there was widespread optimism about the viability of Britain as a modernising and increasingly socially and economically mobile society. The economy was growing, universal welfare programmes were being expanded, social mobility was increasing. In all, the possibility of a politically progressive market society was, it seemed, being proved.

These ideals about the dominance of the liberal educational ideology that formed the common-sense world view of teachers are useful for thinking about the politics of the school Geography curriculum. In terms of school Geography the liberal educational ideology described here was reflected in the growth of what might be called 'progressivism'.

Progressivism was reflected in moves towards curriculum integration in the Humanities Curriculum Project which challenged the traditional subject boundaries which, it was argued, were in danger of becoming petrified, and subject-based approaches such as the Geography for the Young School Leaver (GYSL). These projects tried to accommodate the social changes of the 1960s and 1970s, for example, by addressing gender stereotypes and recognising the multicultural and multilingual nature of British society. These projects were largely materials-based, they developed materials for classroom use for students and teacher materials. Perhaps the most influential of these approaches was the GYSL project, which in many ways represented a challenge to the 'traditional' ways in which Geography was taught. Whilst GYSL sought to reform the discipline and effect changes in the everyday work of geography teachers, rendering the boundaries between subject disciplines less rigid and more open to influences from other subject disciplines, there also developed strong tendencies for what Marsden (1996) calls 'issues-based' approaches or 'adjectival' studies, approaches which were by definition multidisciplinary. In addition, these 'progressive' approaches reacted against many of the features of 'traditional' geography teaching.

The overall effect of these changes in educational provision, and the nature of Geography as a discipline was to increase the diversity of approaches to school

Geography and steadily erode the coherence and status that 'traditional' school Geography based on the tenets of classical humanism once had.

For example, whilst the 'new geography' allowed the perpetuation of a school Geography designed for and catering for the needs of the small number of school students, progressivism allowed some geography educators to address the needs of a larger group of students. Writing of the period from the 1960s to the early 1980s, Huckle (1985: 301) noted that:

While the majority of school geographers were preoccupied with the 'new' geography, others were employing humanistic and structuralist philosophies to design lessons on such topics as environmental issues, global inequalities and urban redevelopment.

To varying degrees, these approaches had in common a revulsion against the abstraction, dehumanisation and retreat from social relevance that the positivism of the 'new geography' was supposed to represent (Smith 2000). This progressive geography drew upon a number of conceptual developments in the discipline linked to behavioural geography, environmental geography, welfare geography and radical geography. These sought to develop a geography education whose content was socially and environmentally relevant and which urged people to do something about their concerns.

In this section I have argued that school Geography underwent important changes in the period from the 1960s. In terms of the content, traditional regional approaches were joined (and in many cases replaced by) the systematic approaches associated with the 'new' geography. These changes in content reflected not just developments in academic geography, but changes in the nature of the school intake. The raising of the school leaving age, comprehensivization, and the incorporation of large numbers of working-class children had important effects on the nature of pedagogy (Bernstein 1971). These pedagogical shifts also reflected social and cultural changes, in response to changed expectations about the education of girls and, in large urban areas, the presence of large numbers of children of people from the New Commonwealth and Pakistan.

### **The 1980s and the 'return of tradition'**

The changes described in the previous section were inevitably related to changes in the nature of educational thinking which is in turned linked to broader currents of social and cultural change. Another way of putting this is that school Geography became the site of political struggle over its meanings. In the 1980s the struggle over the meanings of school Geography intensified, amounting to what might be termed the 'politicisation of the Geography curriculum'.

The 1980s were characterised by tumultuous changes in the economic, social, political and cultural geographies of the United Kingdom. In these contexts it is perhaps unsurprising that previous representations of the UK space which stressed the continuity and essential harmony of the nation were challenged. In

geography education this involved questioning the relevance of much of the school Geography curriculum to the lives of children living in increasingly stressed urban areas.

One manifestation of this economic and social 'crisis' was the call for the schools to prepare young people for the 'world of work'. The inauguration of the so-called 'Great Debate' after Prime Minister Callaghan's speech at John Ruskin College in 1976 led to a plethora of initiatives designed to increase the relevance of schooling to the 'world of work'. Jamieson and Lightfoot (1982) identified the pressures that were being placed on the school curriculum to reflect the needs of industry. These included:

- 1 Technological pressures and the feeling that schools neglected applied studies in favour of pure science.
- 2 Employment. Whilst careers education and guidance had been developed in schools in the 1970s, there was increased pressure to strengthen school-industry links. There was a feeling that pupils needed to have a more positive set of attitudes to work.
- 3 Industrial society. There was a widespread feeling that the school curriculum did not adequately prepare young people for life in a modern industrial society.

Thus, an important development in school Geography in the 1980s was an increased concern with the vocational aspects of geography education. Corney (1985) discussed the potential for geography education to contribute to school-industry initiatives. He suggested that it was in this area that geography could make the greatest contribution. There was a feeling that schools should show much greater concern with developing 'economic literacy' amongst students. This would require the possession of factual knowledge about the national economy, and the teaching of economic concepts which allow pupils to form balanced and informed judgements about economic matters. This would help pupils appreciate how the nation earns and maintains its standard of living, so that they can properly 'esteem the essential roles of industry and commerce to the process'. In short, pupils needed to acquire an understanding of the economic basis of society and how wealth is created.

Geography could also provide for skill development. These included basic skills such as literacy, numeracy and graphicacy, as well as social skills which would equip them for the world of work, such as flexibility, adaptability, working as part of a team, and taking initiative and responsibility. In addition, geography could provide study skills deemed essential for coping with the world of work, such as comprehending arguments, the classification and analysis of data and time management. In developing economic literacy and developing appropriate skills, there was a need for teaching strategies and assessment procedures that reflect a variety of strategies, develop active pupil participation in the learning process. Corney notes that:

Modern geographical education increasingly stresses knowledge and ideas which are relevant and up to date, and gives high priority to broader

educational aims such as the development of personal skills and capacities. It employs a variety of teaching strategies, emphasising active pupil involvement in learning, and attempts to assess through appropriate techniques the extent to which knowledge and skills can be used in a problem-solving situation.

(p. 10)

In terms of content, it was argued, Geography syllabuses contribute to pupils' developing economic literacy, technological awareness and ability to make informal judgements. For instance, they typically stress the factors that influence the development of industry and economic activities, involve the study of the impacts of changing technology on employment prospects in a locality or region, the influence of economic activity on the quality of life and environment, and an understanding of the planning system. This work is frequently local and involves fieldwork. The Geography, Schools and Industry Partnership (GSIP) was established with two main aims. First, to identify the contribution of geography teachers in helping pupils to understand the nature of modern industry and its role in society. Second, to involve geography teachers together with persons from industry in the development, dissemination and evaluation of activities designed to promote such understanding.

The calls for geography to play its part in the promotion of an 'enterprise culture' were ironic in the same decade that saw decline of much of Britain's industrial base. The 1980s saw the publication of a whole series of geographical texts that charted the 'break-up' of Britain. The titles of these are indicative of the mood of many geographers in this period: Hudson and Williams' (1989) *Divided Britain*, Lewis and Townsend's (1989) *The North-South Divide*, Cloke's (1992) *Policy and Change in Thatcher's Britain*, and Johnston *et al.*'s (1988) *A Nation Dividing?* These books can be read as part of the geographical Left's attempt to make sense of the changes that took place under successive Conservative governments. There were some important changes taking place here. The old Marxist political-economic approaches were rapidly merged with developments in other disciplines that were attempting to account for the decline of Labour politics and the new landscape of Britain. Much of this work was involved in mapping the changes, but some geographers were concerned to offer accounts of the changes, a task which meant engaging with social and political theory. These accounts pointed to the fact that the Conservative government inherited in 1979 a country divided in various ways – by class, gender, race and location. They argued that it was to become even more divided in the 1980s. However, these accounts tend to point to the political intent involved in the widening of these divisions. For example, Hudson and Williams, writing at the end of a decade of Thatcher's policies argued that 'the North-South divide has deliberately been redefined and enhanced as part of the political strategy of Thatcherism. It was and is intimately connected to its electoral prospects'.

There is insufficient space here to fully document the policies that were adopted under the Conservative governments. However, it is worth noting the ways in which the space economy was altered. Martin and Sunley (1997) argue that under the post-war consensus the national economy was the key geographical unit of

economic organisation, accumulation and regulation. There was also a degree of spatial centralisation of the economy and integration via welfare policies designed to foster consistent national standards across the regions of the UK. The economic policies of the period were aimed at the redistribution of wealth with the effect of reducing inter-regional income differentials through public expenditure and public employment. The reversal of these policies in the 1980s had important consequences. The exposure of the national economy to external influences in the form of globalisation means that regions within Britain have been exposed to the intense competition and uncertainties linked with the global economy. Individual regions and localities are more prone to external shocks. The privatisation of public industries and the shake-out in public employment have exacerbated the problems and the shift in welfare ideologies has had serious implications for particular social groups in these areas.

'Radical' geography reflected a concern with four major areas. First, there was a sense of economic change. Britain's economy was subject to de-industrialisation and manufacturing decline, which was only partly offset by the development of new types of work. These changes were seen as important because of their uneven impact on regions and localities in Britain. Second, there was a focus on the changing political relations of the British state. There was a recognition of the pressures for devolution in the context of heightened economic division, attempts to reassert central political control at various levels of the state, and the moves to reduce public expenditure and open up areas previously dominated by state provision to market forces. Third, there was a focus on the social effects of these developments, with a focus on divisions along axes of race and gender. Finally, the environment was recognised as an important area of political tension and debate. Together, these amounted to a radical agenda for geographical study.

These academic writings had their educational corollary in the development of a radical school Geography. Building upon the tradition of 'progressivism' in school geography, radical geography educators advocated a form of 'socially critical' education that was less concerned with the defence of geography *per se* than with the development of a broader social education (Huckle 1983). The flavour of these alternatives can be seen in the issues of the journal *Contemporary Issues in Geography and Education* published by the Association for Curriculum Development between 1984 and 1987. The journal's concerns mirrored those of the geographical left: racism, sexism, wealth and poverty, environmental degradation, war and conflict. In participating in these debates geography teachers were engaging in wider debates about the nature of the schooling and how it differed from broader notions of education. For example, Huckle challenged what he regarded as the complacency of large sections of geography educators when he stated that boredom and alienation were the dominant responses of pupils to what was on offer in geography lessons.

As I have presented it here, the 1980s saw a struggle about the purposes of geography education in schools between those who saw education as a vehicle for social transformation and those who sought to stress its relevance to the economic renewal of the nation. These different versions of school Geography were the

subject of critique by the New Right in the 1980s, in the form of calls for the 'return' of traditional subject-based teaching. In terms of geography, this 'discourse of derision' (Ball 1994) took the form of an attack on progressive teaching methods that meant that children no longer knew where places were. The place of Geography in the school curriculum became the subject of public debate in the 1980s when the Secretary of State for Education, Sir Keith Joseph addressed the Geographical Association. In relation to geography the argument was about the extent to which the teaching of content – by which was meant 'facts' – was being undermined by a focus on values and attitudes.

It is worth noting that these 'assertive' versions of geography teaching were limited in scope and influence. For many geography teachers, life in the classroom was 'business as usual'. Thus, in the 1980s – in the midst of profound economic, social and political change – geography continued to provide images and explanations of the world that relied on older models of environmental determinism, neo-classical economics and Whiggish versions of history (Gilbert 1984). Machon (1987) accounts for the failure of geography teachers to incorporate elements of political education into their teaching as a result of a combination of factors. These included: the stress on the importance of subject matter, the establishment of uniform and distancing patterns of authority and an acceptance that some issues are 'not suitable for the children'. Taken together, this means that many controversial issues, explanatory models and radical perspectives are off limits in the geography classroom. This 'slows the pace of change in political, economic and social processes and underwrites the status quo'.

## The National Curriculum

The 'curriculum wars' of the 1980s gave way to an uneasy peace with the establishment of the National Curriculum in 1990. As Helsby (1999) notes, the introduction of central curriculum initiatives was contentious because of the strong post-war tradition of curriculum autonomy that had been associated with strongly ingrained notion of teacher 'professionalism'. In reality the curriculum autonomy of teachers was always relative. It was largely limited to what took place in their individual classrooms and teachers exercised little control over the wider context of their work. Teachers were always subject to external control over their work in terms of having to prepare students for public examinations. Thus a combination of inertia, lack of time and lack of incentive meant that few teachers actually exploited what freedom of action they did enjoy, tending to fall back on their own experiences and replicating traditional practices. There is something to be said for the idea that the notion of 'curriculum autonomy' took on the characteristics of a 'myth', a social construct that shaped understanding of reality and fuelled expectations of what could or could not be done by either teachers or the state. This myth remained largely unchallenged throughout the 1960s and early 1970s.

The National Curriculum represented the reassertion of central control over the school curriculum. The National Curriculum was compulsory for all teachers, offered little or no additional funding and had a high degree of detailed curricular

prescription. The process of constructing the National Curriculum was complex and contested, though here I wish to note only that it must be seen as an attempt to overturn the perceived 'progressivism' of teaching in favour of more traditional knowledge-based approaches or what Ball (1994) has called the 'curriculum of the dead'. In the 'discourse of derision' that surrounded the implementation of the National Curriculum, teachers were often criticised for their failure to safeguard standards and were to be reduced to mere technicians, no longer making decisions about the curriculum but following orders devised elsewhere. The National Curriculum placed increased emphasis on a particular interpretation of subject knowledge and moved towards central prescription and enforcement of what was to be taught in schools (see Rawling (this volume) for a discussion of the National Curriculum).

### The 'naturalisation' of school Geography

This chapter has provided an account of the development of Geography as a school subject. It has sought to relate important changes in the nature of school Geography to the values and interests of particular social groups. Even from this cursory examination of the development of Geography as a school subject, it would appear that Lankshear *et al.*'s assertion is correct. For most of the twentieth century, dominant views about the nature of the subject have held sway. Particular notions of important and useful knowledge, clearly defined ways of arguing and establishing correctness have formed the basis of school curriculums, examination syllabuses and the National Curriculum for Geography. However, this discussion of the changing and contested nature of school Geography suggests that despite the work of the National Curriculum to present a fixed structure for the subject in schools, there exists a variety of forms of Geography as a school subject, informed variously by 'traditional', 'scientific', 'humanist' and 'radical' versions of school geography. An important part of the argument in this chapter is that these versions of geography are inextricably tied up with questions of power. A useful way of analysing the relationship between geography and power is to adapt Ball *et al.*'s (1990) matrix. The horizontal axis – Self–Not self – concerns relationships between people, and portrays the distance between a focus on the personal, private needs of the individual and the formal, rule-governed situations to which the individual might be subject. In other words, individual versus collective need. The vertical axis concerns sources of power: Authority–Authenticity. The polarity of power lies in the fact that it can be 'top-down' or bottom-up – dictatorial or democratic.

The *geography as skills* version of the subject has as its goal the development of functionally literate individuals who are able to function in the workplace and earn an income. Geography is sponsored by the state education system as long as it functions to provide a skilled workforce of active consumers. Current developments in geography suggest that it is recognised as contributing to this project. Geography students have a range of skills including literacy, numeracy, graphicacy and ICT. In addition geography makes claims for its ability to contribute to vocational education. Through the hidden curriculum, it can be argued that school Geography promotes versions of active consumerism, as it indirectly markets the diversity of the world and highlights the naturalness of travel and tourism and the consumption

of environments. The curriculum becomes carefully pre-specified in terms of grade-criteria, assessment items and levels of achievement. The attendant pedagogy rests on a strongly behaviourist notion of motivation by reward. There is little room here for the consideration of feelings or emotions. The focus is on presentation and performance.

The version of *geography as cultural heritage* is similarly constructed on direction and prescription. A selected elite agree the 'canon' of geographical knowledge into which educated members of society are inducted. The emphasis here is perhaps on a geography of awe and wonder, whereby students are to learn how to read and respond to places and environments through appropriate intellectual skills. This view of the subject is restated by Walford (2000) in his discussion of the 'issues for the future' facing geography. Walford argues that there is a need to defend the place of 'geography' in the curriculum in the 'present climate of uncertainty'. He is sceptical of the idea that recent moves to introduce 'Citizenship' and 'Education for Sustainable Development' are an opportunity for Geography to defend and expand its place in the curriculum. Instead, he argues that geographers should not be deflected from what they do better:

providing a sound base of world knowledge, stimulating interest in places near and far, and getting pupils to appreciate the wonder and diversity of the world in both its physical and human manifestations. Pupil support for this educational enterprise is likely to be deeper and more constant.

(p. 302)

Walford is clear here that it is the very nature of the subject of geography that is *intrinsically* interesting and stimulating and is worthy of study by all pupils:

Given the wealth and range of lively material available to geography teachers and the richness of life in the real world, it ought to be rare for a geography teacher not to be able to interest or stimulate students in some part of the subject on its own merits.

(p. 305)

The role of geography in a skills-based or utilitarian education is not given particular emphasis by Walford, who would prefer a form of geography which emphasised:

The need to have a general understanding of patterns and processes, of the way the world works spatially and economically, of how landscapes and townscapes come to be the way they are, even more the need to feel wonder, awe and respect for the physical world.

(p. 306)

In both these versions of the subject, the learner is passive – the individual is neither empowered nor invited to engage in the construction of knowledge. Instead, the focus is on conforming and adapting herself to the subject, learning a

set of rules, a body of information that somebody has defined as worthwhile. In Walford's version, there is a need to 'appreciate' and 'respect' rather than to critique, and to acquire rather than actively generate knowledge. There is a real sense in which geography is something individuals 'have done to them':

Geography teachers in Britain have, over the past hundred years, played a significant part in opening the eyes and widening the horizons of those who have sat in their classes.

(p. 311)

Progressive geography, or the *geography as personal growth* model, places an emphasis on the development of the individual and the construction of meaning in the classroom. Teaching and the definition of geography is pupil-centred. This is reflected in the increased attention given to learning in the 'teaching and learning' equation. Here, the subject of Geography is the source for the development of a wide range of abilities and sensibilities. Personal responses to stimuli are valued and developed, and there is an attempt to connect with the 'experience' of pupils. This approach is best reflected in Lambert and Balderstone's (2000) *Learning to Teach Geography in the Secondary School*:

The key assumption to understand is our fundamental 'pupil-centeredness' – our belief that good teachers develop a real feel for, and commitment to, the children they teach; it does not matter how good a geographer you are, if you cannot make connection with the children in your class you will not be able to teach them effectively.

(p. 2)

In line with this Lambert and Balderstone's textbook has a humanistic feel about it. A wide range of more 'expressive' resources (music, literature, poems) are discussed alongside the more 'traditional' textbooks, maps and computers. The architecture of geography teaching – lesson plans and assessment strategies – is 'softened' to make the point that it is the quality of human relationships in the geography classroom that is the measure of 'good' geography teaching. Thus, in their hands, assessment becomes a means of developing a 'conversation' rather than a hard-edged tool for sorting and classifying children.

Finally, in the bottom right-hand sector, is 'socially critical geography' or *geography as critical literacy*. This version of geography is assertive, class-conscious and political in content. Social issues are addressed head on. The stance is oppositional, collective aspirations and criticisms become the basis for action. Children are taught 'how to read the world' (Huckle 1997).

It is important to recognise that each version of geography contains and informs a particular political epistemology, the geographical learner is placed differently in relation to subject knowledge, their teachers and the state. Each produces different kinds of students (and citizens) with different kinds of abilities and relationships with peers. In each version the paradigm of meanings within and about geography

differs and conflicts. Since the mid-1970s geography teaching has been brought into the political arena.

### Some conclusions

This analysis of the history of disputation in the field of geography teaching indicates how teachers have found themselves positioned in debates about the nature of economic and social change. In a period when questions of economic change, political and social order and national identity have been to the fore, Geography as a school subject has been unavoidably linked to projects to 're-imagine' the national space. This can be seen in both the content of school Geography and in its pedagogy – the ways in which it is taught. The classical humanist version of geography, designed to pass on the cultural heritage of the nation, and staunchly defended by Walford, strives to present the world independent of politics and history, as 'natural' and common sense. Certain forms of content and ways of looking at the world are presented as valuable and important for all children. This approach operates and seeks to present itself as 'disinterested' and 'non-political' – the focus is on what we share as a common geography, and entails a rejection of the idea that people have their own histories, cultures and geographies. The result is that the fractured experience of space and place that is rooted in changing political geographies is glossed over by notions of 'personal growth'.

It was perhaps the experience of the breakdown of the post-war consensus and the experience of increased social and economic division that led to the emergence of the more assertive versions of geography teaching that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. These versions, which sought to address issues of class, gender, and race were engaged in a struggle over representation, over the meanings of geography. The reactions to and attacks upon these 'progressive' and assertive versions have been relatively successful in displacing them. The National Curriculum and the focus on assessment have served to reduce their presence even further. However, as Roberts (1994) suggests, geography teachers who have developed practical ideologies and distinctive ideas about what counts as 'good' geography have been able to maintain their practices. The result is that there are a variety of geographies taught in school, and that the construction of school Geography is an ongoing process in which all geography teachers are involved.

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