OPPORTUNITY STILL KNOCKS AT THE DOOR OF THE GEOGRAPHER*

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There is little need for me to suggest to a group of professional geographers that the subject to which they devote their time and, no doubt, considerable affection should occupy a place of importance in the public school curriculum. Probably there is little need for me to say that the place allotted to geography is actually smaller than some current trends seem to indicate. In a recent publication to which I shall refer later, the word "geography" is used an impressive number of times, but the illustrations of its use which run through the book reveal that geographers must still work to give meaning to that term.

You know, too, that teaching credentials will be granted this spring to many college graduates whose only experience in geography has been acquired in such cover-all courses as were described to me recently in writing in these terms: "Our course in elementary education that includes the geography is one entitled Curriculum, Methods and Materials which encompasses the curriculum of the social studies and the audio-visual materials and equipment."

But the picture is not all dark. We know that there are many administrators and curriculum workers who are making a sincere effort to include geography as they plan the curriculum. From the efforts being made we can see that this is a time of opportunity. We can see, also, something of the nature of the work to be done.

Let us look at a few specific happenings which illustrate the current concern.

1. The Social Studies Framework for the Public Schools of California prepared by the State Curriculum Commission and released by the California State Department of Education in 1962. Four columns are spread across two pages through much of the book. The first is headed Geography; the second, History; the third, Civics; the fourth, Related Areas.

2. The provision by the State Department of Education for geography textbooks for pupils. Some are excellent. Some are so-called "combination books." The adoption of the latter as social studies books underlines the need for a knowledge of geography on the part of the teachers who served on the evaluating committees.

3. The availability of many attractive trade books on regions of the world. Our libraries are well supplied with these books.

4. The generous provision of tools needed to learn geography—maps, globes, films, and charts.

* This was the opening paper of the 1964 Annual Meeting of the California Council of Geography Teachers held at the University of the Pacific, Stockton, Calif., May 1, 1964.
5. Credit-bearing workshops in geography for teachers in summer school (some of them in schools which provide no work in geography during the regular academic year) and in-service workshops for teachers.

6. An opportunity which may or may not result in increased work in geography—the requirement of five years' preparation for the elementary credential.

Justifiably, you may say that none of these efforts or changes assure the teaching of geography in an acceptable manner. I must counter with the contention that only you and your colleagues throughout our state and throughout our nation can in the last analysis assure the teaching of geography in an acceptable fashion. In the efforts cited above we can see some opportunities. The door is ajar, but, as I see the situation, geographers will, in the foreseeable future, enter the elementary school only on the terms of the elementary administrator, curriculum worker, and teacher. Nevertheless, you can modify the terms under which they will let you enter.

Had all of these people had work in geography in their elementary, secondary, and college years and had they kept up with the times, we could rest assured that geography would occupy a worthy place in the curriculum they build. But since not all have background work in geography we must work within the framework of the current situation in order to get through the door of the elementary school.

Let me cite a few examples to support this point of view:

1. Confronted with the State Framework which calls conspicuously for geography, although not as we might wish to have it included, what do loyal people do?


   How was this curriculum guide developed? The campus laboratory school faculty and a consultant from the Department of Education worked together in deciding how the State Framework was to be implemented. No mention is made of calling in subject matter specialists to help.

   This group saw in their task of revising their social studies program the need to organize units which encompass the various areas of the social studies—geography, history, political science, economics, and anthropology. Their reasons for organizing units as a means of fulfilling their obligation are given on page 29:

   The social studies program in the various grades reflect [sic] the procedures recommended in the professional literature; i.e., an activity oriented program in the primary grades and an information-process oriented program in the upper grades.

   The classroom supervisors in the primary grades tend to interpret social studies as meaningful activities within a broad area of study. Those in the upper grades tend to regard social studies as acquiring information about a broad topic through the wide use of references.
b. A more recent publication, a work sponsored by the National Education Association, *Guiding Children Through the Social Studies*, 1964, supports the teaching of large units. This little book makes a strong case for the belief that only by organizing the work of the social studies in large units which draw upon all of the disciplines of the social sciences can social understandings be acquired by children in a manner that is meaningful to them.

If you would enter that door into the elementary school curriculum laboratory, I beg you to study this pamphlet thoughtfully for in it is expressed in a powerful fashion and in a few pages the philosophy which gives direction to many schools in California. All of the members of the writing committee which produced the book are from California, among them Miss Helen Heffernan of the State Department, Dr. John Michaelis of the University of California, and several from San Bernardino County.

There is much in the Framework and in these recent guides which is open to question. An example is the teaching of Japan and Africa in the fourth grade, an age level at which children can acquire only a superficial knowledge which is likely to be misleading and detrimental to the cause of international understanding. Nevertheless, all of these publications indicate the type of thinking which must be studied and respected if geography is to enter that door to elementary teaching.

2. The selection of materials is another important area in which lack of geographic background conditions the work in the schools.

a. Textbooks have been provided by the state at great cost, but not until teachers see value in geography will the books become useful sources of information in the hands of the children. For example, sets of excellent fifth grade geography textbooks entitled *The United States and Canada* have been known to lie long unused in book rooms and closets because, as a highly respected teacher who does much demonstration teaching says, they do not fit the unit on colonial life in America.

What better time is there than when studying early New England to consider the rocky soil and the rigorous climate which beset the hardy settlers? These geographic features are discussed briefly in this book which is provided by the state. Of course, many would say that to stop to consider such topics might be too much of a digression. Possibly so, but is it really a digression if the children are seeking to understand, if the teacher is helping the children see the relationship between geographic conditions and human activities? In a program in which geography is taught only as a phase of the social studies when will the geographic factors be studied if not at such times? When we examine the social studies units taught, we find that many have an historical approach. This approach is not to be wondered at when all teachers are required to study history. Bertrand Russell, as quoted in the *New York Times Magazine*, gave us something to think about when he said:

> It is because modern education is so seldom inspired by a great hope that it so seldom achieves a great result. The wish to preserve the past rather than the hope of creating the future dominates the minds of those who control the teaching of the young.
b. Earlier I gave as one sign of increased interest in the teaching of geography the fact that many schools are very generous in supplying the tools for learning. Since maps and globes are the most necessary tools, I have compiled some test results as one means of indicating the very specific nature of the help needed by many teachers if these tools are to be used effectively.

In keeping with legislative edict, schools must submit to the State Department of Education the results achieved on standardized tests by the pupils of grades five, eight, and eleven.

From one district whose results on the October, 1963, test I have had an opportunity to study, I obtained data in which you may find implications for your consideration.

The California Achievement Test used in grades four, five, and six, Form W, includes in the Reading Test a section on reference skills. In this section are six multiple-choice items on map reading, namely:

- Item number 85: In what state are there mountains?
- Item number 86: How far is it from Dogwood to Cherry?
- Item number 87: What city is on a lake?
- Item number 88: There is a number on each side of the map. In which direction does the arrow by number 4 point?
- Item number 89: What city is northwest of Ash?
- Item number 90: Between what two states does a river form part of the boundary?

The results on these six items are presented in Table 1.

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The California Achievement Test Form W for the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades provides in the Reading Test a 5 x 6½ inch map of Switzerland and the surrounding area. Five test items are based on this map. You may not be satisfied with the map and the test. However, I should advise you of the fact that approximately two-thirds of the eighth grade pupils used this test in 1962 and it is reasonable to assume that a similar proportion used it in 1963 and that a similar proportion of the seventh grade pupils used the test in each of the two years. Moreover, we can assume that this is the only standardized means used to test any phase of the geographic learnings of these pupils.

The multiple-choice items run as follows:

Item number 97: One of the following rivers flows through Lake Constance. Which one is it?

Item number 98: The west end of Lake Constance is located near what degree of longitude?

Item number 99: Which of the following regions is not to be found in Switzerland?

Item number 100: One of the rivers draining the central plateau is the

Item number 101: The Rhine and the Rhone rivers have their sources in one of the following areas. Mark the number of the correct area.

In another section of the test are two items which test knowledge useful in using maps, namely:

Item number 65: Latitude is the measure of distance north or south of the equator. Mark the letter of the following ship's reading which indicates latitude.

Item number 74: The scale of miles shown in the above drawing is forty miles to one inch. Determine the distance from Point A to Point C. Mark the number which shows the correct mileage below.

The results are given in Table 2.

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Ability to use maps efficiently is not the whole of geography by any means, but the results on items that test basic concepts about direction, about rivers and other physical features, and about scale can be taken as illustrative of the pupils' ability to engage in geographic thinking. Think how meaningless much of the class discussion must be to the 76 per cent of the seventh grade pupils herein considered when the teacher or a classmate makes some comment about the source of a river. Think how meaningless discussions on current boundary changes must be to the 57 per cent of the sixth grade pupils who failed to find the two states which are separated, in part, by a river? If there were no more comprehensive test available to school administrators, supervisors, and teachers, I would feel less concern. But there is a test, The Iowa Test of Basic Skills, which uses 89 items to test the ability to read and interpret maps. The test is designed for use in grades three to nine. However, fewer than 10 per cent of the fifth grade pupils and fewer than 6 per cent of the eighth grade pupils used this test in 1962.

What can we do to increase awareness of the value of geography in the curriculum followed by children and young people? I suggest that we accept the fact that much good, solid geography can be learned through an elementary-school curriculum organized on the basis of social studies units. I trust that you will excuse a personal reference or two. Once upon a time, I carried on a little research project in which, on the basis of standardized test results, I demonstrated to my own satisfaction and to the satisfaction of some college professors that it can be done. Later, while teaching children in a situation in which the Iowa Tests were used regularly, the children, year after year, stood in the neighborhood of the ninetieth percentile.

If the teachers know geography, no type of curriculum organization will keep geography out of the curriculum. If they are not acquainted with the fundamental concepts of geography we can hope for nothing more than a mechanical following of a textbook or curriculum outline. We cannot legislate geographic thinking into a school curriculum. It is for this reason that I would say again that securing greater emphasis on geography depends, in the last analysis, on those who share in any way in the program of teacher education.

I realize that some geographers see in Jerome Bruner's philosophy support for teaching geography as a separate subject. As you know, he tells us we learn the subject matter of a given area of knowledge best by becoming acquainted with the structure of that area of knowledge. I accept Dr. Bruner's premise rather as an intermediate goal than as a starting point. Let us realize that recognition of the structure can come about as a result of experiences in the subject and that awareness of the structure comes about in the same manner in which generalizations are formulated — by following observations and experiences, often through a period of years. Children will have the experience necessary for recognizing the elements of the structure for which Clyde Kohn pleads if their teachers are aware of that structure. If children have sound experiences in geography as a phase of their social studies in grades one to six, it seems to me to be reasonable to
expect them to be aware of the geographic structure in terms of which the
great movements of mankind are taking place by the time they reach junior
high school or, certainly, before they leave junior high school.

As one who works with teachers and children, I should like to offer
the following suggestions for the consideration of the California Council
of Geography Teachers:

1. Paramount at this time is the need to take steps before college pro-
grams become firm to see that the fifth year of college now to be required
of those preparing to be elementary teachers allows for an increase in solid
subject matter. Such was the intent of the legislature, but unless steps are
taken quickly to see that that intent is recognized, the law may be circum-
vented. Geographers, organized, can help give direction to the five-year
program.

Helping teachers acquire knowledge of subject matter areas while they
are acquiring their general education is essential to establishing a frame of
reference — a knowledge of the structure, if you will — in terms of which
they can profit all the rest of their lives through in-service activities. In-
service experiences are needed by all of us, but they are at best only in-
adequate substitutes for basic work studied in an organized fashion.

2. Now I shall seem to contradict myself when I say that we should
increase the in-service offerings. They are needed to inspire and keep up-
to-date those already well-grounded and to inspire and challenge those
whose background is limited. But, and for this suggestion I may be "ruled
out of the party." Unless the members are selected, we should simplify the
approach.

We must be mindful of the fact that we have in our schools teachers
who, through no fault of their own, have never had a course in geography
in their lives. We must remember, too, that there is considerable rather
highly technical content in geography. I expect to hear some such content
discussed during this conference. I fear I shall not understand all of it.
Specialists in a given subject matter area tend to use a highly specialized
vocabulary. Many of the terms geographers use freely are unintelligible and
frightening to teachers. We must be mindful of the fact that elementary
teachers are responsible for art, music, mathematics, reading, language,
spelling, health, science, and recess, noon duty, and yard duty, parent con-
ferences, etc., in addition to the social studies. The sum total of their capa-
bilities is considerable, but because they can hardly go into great depth in
any one subject, many of them sit in awe in the presence of specialists in
a subject matter field.

Geographers who would help elementary teachers become proficient
in geography might consider the approach made by some mathematicians,
especially those in the School Mathematics Study Group. They
have included elementary teachers who are not majors in mathematics on
their writing teams. When I asked the late Dr. Morgan Ward about this
procedure he told me if they took only teachers strong in mathematics
they would not find out what they needed to know to help teachers.
On request, mathematics teachers in colleges and universities have organized courses which introduce elementary teachers to the principles of modern mathematics in a relatively simple fashion. The purpose is to prepare teachers to teach children what they want them to learn. Some mathematicians want nothing to do with these courses, but others realize that if mathematics is to be taught in the elementary schools as they want it taught, they must work with the teachers and supervisors in the situation as it exists. Dr. Ward, formerly head of the mathematics department at the California Institute of Technology, visited fourth and fifth grade classes with me and held conferences with the teachers.

Since financing in-service experiences is a problem with colleges and public schools, you may want to offer more of the kind of opportunity Northwestern University has provided with the help of publishers during its summer sessions. The university provides the housing and the accreditation while the publishing company provides the teaching staff and the tuition for the students. I know that the Rand McNally, Nystrom and Denoyer-Geppert Companies have provided this kind of service through Northwestern University. Doubtless, you are acquainted with other similar situations.

3. You may want to affiliate with groups of professional educators who have responsibility for curriculum building. The California Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development has working committees, one of which is the social studies committee and another is the teacher education committee. All concerned with curriculum problems are welcome in the organization. Participating acquaints one with the philosophy operating in the social studies program. Experience has shown that requests for geographers to contribute follow opportunities to become acquainted. The Southern Section of the CASCD will meet next week-end. I do not have a full program, but I am sure the group will work at matters of concern to all of us.

4. Try to spot elementary teachers, supervisors, and administrators who show interest. Encourage them to join CCGT and attend its meetings. As the service committee extends its activities these people will see that they have a stake in this organization. In this connection I might call attention again to the mathematicians. A few years ago an elementary teacher could find little if anything designed for her at their conventions. In the national meeting to be held at Long Beach next week-end nine sections are planned especially for the elementary teacher.

5. To break the ice for those students who have had little or no work in geography, set up a course labeled Geography for Elementary School Teachers. Examine the content and the activities of the units commonly taught in the elementary school. Organize the content which could be used to advantage in teaching these units, and in the course of teaching make frequent reference to the places in the units at which certain geographic principles can be developed. This would be a content course, however, not a methods course, with the content selected and organized especially for the elementary teacher. Some feel this kind of course unworthy of recognition or credit. However, this is essentially what the mathematicians have done and they are reaping a tremendous reward.
I feel very humble, although you may think I am very presumptuous, in presenting these suggestions which seem to respect our favorite subject too little. It is because I want our subject to make its contribution to the education of our children and their teachers, that I have been so bold in expressing these thoughts based on observations and close contact with teachers. Geographers have stayed too long apart. In connection with our problem a thought from the Scriptures comes to my mind: “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it.” The prevailing practice is to teach geography as a phase of the social studies. If geographers would find their subject they must, at least for the time being, be willing to have it included within the larger framework of the social studies.