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Research in Geographical Education: Retrospect and Prospect¹

von MICHAEL WILLIAMS (Swansea)

It is a great pleasure and an honour to be present in Freiburg today to recognise the work of Hartwig Haubrich. For more than twenty years I have been privileged to collaborate with him on several projects: writing chapters in books and journals that he has edited, visiting schools and engaging in gathering research data; organising a Council of Europe course; and witnessing his considerable contribution to the success of the Commission on Geographical Education of the International Geographical Union. In preparing this paper I have re-read much of his writing in English and I have sought to highlight those publications that I know best.

¹ Paper presented by Professor Michael Williams, University of Wales Swansea on the occasion of the Festkolloquium organised by the Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg in honour of Professor Dr. Hartwig Haubrich, November 7th, 1997.

1. Introduction

In considering the diverse aspects of research in geographical education and reviewing the work of Hartwig Haubrich, I was faced with the choice of focusing either on research methods and their application to studies in geographical education or on the principal issues that geographical education researchers have addressed in recent years. I have chosen the latter approach and structured my review on three broad issues: the nature of geography in an educational context; how students learn geography; and how teachers teach geography. Before taking each of these in turn, there are a number of introductory remarks I need to make in order to contextualise my discussion.

First, research in geographical education is *not* conducted with the same breadth and depth as characterises research in some other curriculum areas. If we consider the *educational* research work undertaken in languages, science and mathematics, we notice the substantial amount of international, governmental and non-governmental research funding that has been directed at studies conducted at various levels: international, national and local. This has led to the creation of research groups within universities, to the proliferation of refereed journals dedicated to sub-fields, and to the regular meetings of researchers with particular specialist interests in national and international conferences and symposia. Researchers in geographical education have very limited access to research funds, they are often isolated individuals employed either in faculties of education or in specialist geography departments, there are remarkably few refereed journals specialising in research in geographical education, and conferences and symposia usually have general rather than specialist sub-field characteristics.

Secondly, we must also acknowledge the rapid increase in the amount and range of work undertaken in research in geographical education over the last twenty years. Clear evidence of this can be found in the bibliographical work currently reaching a conclusion by Bill Marsden and Nick Foskett, on behalf of the British Sub-Committee of the Commission on Geographical Education of the International Geographical Union. They have amassed the titles of more than 4,000 publications produced in the English language over the last twenty five years concerned with geographical education and the classification runs to five major headings, 33 sub-headings and many more headings within these. We have moved a considerable way since the five headings used in a classification produced by Long in 1964 and the increasingly sophisticated classifications used by Naish in 1972, Lukehurst and Graves in 1972 and Corney in 1982. All of these

bibliographies, that drew only on the English language literature, have been carefully reviewed by John Lidstone in 1988.

Thirdly, researchers from one language domain are *generally* unfamiliar with research undertaken in other language domains. Even when there is a possibility for researchers to present their work in either French or English, as in the symposia of the Commission on Geographical Education of the International Geographical Union, remarkably few papers are presented in French. Researchers in geographical education from the English language domain very rarely quote recent research reported in languages other than English. This paper draws its evidence predominantly from research undertaken by workers in the English language - and is limited by that.

Fourthly, it is important to distinguish between research driven by the traditional educational disciplines - educational psychology, sociology of education, philosophy of education and history of education - and research that is driven by concerns related to curriculum planning and curriculum implementation. For the latter the research motive is more to improve the institutional provision of geography in schools, colleges and universities, rather than to progress the discipline of research in geographical education. Obvious consequences of this are, on the one hand, the need for research to be responsive to others' agendas and, on the other hand, the lack of continuity and linearity of studies. From this comes a tension between pure research and applied research and in geographical education there has conventionally been a strong leaning towards the latter.

Fifthly, we need to acknowledge the different emphases given by researchers in geographical education to the purposes of research. On one end of the spectrum are those who argue that all educational research should be driven by utilitarianism - the fruits of research should be seen in teaching and learning contexts. Research is the handmaiden of the geography teacher and the geography learner. At the other end of the spectrum are those who would argue that research has its own intrinsic worth. The act of research is significant for the researcher, in the first instance, and then for those colleagues in the research community who share a mutual research interest - substantive or methodological. Those who favour the utilitarian position find themselves torn between local and national interests rather than international interests and there is always a temptation to engage more in narrative description than empirical investigation. They also find themselves drawn to the descriptions of work in progress as in the case of accounts of national or highly localised curriculum development projects, national changes in

school examinations, and national changes in the professional development of teachers. The penalty of such work is the loss of both theory and scholarship leading to an apparent temporary, *ad hoc*, focus on contemporary fads and fashions. It is the loss of theory building and the construction and consolidation of scholarship that is the price paid for too great an emphasis on essentially descriptive accounts of curriculum development and curriculum evaluation. Hartwig Haubrich has demonstrated a clear awareness of these problems and he has successfully bridged theory and practice, principles and their application.

Finally, in this general introduction, what is striking within the community of geographical education specialists is the high degree of harmony and lack of controversy and criticism that pervades their public expressions either in conferences or in print. To that extent, it is a welcoming, supportive and essentially friendly community and this is particularly noticeable in the work of the Commission on Geographical Education of the International Geographical Union presided over until recently by Hartwig Haubrich.

With these opening remarks we can now turn to the three themes to which I referred earlier: how the subject changes; how students learn geography; and how teachers teach geography.

2. The Changing Nature of Geography

Under this heading I would refer to two principal aspects: conceptual clarification and historical analysis. Geography in schools in various countries has passed through a number of stages: moving from the largely descriptive to the analytical, from a regional emphasis to case studies and themes, from a focus on knowledge to an emphasis on skills, from a focus on the national to the international and the global. This has led researchers to examine the interaction of changes taking place in school curricula with changes taking place in universities and other institutions of higher education. It has, in recent years, led to studies of educational policy making as researchers have sought to identify the pressures - largely political and ideological - that have influenced the definition of school geography. Further, geography in some countries has been pressed to the margins of school curricula and efforts have been made to bolster the subject in some countries, as in England and Wales, and to revive it in others, as in the United States.

The drafting of the International Charter on Geographical Education by members of the Commission on Geographical Education of the International Geographical

Union, led by Hartwig Haubrich, in 1992 was a deliberate attempt to contribute to these efforts. Here we find a lucid justification for the inclusion of geography in school curricula, the identification of key questions and concepts and the highlighting of principles and strategies for implementing the proposals. For Haubrich, the publication and later translation of the Charter into a number of languages represents a fitting culmination to his work for the Commission and highlights the academic efforts he had made previously in the cause of promoting geography world-wide. Illustrative of this are the accounts of geographical education drawn from 30 countries that he edited as an *International Focus on Geographical Education* in 1982, that he updated in 1987 as *International Trends in Geographical Education* and, more recently, the collection of papers on *Europe and the World in Geography Education* he edited for the Commission in 1994.

These publications provide useful baseline data for future historical studies of geographical education. Future scholars will, no doubt, seek to analyse and explain using the skills of historians, comparativists and others the patterns and trends that emerge from these studies. The current vogue for policy studies and the attempts made to draw out the links between ideologies and curriculum policies and practices finds expression in research in geographical education and it is an area in which much work needs to be done. We have only to think of the tensions implicit in internationalism, expressed in globalism and Europeanisation, on the one hand, and federalism, regionalism and nationalism, on the other, to indicate a direction of much fruitful research work in geographical education. International understanding is part of this, though only a part, and it is this theme that provides a bridge with my next topic: how students learn geography

3. How students learn geography

Any consideration of the complex processes of learning must take into account what is learned and its significance, by whom, and in what time and place contexts. It is commonplace to categorise the outcomes of learning under three broad and inter-related headings : knowledge and understanding; attitudes and values; and skills. For each of these, geography-specific taxonomies have been defined and they are helpful in providing the starting point for investigations of student learning. It must be emphasised that studies of learning should contribute to an understanding of the developmental processes that lead to progress in students' acquisition of knowledge, attitudes and skills.

In seeking to illustrate the geographical educators' special interests in learning it is possible to identify a number of strong themes that have persisted over the last twenty five years. Possibly, the strongest of these themes is the research undertaken into aspects of mapwork with school aged students. However, in reading through the reports of international conferences we ought not to be surprised by the amount of attention paid to aspects of learning under the broad title international understanding. On this occasion it is particularly appropriate that this should be a focus for our attention given the considerable contribution made in this area by Haubrich, and not least because of the amount of attention paid to international understanding in the highly successful symposia he has organised in Freiburg, Boulder and Berlin for the Commission on Geographical Education of the International Geographical Union.

Reading through the reports and publications emanating from the Commission it is possible to detect a number of sub-themes under the umbrella of international understanding. These include:

- children's perceptions of foreign places;
- children's knowledge of foreign places;
- children's attitudes towards foreign places and foreigners;
- the representation of foreign countries in curriculum materials - textbooks, atlases, etc. - and the media.;

The motives for researching these issues was well expressed by Hartwig Haubrich in the preface to the collection of papers presented at the Education Commission Symposium held in the Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg as part of the 25th International Geographical Union Congress in 1984. He expressed his belief that, in the face of daily international misunderstanding, regional crises and the danger of another world war with the end of civilization, themes traditionally referred to as 'international understanding' and, in more recent times referred to as 'peace education' should be fundamental topics for discussion in international meetings of geographers. In this symposium he introduced a paradigm on international understanding and co-operation and he was to return to this in a number of ways. I shall refer to two.

First, there was the imaginative sets of essays he and Hildegard, his wife, collected and published that were written by children for children. Drawing on his wide circle of friends, essays were gathered from children in many countries. Children described their homes, their communities, their schools and their hobbies.

Secondly, there was the cross-cultural survey of students' international attitudes that he undertook more recently and discussed in a number of papers including one presented at the annual conference of the Geographical Association and to which he referred in the book produced for the International Geographical Congress held in the Hague in 1996. The title of the paper was „International understanding and cooperation through geographical education: how we see people and places“, a theme that he had highlighted in 1984 when the Commission on Geographical Education of the International Geographical Union held its symposium in Freiburg, here at the Pädagogische Hochschule in 1984. This has been a well-established theme of Haubrich's work, though not the only one as we shall see in the next part of this paper.

4. How teachers teach geography

Not surprisingly, this topic has attracted the attention of many scholars in the field of geographical education. If teaching is taken to include curriculum planning, curriculum development, lesson planning and presentation, and student assessment then there is a very rich literature focusing specifically upon geography. Scholars in many countries have written about teaching strategies and teaching tactics. One has only to think of the substantial writing on such aspects as fieldwork, the use of textbooks, atlases and maps, the use of audio-visual aids, and, more recently, the application of the new technologies in geographical studies.

One of the first papers I heard Hartwig Haubrich present was here in Freiburg in 1984 under the title „Educational television for geography teaching - a pilot study of a content analysis“. In it he drew on a number of studies he had previously undertaken (e.g. 1973a and b, 1975 and 1978). Using a theoretical communication model, he analysed a programme from a series of television programmes that he had devised for schools. He had also written teaching aids, teacher and student booklets, to accompany the series. The paper was a detailed, almost shot by shot, analysis of the design and contents of the programme. More recently, indicating how technology in geographical education has shifted, in 1996 he presented a paper with Hands Jürgen Engelhard at the 28th International Geographical Congress organised by the International Geographical Union in The Hague in 1996 on the production, implementation and evaluation of a computer program that they had devised. Based on the Monte Carlo simulation this program provides students with the opportunity to simulate landscapes, illustrating how geographical rules and chance interact in the evolution of human environments.

Despite the efforts of Haubrich and others who have kept pace with the changing strategies and technologies available to geography teachers, there is a lack of any substantial body of research that has sought to measure the *relative effectiveness* of particular strategies and technologies applied to particular groups of students, differentiated by national and regional cultures, and student characteristics such as ability, gender, age, and socio-economic class. We have also made very little progress in identifying the matching of student learning in geography with teacher competence. How important are particular teacher competencies for student achievement in geography and what are the relationships between different kinds of teaching qualifications and teacher performance and student achievement? These questions lead me to my conclusion in which I seek to lay out a highly selective agenda for future research directions in geographical education.

5. Conclusion: future directions

We can anticipate that there will be progress made both in the range of research methods used to investigate geographical education and in the substantive targets for such investigations. With regard to research methods the debate about the relative strengths and weaknesses of methods associated with positivist, interpretive and critical traditions will persist (Williams 1996, Gerber 1996 and Fien / Hillcoat 1996). Time does not permit a comprehensive and thorough presentation of an agenda for future studies and therefore I shall highlight some particularly important topics.

The needs of policy makers will continue to lead to an emphasis on the collection of hard data, as witnessed in the increasing interest of governments in the results of large-scale international studies, especially those conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement and the International Assessment of Educational Progress (Stoltman, 1996). Of particular interest to geographical educators is the work of the InterGeo Project of the Commission on Geographical Education of the International Geographical Union reported by Stoltman / Niemz (1992a; 1992b). The data derived from such tests have a certain raw bluntness for those who seek to see educational achievement in the context of international economic competition. For geographical educators they pose a challenge to engage in cross-cultural, comparative studies that seek, in Philip Stimpson's (1996, p. 42) words to use 'the understanding of a populace's feelings and thoughts...as viewpoints from which to interpret and explain educational differences between regions of the world or between sub-groups in

society within countries'. It is here that the International Geographical Union has such an extremely important role in bringing together geographical educators to engage in collaborative international studies.

Without doubt, as I indicated earlier, there is a substantial amount of work to be done in studying teacher effectiveness in geographical education. We need to focus sharply on the relative merits of commonly advocated strategies and the tactics within them. There is scope for major empirical studies on the learning processes and outcomes of aspects of fieldwork, inquiry approaches, and the application of old and new technologies in classrooms and other settings. We need to know more about the changes in learning processes for students as they progress to become geographers - little and large. We need to address the implications for geography of increasing interest in the concept of lifelong learning. The importance of geographical learning for adults in general and selected professional and vocational groups in particular has been generally neglected. There has been some attention paid to research related to the professional development of geography teachers, in pre-service and in-service contexts, but this too is a field deserving much closer empirical attention.

Finally, there remains the continuing interest in the processes of curriculum development at various stages of educational systems and here I am referring to the clarification of changing definitions of geography and the aims and purposes of geography in various cultures and at different stages in the differentiated experiences of children and students, the specification of instructional objectives, the selection of appropriate teaching and learning strategies, modes of student assessment and processes of curriculum evaluation. The bridge between theory and practice in curriculum planning, implementation and evaluation is a rich field of study and one in which the benefits for policy makers and practitioners are potentially useful.

As we look back with Professor Hartwig Haubrich over recent decades we can see that much has been achieved and much remains to be accomplished. Haubrich has made a substantial contribution to geographical education in his research, his developmental work and in his international leadership. I find it difficult to believe that he will rest on his laurels and I, with colleagues and friends scattered across all of the continents, wish him and Hildegard a long and healthy retirement. They will continue to have a warm welcome in many homes including ours.

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