

## EDITORIAL

### Continuing Focus on Primary Geography

Simon Catling , Péter Bagoly-Simó

There is hardly any country where geography has experienced a positive development in formal education curricula. Instead, geography educators worldwide mourn the decline of their subject, highlighting complex frameworks composed of global trends and specific national or regional developments.

Still, most geography educators only focus on secondary education. Primary geography remained the field of a small circle of engaged scholars for decades. Focusing on this essential stage of formal education, scholars linked primary geography, on the one hand, to various preprimary formats, allowing for a better understanding of small children's geography. On the other hand, scholars interested in primary geography traditionally remained mindful of the needs and requirements of lower secondary education, which regularly featured geography as an independent school subject.

Focusing on primary geography requires different skills. Indeed, educating children in primary schools requires different filters to view geography or other subjects. Primary geography remains heavy on pedagogy, and general educational goals are still tied to basic skills. Furthermore, primary schools are also places of social and emotional learning that require formats of subject-specific knowledge other than those in lower or upper secondary education.

Research in primary schools also requires different approaches regarding ethics, accessibility, and duration. Research tends to take longer, and methods tend to be more complex to understand better how primary geography works.

While the literature is limited, it covers an impressive variety of topics. Still, as BAGOLY-SIMÓ and

HEMMER (2017, 2018) show, the leading German journal of geography education *Zeitschrift für Geographiedidaktik | Journal of Geography Education (ZGD)* only made a limited contribution to primary geography. Still, over the last five decades (1973-2023), some trends and tendencies characterize scholarship on primary geography. In light of these trends, a previous special issue (CATLING & BAGOLY-SIMÓ, 2021) first attempted to (re)ignite interest in primary geography in the German-speaking countries.

German scholarship on primary geography entered a phase of decline, so the meta-studies show, with the empirical turn in education sciences, in general, and geography education, in particular. Two consequences followed. On the one hand, authors with a conceptual and theoretical tradition discontinued their publication activity; on the other hand, the empirical turn only produced limited scholarship on primary geography—most of whom seem to prefer the community of primary educators. Therefore, the first special issue offered a combination of empirical (BLANKMAN, 2021; BAGOLY-SIMÓ & BINIMELIS, 2021) and conceptual studies (CATLING, 2021; JULIASZ, 2021) to highlight the need for both traditions in geography education.

A second trend inherent to scholarship on Primary Geography was its qualitative methodology. The National Standards (DGfG, 2014) strictly focused on secondary geography, channeling qualitative efforts away from the early years. The previous special issue aimed both for methodological diversity and the concurrent study of map skills in primary and secondary education.

Finally, the third trend is the need for primary-trained scholars working in primary education.

Nevertheless, a few primary background Geography specialists internationally represent the subject (such as PIKE, 2016; SCOFFHAM, 2017; BARLOW & WHITEHEAD, 2019; KIDMAN & SCHMEINCK, 2022).

This special issue further spotlights primary geography by focusing on two additional crucial aspects.

On the one hand, CATLING (2023) discusses the moral dimension of primary geography in England. Drawing upon current debates from primary geography and beyond, the paper argues that the moral dimension may not remain unstated and implicit. Instead, schools need to make clear in their geography curriculum statements the moral aspects (or values) they espouse in the subject to ensure these are clear to all who have a stake in the school's geography curriculum.

On the other hand, it connects Initial Teacher Education at the primary level with matters of imagination. DOLAN ET AL. (2023) outline an interdisciplinary collaboration between geography, sociology, and visual arts. Following the Studio

Habits of Mind framework, cross-curricular work can foster inquiry, constructivism, geographical imagination, and problem-based learning, encouraging students to adopt flexible, intuitive, and creative strategies to become interdisciplinary innovators equipped to shape the future of our world.

Finally, YOSHIDA (2023) summarizes studies on children's environmental perception in Japan. The report opens up a different and thrilling world that shows similarities with primary geography in other countries and showcases the impact of particular methods and approaches.

While geographical experiences and imaginations link back to much earlier days, it is primary geography that first exposes students systematically to a novel way of seeing and representing the world, namely geography. We all want to nurture the subject in the early years so that young learners can learn about this thrilling way of seeing, living, and experiencing the world.

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