

GEOGRAPHY IN PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

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The pre-university system of education in Spain is currently characterised by two clearly distinct structures: one, introduced by the «Ley General de Educación», 1970 (General Education Law), is in a progressive yet gradual process of extinction; while the other, authorised by the 1985 «Ley Orgánica Reguladora del Derecho a la Educación» (Freedom of Education Law) and outlined in the 1990 «Ley Orgánica de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo» - L.O.G.S.E. (Education System Law), should be fully operational by the academic year 1999-2000.

This paper shall, therefore, analyse only the situation, presence and importance of geography in the various levels of the new system, namely, Primary Education, Compulsory Secondary Education and in the proceeding stage to these comprehensive stages, the «Bachillerato» and its various branches.

1. ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

Under the new structure of the Spanish education system, primary school children from the ages of six and twelve will study a curriculum divided into six areas, one of which, entitled *Awareness of the natural, social and cultural environment*, is partly comprised of a geographical content.

Royal Decree 1006/1991 provides the minimum educational requirements for Primary Education in Spain, which must be applied in curricula design. This is a process delegated to the governments of the Regions. The extensive preamble to the Decree seeks to justify on psychopedagogic grounds the inclusion of an area which provides an awareness of the natural, social and cultural environment. It recognises its «interdisciplinary nature», and that «various disciplines contribute, each from its own unique perspective, in providing a greater

understanding and explanation of the range of aspects and dimensions which make up the human environment».

The content is subdivided into ten blocks, of which two - Landscape and The Physical Environment - are purely geographical in concept, procedure and focus. Geography also forms a part of two further blocks - «Population and Human Activities» and Communication and Transport. Clearly, the study of these areas of geography at this level of the education system adheres to the sense and integrative foundation which typifies «... the curriculum and the experience in the Primary stage of (Education)...», in which a global perspective and techniques of analysis form a part of the teaching practice. This is ratified through the general objectives and the criteria or premises of evaluation proposed by the Law. There is a global nature to the 18 guidelines, in which only very occasionally are unmistakable references to geography to be found, though without ever entering the model more closely associated with the discipline's organization in the Compulsory Secondary Education.

2. GEOGRAPHY IN COMPULSORY SECONDARY EDUCATION

The L.O.G.S.E. and the Royal Decree 1.007/1991, which establishes the minimum education requirements for Compulsory Secondary Education, are the two principal sources for examining the role which geography will play in Spanish secondary education. As in Primary Education, these basic proposals are common and applicable to the whole of Spain, and their establishment seeks to ensure a common education for all Spanish pupils.

The L.O.G.S.E. and the Royal Decree establish at the secondary level an area of study under the multireferential of Social Sciences, History and Geography. Within this the preeminence of History and Geography is recognised - «... for their long academic record and cultural tradition» - while in the second cycle (14-16 year olds) «their organization by subject» is permitted.

The legislative norms, therefore, recognise the existence of Social Sciences, Geography and History and provide the teachers with various alternatives in curriculum design, which range from the purely disciplinary to fully integrative. However, if we analyse the importance given to Geography, it can be seen to vary in each of the three principal aspects of the curriculum: thus it is underrepresented in general objectives but of greater importance as regards content and criteria of evaluation.

The presence of geography within the general objectives of the Social Sciences is somewhat reduced. Of the eleven proposals only one is entirely geographical, while two more incorporate elements of Geography alongside those from other fields. In the remaining objectives Geography is assigned no explicit role, which is not to say, however, that it might contribute to them in varying degrees.

As regards contents, the Royal Decree grants Geography considerably more importance given that in the four main blocks, all of the first Society and Territory - and part of the third -«The World Around Us»- are dedicated to different geographical subjects: theoretical concepts and principles, methods of analysing the physical world and attitudinal development. Among the former the traditional issues of General Geography predominate, those always taught in school syllabuses: physical environment, population, economic activities and geographical spaces, urban phenomena and world economic imbalances. The one new area to be included in secondary education is that of political geography, which has been

popular in university education for some years. The Geography of Spain is not expressly considered, but according to the Royal Decree, each and every aspect of General Geography should be studied at the national level. Various aspects of Environmental Awareness are also included. Other innovations include the introduction of methods and procedures of analysis: use of data sources, graphic and cartographic techniques, introduction to field work. Finally, the Royal Decree also includes within the contents the development in the students of a range of attitudes closely linked to the principles and concepts of Geography: rejection of social inequalities - as reflected spatially - defense and conservation of the environment.

The importance granted to Geography in the criteria of evaluation is also considerable. Of the 29 criteria mentioned, nine are entirely geographical in nature and they correspond faithfully to the block entitled Society and Territory. In most cases they consist in evaluating the ability to identify, characterise and locate the main geographical phenomena in the world and Spain. In some cases the evaluation is more demanding in that students are required to offer more detailed explanations as, for example, of spatial structures, the environmental impact of man's activity and the inequalities in international trade.

3. GEOGRAPHY IN THE *BACHILLERATO*

Having passed the course of Compulsory Secondary Education, the student embarks on the *Bachillerato*, which is divided in four branches, and which prepares the student for university. In only one of these branches, Humanities and Social Sciences, and then only as an option, is Geography offered as a subject in its own right, though in reality, in light of the curriculum contained within the Royal Decree 1179/1992, the subject would be better entitled the Geography of Spain.

The course contents -core subjects- are organised into five main groups through which a study is made of the unity and diversity of Spain, the ecogeographical dynamics operating within the state borders, its economic activity in view of its unequal resource use, population together with the urban system and territorial organisation and, finally, the presence of Spain in the world, with particular emphasis given to its membership of the European Community. Here, as in the curricula proposed for Primary and Secondary Education, the official regulations establish certain general, basic objectives together with certain criteria for evaluation of the subject.

However, rather than looking in detail at these it is perhaps of greater interest - given that it is the first and only course in Geography which the Spanish student can study in Secondary Education - to analyse, albeit somewhat superficially, some of the general characteristics of the official proposal.

The teacher seems to be faced with a rather vague curriculum which, instead of adopting a specific geographical approach, seeks support in several and yet ultimately no one single approach. Indeed, from the introduction to the Royal Decree, Geography is defined by means of a collection of characteristics which are both poorly defined and overly general, and which are common to many different conceptions, from the most classical to the most avant-garde. However, two main tendencies - quite distinct and contradictory - can be identified: geography as the study of social events manifest in space, and geography as the study of interactions between nature and society.

Breaking with a long tradition in the geography syllabuses of the *Bachillerato*, the curriculum proposed by the 1992 Royal Decree chose to abandon Vidal's regional approach to geographical study. While it is true that the internal diversity of «regions and landscapes» is mentioned, no such mention is made within the contents of the unique spaces - the traditional geographical regions - or of the characteristics which define them. The above reference would seem to be a mere formal recognition of certain ambiguous terms, the remnants of geography as it used to be practised.

In contrast, the government guidelines explicitly identify - in their objectives, contents and criteria for evaluation - two predominant themes: awareness of the environment and the study of the State of Autonomies. The nature of the former can quickly be determined if we examine the first two general objectives on the list - «Appreciate the importance of man's actions and their environmental consequences...», «Identify and appreciate the characteristics of Spain's natural environments...», the subject of the third group - Ecogeographical dynamics-, or the second and third criteria of evaluation - «Recognise the main ecogeographical environments of Spain...», «Summarise the main environmental problems...». The interest for the state autonomies is apparent in the Political Geographical approach; the approach is concerned that students understand the present state organisation, that they value it positively, feel a part of it and become integrated within it.

As in all the official proposals arising out of the philosophy and tendencies of the LOGSE, Geography for the *Bachillerato* also offers teachers a flexible, open curriculum, which is adaptable to a range of places and specific circumstances. However, doubts remain as to the acceptance -and, therefore, efficiency - of this approach when confronted with the traditional practice of teaching the list of official subjects one after another, in a manner which lacks dynamism and fails to appreciate the global curricular themes.