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Learning for a democratic Europe with geographical syllabuses and textbooks in Slovenia

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Introduction

The school is often expected to remedy what has been taught incorrectly, or omitted, in other areas of learning; this is so in the wider European context (Multicultural Education, OECD&CERI, 1987), as well in Slovenia. The education process is supposed to create conditions for developing an understanding of complex social processes and building further relationships of understanding and tolerance, so that rights enacted in law are demonstrated in pedagogical as well as out-of-school life.

Culture and education are basic foundation of identity and of the preservation of personal and national diversity: both contribute to an individual's basis for asserting basic human rights. In the process of European integration the formation of new countries like Slovenia there is a great need to understand the basis of human, international and inter-state relationships. Education is very important in this; civil education (for instance putting human rights in its frame), multicultural education, and education for harmony which teaches tolerance and acceptance of social differences as well as an understanding of human rights. The promotion of such attitudes is important, because they lead to an understanding of the multilevel social processes which can reveal and overcome stereotypical opinions and prejudices that arise from a lack of understanding geographical and cultural diversity. This is an area where geographical education can add an important quality. Geographers have included educational goals in the renewed school programmes which aim to develop professionally based relationships, opinions and values (for instance toward a human and his/her rights) that derive from respect for different races, religions, ethnic, linguistic and cultural heritages. We need to emphasise that it is not effective to teach about democracy in isolation or confined to certain subject areas. It should be present in all school subjects, including geography.

Geographical education and educational contents on Europe in Slovenian schools

Among basic children's rights is the right to education. Education enables us to know each other and to communicate, and thus reduce prejudice between individuals and groups. The social context in which educational processes occur includes the physical and the social – the school and the extended environment. The latter may cause differences in understanding of the role of individual personality in society, in hardened behavioural patterns, and in systems of values. We need to relate didactic approaches to the current and actual life needs of pupils, to redefine existing, mostly materially directed, educational aims. 'The educational aims in geographical education can be very important mediators of social power and ideology. They often carry the task to form an idea of a friend and of an enemy' (Hajdu, Paasi, 1995, 35).

For some time the basic purpose of geographical education has not been confined to presenting geographical information; it is also to ensure the application of knowledge which will encourage pupils toward openness and understanding, and to a positive evaluation of society and nature. Both international understanding and the individual's responsibility for the environment have become major considerations when planning the

geography curriculum, but these are also elements of the curricula of other social studies subjects.

Learning for a democratic Europe with Geography syllabuses and textbooks

In the past decade in Slovenia geographers have made a thorough renewal of their syllabuses, which is still in progress. One starting point was the need to harmonise geographical education with the directives of the Commission for Geographical Education, that works under International Geographical Union (IGU). The Commission said that one of its basic tasks was to ‘...develop international directives of planning of geographical curriculum, education of teachers and geographical educational aides’ (International Charter on Geographical Education, 1992, 2). The Commission wanted geographical education to ‘... encourage understanding among all nations, races and religions’ (ibid, 8). Under this global aim they identified seven thematic aims linked to

‘... learning about people of other cultures, different ways of life and different landscapes. This way the geographical education contributes to the basic ideas of United Nations declaration of children’s rights, that says that a child should enjoy a special protection. Legal possibilities and other opportunities have to be given, that a child can develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially healthy and in the conditions of freedom and dignity’ (ibid, 9).

From this the Commission argued that geographical education contributes to international education, described in the recommendation for education for international understanding, co-operation and peace, and education related to human rights and basic freedoms (ibid, 9).

In Slovenian primary schools geographical education is provided in the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades of the eight-year primary school: with the renewal of the educational system it has also been taught in the nine-year primary school since 1999-2000. In secondary school programmes geographical issues are either taught in Geography as an independent subject (in gymnasiums and some technical schools) or in the interdisciplinary subject of Social Studies (in vocational secondary schools), alongside history and civil studies.

Table No. 1: Geography of Europe in primary and secondary schools in Slovenia

Type of school	Grade and age of pupils	Number of lessons per school year
Primary school		
Eight-year	6 th grade, 13 years	70 lessons
Nine-year	7 th grade, 13 years	70 lessons
Secondary schools		
Gymnasium	2 nd and 3 rd grade, 17 and 18 years	50 lessons
Other secondary schools	1 st and 2 nd grade, 16 and 17 years	35 to 70 lessons ¹

Source: Geography curriculum in eight-year and nine-year primary school and secondary schools in RS (Institute for schools and sport RS, 1993-1998)

By defining the global educational aims of current geographical education, the Curriculum for Geography in eight-year primary school (ZRSŠŠ, 1993) and the Curriculum for Geography in nine-year primary school (ZRSŠŠ, 1998) emphasise curricula which encourage active educational and scientific approaches and which enable the acquisition and development of geographical knowledge and abilities. Among the eleven global educational aims of geography for the three-year level (6th to 8th grade) in the eight-year primary school, and among the thirteen global educational aims of geography for the four-year level (6th to 9th grade) in the nine-year primary school, we find those which deal with forming knowledge about and understand neighbouring countries. These are:

- respect for other nations and cultures different than ours,
- tolerance toward differences,
- international co-operation, and
- working for common human goals such as world peace, preserving natural and cultural inheritance for the next generations and considering human rights.

The importance of knowing and understanding our neighbouring countries can be translated into educationally operating aims on the local, regional, state, European and global level.

Examples of global aims of geographical education which are linked to multiculturalism and human rights include:

1. Primary school (Curriculum for nine-year primary school, 1998)

¹ Slovenia in Europe is one of six topics linked to knowledge about pupils' homeland (so 5-10 of these lessons could be about Europe)

Children should recognise the proper use of natural materials and link this to the need to conserve the natural environment for future generations. They should recognise the wealth of diversity of nations and respect that diversity, showing tolerance towards those who are different in their religion, race, language and customs. Beside these general and common aims of geographical education, in the spirit of consideration of multiculturalism and human rights, the national minorities in primary schools are legally required to have a number of lessons to familiarise themselves with the geographical characteristics of their homeland. It enhances children's legal right to discover the characteristics of their homeland and also to use their native language.

2. Secondary school (Curriculum for gymnasiums, ZRSŠŠ, 1997):

Pupils should understand the geographical reasons for cultural and political diversity in the world. They should develop a spirit of tolerance and respect toward people and nations that are different in terms of language, religion, race and customs. They recognise the need of natural development and both the responsibility and right to preserve physical and biological conditions for life for future generations. In secondary schools the Republic Subject Committee for Geography prepared changes and adaptations of the geography examination for members of the Italian and Hungarian minorities in the nationally mixed areas (RIC, 1995 to 2000). In the 35 lessons for geography which are for the topic of the geography of the domestic province, the 'geography of Italy' or the 'geography of Hungary' is taught. The subject catalogue (RIC, 1995) also gives pupils from the Italian minority the opportunity of using geographical literature in their own language when studying for geography and the same for members of the Hungarian minority community.

Europe in Slovenian geography textbooks

Teachers in primary schools may choose between three textbooks from different publishing houses for teaching geography. In secondary school there is only one geography textbook for the gymnasium, and two for Social Studies. The textbooks are approved by the National Professional Council for Education. They differ very little in educational topics (which are prescribed), but vary in their methodological approach. All the textbooks are colourful and technically very well produced. Multiculturalism and human rights topics are found in chapters about population, settlements, economy and Europe. Contents mostly cover the following issues:

- the right to equal conditions for all: enough food and drinking water, education and a healthy environment (air, water)
- differences of race, language, religion, nationality and gender identities
- economy and poverty as reasons for unequal distribution, and their consequences.

The following examples show educational approaches to two different topics for each level of schooling.

Primary-school: multicultural diversity

Topic: Eurasia nowadays. A short text is given as an introductory motivation: this speaks about the diversity of languages but also covers the need for mutual communication and

understanding. An invitation from the heart sounds the same in all languages – ‘Greetings, young friend and welcome to my home!’

Picture No. 1: Can we understand each other?



Source: Geography for 7th grade, DZS, 1999, Ljubljana

Secondary-school: the right to live in a healthy environment

Topic: Human beings and the landscape. The title ‘We are sawing off the branch on which we are sitting’ takes pupils into the problems of human relations with the environment; which includes everyone’s right to live in a healthy environment and the duty to preserve a healthy environment for our successors.

Picture No. 2: We are sawing off the branch on which we are sitting

A pessimist regards
the glass as half empty.

An optimist considers
it is half full.

A realist knows that
our water is in danger.

Source: Social studies – Geography, DZS,
1999, Ljubljana.

Caricature R. Jenko

**Research with secondary school geography professors on some important democratic educational issues**

My aim was to discover through interviews teachers' opinions about the meaning and connection between the aims of geographical education and learning for a Democratic Europe, and the relationship of these to democratic issues of multiculturalism. The hypothesis was that teachers are aware of the importance of these goals, but that most of them do not know how to achieve them in practice.

The methods used are descriptive and non-experimental, drawn from empirical pedagogical research. I introduced the research problem to them, and tried to find causal connections between the individual parameters. Inquiry and interview were used in the research. The basic instruments were enquiry questionnaires interview protocols. Research questions addressed to 20 secondary school teachers were linked to the inquiry questionnaire. Non-structured direct interviews took place in January 1998 and, with interviews with twelve teachers, formed the basis for the interpretation of enquiry answers.

All the teachers had university degrees in geography. Twenty answered the enquiry questionnaire: five of these had the title of mentor, five were called advisors and two were counsellors. The remainder did not give this information. Their average teaching experience was 19.1 years, with the maximum of 34 years and the minimum of 7.5 years. For a test of statistical validity of differences between the answers of different groups a minimum number of 21 candidates in a group is needed (Sagadin, 1992), and this was not possible to achieve with this sample of 20 teachers.

Question:

I am asking for your personal opinion about the meaning of the international dimension of geographical education. Please, express it in such way that you only circle the one word that best describes this.

Number of answers: 20

- a) It is clearly defined and written in the educational aims of our curriculum that geographical education should enforce positive international and interstate relations.

	yes	partly	no	do not know
Answers	12	4	2	2

- b) Education of the pupils for international understanding is a conscious and important orientation of your school and is present in all subjects.

	yes	partly	no	do not know
answers	9	10	1	/

- c) Is it more important to enable pupils to understand international relations and problems than to follow the curriculum and teach for successful final examination?

	yes	partly	no	do not know
answers	7	7	5	1

- d) Can you stimulate and enable your pupils to be 'good neighbours', so they will be able to objectively evaluate international and interstate problems, because they will understand the geographical background of individual situations and decisions.

	yes	partly	no	do not know
answers	8	10	1	1

More than half of the teachers surveyed thought that the geographical curriculum included clearly defined demands for geographical education to stimulate positive international and interstate relations. More than a third (seven teachers, 35%) thought that it less important to help their pupils understand international relations and problems than it was to follow the curriculum and teach them to be successful in their final examination.

The majority placed more importance on results (knowledge for the matriculation examination). The teachers do not show an appropriate pedagogical and geographical knowledge about the meaning of international understanding and co-operation: this is shown by their thinking that they can stimulate their pupils to be good 'neighbours' without devoting any attention to the topic: just 'by the way', as one expressed herself. Educating pupils for international understanding is a conscious and important aim to less than a half of the gymnasiums from which the teachers in the survey came from.

Summary

The improvement of international understanding and communication through acknowledging individual human rights is no longer an isolated phenomena confined to a few individuals, individual educational institutions or countries. This challenge is now taken up by pedagogues, psychologists and historians, and a great deal is contributed by geographers. By acquiring new geographical knowledge about ourselves and others, we simultaneously form our own ethical, cultural, social, political conscience and sensitivity. It is not enough to define the content of geographical study simply with slogans, and to elect to study only certain countries or regions, or even to enumerate particular issues (such as nationality rights) or defined spatial processes (globalisation) in order to define study goals. Such a curriculum can lead to measurable, exactly defined study material, which is easily tested, but it does not consider the different interests, needs and abilities of the pupils, nor does it consider the actualities of time and space. Geography teaching should give young people information about and understanding of contemporary problems, it should develop pupils' and students' autonomy, stimulate tolerance and also their awareness of obligations, rights and responsibility for their national and natural heritage, and for European culture.

Our research suggests that secondary school teachers of geography are not sufficiently aware of the meaning of planning a democratic dimension in geographical education, which seems only to be written in pedagogical documents and not in practice. They do not actual teach about subjects such as migration and refugees, as shown in examples drawn from our country or our neighbours. Suitable methodical-applicative instructions are missing from the educational curriculum. Teachers do not feel qualified for this, and do not feel they have the authority to adapt the curriculum or textbooks.

Textbooks are improving, especially at the primary school level, but there is not enough space in them for all the geographical information and problems we wish to include. There is limited information on human rights and the importance of multicultural equality, which is an important foundation for building a democratic Europe. There are no case studies, and very few problem-directed contents, on the topic of Democratic Europe in the secondary school textbooks.

To conclude: in Slovenia we have enough time for teaching, and increasing possibilities through textbooks, but we do not have enough pedagogical knowledge and methodical examples to provide quality teaching for a democratic Europe, especially related to real life.

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