

TEACHER DEVELOPMENT AND PERFORMANCE IN GEOGRAPHY: GUIDELINES FOR A GRADUATION PROJECT

Lana de Souza Cavalcanti
Federal University of Goiás, Brazil
E-mail: ls.cavalcanti@uol.com.br

Abstract

The text introduces an argument about teachers' development and practice in Geography, trying to summarize some already reached advancements and highlighting some problems that should be better analyzed in order to improve the quality of this development. Taking the current legislation about teachers' development courses in Brazil and their theoretical fundamentals for granted, the article brings up principles of professional development to serve practice demands, such as the theoretical and practice integration in education projects, the research as an important education component and the school Geography problematization. Based in surveys that took place in post graduations in the country and to comprehend the practice challenges better, the text analyses approaches to the most indicated geographic content about Geography teaching and searches to apprehend daily difficulties faced by Geography teachers. Based in such argument, the text presents, yet, a set of topics to be considered in the graduation projects.

Key words: *geography teaching, project, teacher's development.*

Introduction

The Geography teaching concern with the meaningful learning puts for teacher's developers specific graduation demands: what principles must indicate the professional education in the contemporaneous days? How must geographic content be worked through the courses disciplines? How must we consider the teacher practice effective reference to the organization of these courses? Intending to lead answers to these questions, the text is organized in distinct parts: the first brings up principles of professional development to serve to the practice demands; the second, based in such demands, discriminates and analyses approaches to the most indicated geographic content about Geography teaching; the third, searches to apprehend daily difficulties faced by Geography teachers and, finally, in the final part of the text, presents a guideline to graduation projects discussion continuity.

Initial Orientations to the Geography Development

Lately, courses of development to Geography teachers in Brazil accomplished changes in their curriculum structure, elaborating new political-pedagogical projects, based in valid legal dispositive, like the resolution of CNE – *Conselho Nacional de Educação* (2002) and the National Curriculum Guidelines. Some of these basic orientations are:

- Unique basic education for the bachelor and the licenciated

For Geography graduation, the guidance is to form a conjunct of expertise and general and specific abilities of the professional in Geography, having as axis: the geographic analysis; the knowledge and the analysis of the Geography history; the technological advances and the geographic analysis, in its different specialties. The National Curriculum Guidelines for this education mentors Geography graduation courses projects (Bachelor and Licenciated), with the

understanding that the Geography professional must take part of its unified education, regardless his performance modality.

- Theoretical and practice integration in graduation projects

The recent political-pedagogical projects for Geography teacher's graduation predict 400 hours of practices like curriculum components and 400 supervised internship hours, in activities that must happen from the second half of the course, parallel to the most theoretical disciplines, including pedagogical aforementioned, dealing with Didactics, Psychology and general education themes. These courses composition try to provide, through the student's graduation, opportunities for initial contact with the professional practice, overcoming the most conventional standards, which predicted this contact only in the last year. About this course structure, it must be highlighted two aspects.

The first is that this proposal is based in the theoretical and practice presupposition, changing the conception already soaked in society that graduation is responsible for the publicizing, discussion and access to the theory, while the professional practice is the applying field of this theory. In these terms, there is a separation and, meanwhile, linearity from theory to practice. In a different way, what is wanted in this new course models is to involve the students, through their graduation, in the thinking of needs and possibilities to work, in practice, with the knowledge they are building. Starting from the comprehension that teaching is a social, historical, dynamic practice, done by concrete subjects, the didactic theory alerts that it's not susceptible of comprehension solely theoretical and rational, with normative ramifications to be applied in practice.

The activity of teaching is done by subjects with personal experiences, emotions, beliefs, academic knowledge, daily life knowledge, that are put in action in the work process, turning them to theoretical-practical dispositive of action. They characterize the teacher's work as a profession and they are defined as part of a wider institutional and social structure. So, the teachers' knowledge in the classroom isn't reduced to a cognitive system, they have social, existential and pragmatic components. In this direction, the courses lead themselves into the theoretical and practice integration. As Gimeno Sacristan asserts:

The problem of the theoretical-practical relation can't be solved in education from a collocation which affirms that the reality – the practice – is caused by the application or the adoption of a theory, Knowledge or investigation results. In other terms, we can't install ourselves in a world where there is hope that, once we've got a theoretical system, we can set the reality globally in another way, that we can govern it according to determinations we can deduct this system (Sacristan, 1998, p. 33).

The second aspect to be highlighted about this principle is that the simple definition of this structure doesn't guarantee the theoretical and practical integration. It's possible to accept without many problems that this way of noticing the relation between theoretical and practice is the most appropriate. However, changing the core of the courses is a necessary condition if we want that to happen, but it isn't enough. What is more meaningful in this case is the alteration of the graduation practices.

The graduation practices are the assumed rolls for teachers and students, the pedagogical routines, the ways of relationship between teachers and students, the teacher's teaching styles, the activities organization, the ways of learning evaluation, the ways of activities records and centralized organization of the records, the ways of planning classes and curriculum.

If it's in the context of the practices that really happens the changes, beyond the course structures, one side of it, and the individual actions of different subjects, another side, we should

ask: How are these practices? Are they transformed to the point of leading themselves effectively by these principals of theoretical-practice integration? And what does it mean to change the development of the professors in graduation courses? It means, besides other aspects: taking the students experiences as vital references in the teaching-learning process, reinforcing the idea that basis of a consistent education is not the amount of content taught through the disciplines, but the development of an autonomous way to think; leaving the strict logic of the disciplines; overcoming the professor's logic that he knows everything and the student who will "absorb" the content; searching a contextualized learning, trying ways of teaching with researches, organizing disciplines having situation/problems axis; providing opportunities of cooperation groups school works, of interdisciplinary groups, of interdisciplinary seminars; searching ways of doing alternative teaching activities for the classroom and, after all, to the display classes.

In this scenery, the practical activities get another dimension, turning themselves into linking axis of the graduation. The curriculum Internship turns to have a character of educative field, realizing itself through partnerships among involved institutions and through the research about educative reality.

The Research as an Important Education Component

Another recurrent principle in education projects is the one you consider research as component part. Indeed, in the curriculum cores is predicted the monography, also called "Course Conclusion Work", as a compulsory activity of curriculum integralization. This principle leads itself by the comprehension that research is one of the main potential activities of learning and includes the teachers as subjects of the investigative process, which can build knowledge about the act of teaching, that's why they must learn the research in their graduation.

The basic idea is not to graduate researchers in the strict way, but to consider the teaching as a process of building knowledge by the student, emphasizing activities that enable this construction, going from a teaching view as mere subject reproduction to the teaching as a pedagogical help to the students, so they can learn to think autonomously. The teaching work orientated like this demands from the teacher a new teaching and learning paradigm.

The school, as we are reasoning, is the object of study to render problematic. Despite this, it's noticed that, practice, there is, in fact, little insertion from graduation courses in school's reality. The teachers of the specific disciplines show bit interest by the pedagogical questions, many times not knowing them totally and, in other cases, denying them as basic knowledge for themselves and for the students, future teachers.

For many University professors, the research is the only reason for the university to remain; and, conforming to this thought, their teaching activities are directed principally to the researcher formation, in the strict and in the technical sense.

To review this concept in a University context, it's necessary to consider the graduation research as equivalent to the others and, besides that, to gather an investigative activity with the formative process of the students and not in the investigative projects and purposes of professors and investigator groups of that context. The research as a teaching principle is an attitude, a practice for the professionals worried with reality knowledge building.

Practically, it is still noticed a separation between teaching and research in university courses, as if the research would be an activity for few, what creates prejudices and discrimination in relation to teaching. A consequence is the decreased link between knowledge worked in the disciplines of specific contents and the practical reality of the schools. In this meaning, it is drawn attention to the roll of the internship that, effectively, promotes the joint between the practical development, the research and the innovation done in collaboration by teachers of the schools, future teachers and university researchers.

As it is seen, these changes are important advances in the projects of teacher's develop-

ment, however, the demand for more efficient approaches to obtain meaningful knowledge from the students continues to challenge the practice for Geography graduation, that goes beyond the structures of the course. These challenges are the focus of this research.

Theoretical-Methodological Approaches of School Geographic Content

The construction of the intellectual autonomy of the teacher, the change of professor practices and the reflection about innovation possibilities must be the tonic for graduation institutions, for all educators, in their gathered actions. Understanding that, it's indicated that it must be added as principle of the teacher development the problematization of the school Geography, as one of the graduation axis. This axis has the purpose to question the different specialties of this science in its different moments of the course, and even in moments of continued education, from some interrogations like: in what context the Geography constituted itself as science? What is the nature of this knowledge throughout history? What is the structure of the geographical knowledge? In what consists the particularity of the different knowledge that this science produces? What is the contribution of Geography nowadays? How has this knowledge been constituted as school knowledge? What relations does it have with academic knowledge of the Geography different specialties? What are the relations between academic Geography and school Geography? Are these questions, actually, ramifications of more general questions of Geography didactics, related to the epistemology: what is Geography? What is school Geography? For what does it serve? Who makes it and with what fundamentals?

A bibliographic research in dissertations and thesis about Geography teaching in the last ten years in Brazil allow us to conclude that the teacher's questions go around "strategies" or "procedures" that must be adopted to create interest in their students, to get discipline, to have authority, to convince the students about the importance of Geography in their lives. In other words, the Geography teachers are, frequently, worried in finding ways to provide students group interest, approaching local and global spaciality to the spatiality lived by the students in their daily life. Trying to answer this docent practice demands, in an earlier text (Cavalcanti, 2010), it was pointed approaches that has been suggested because of its good results potential in learning-teaching in Geography. From this approaches, it can be extracted important indications for a professional development.

The Student's Place as Basic Reference and the Necessary Multi-scale in the Content Treatments

The place as reference to the geographic teaching has been underlined in research and didactics' books (cf., for example PNLD – *Plano Nacional do Livro Didático*, 2009). Callai (2003, 2006) warns, however, that it doesn't have to do with working the place only as a local reference, but as an analysis scale needed to understand the phenomenon, that happens in the world, but that carries out in the local. This indication allows higher identification of the students with the contents. Practically, such reference remains several times as a strategy of "beginning a conversation" in the classroom, and not as sense searching of school content. So, it is highlighted the necessary dialectic articulation among local and global scales in the construction of complex spatial reasoning, searching to overcome the dichotomy and excluding treatment of the phenomenon in its global and local scale.

Formation of Geographic Concepts that are Formers of the Spatial Thinking

The formation of concepts requires gathering and confrontation among scientific daily life concepts. Following Vygotsky contributions, there is a necessary relation among daily life, pedagogical mediation and concepts formation in the development of the learning-teaching process. For Geography, it is warned to the relevance of the students' daily life knowledge, especially in respect to the place where they live and their representations about different places around the globe. To form a spatial thought, it's necessary that they form wide geographic concepts, that are fundamental tools for spatial comprehension, to find and analyze the places meanings and their relation with daily life.

The aim of forming geographic concepts has been outlined since 1980s, when it was built a comprehension of teaching Geography is not teaching a group of themes and content, but it is, before all, to teach a way of thinking, of noticing reality. The geographic thought has been historically structured by a group of categories, concepts and theories about space and the relation between society and the space. So, teaching Geography is to teach by themes and content (facts, phenomenon, information) a way of thinking. The concepts of landscape, place, territory, region and nature, understood as the elementary in the geographic thinking structure, expressing vivid experiences through every people in the daily life, in the specialties development, and that's the way they have to be considered since the first years.

Development of the Ability to Read and to Map the Reality through Graphic and Cartographic Language and the Development of the Ability to Deal with "Alternative" Languages in the Geographical Analysis

The methodological indications about school cartography have been recurrent in these two last decades. Several are the theorists (Simielli, 1999, 2007; Almeida, 2007; Lesann, 2010) that has been contributing for this, defining as one of the Geography teaching axis the cartographic alphabetization – the ability of representing the visible worlds, objective and subjective, not being limited by the objective and fix location and mapping of the things. It stands out the mental maps, as symbolic constructions, immersed in social, spatial and historic environments, that are "free", without concerning with the objective correspondence with what is represented, that don't obey cartographic rules, however they can be utilized to develop them or as a strategy to comprehend the students' representations (Miranda, 2005). For Geography, the image, the drawing and the map are important resources to the mediation between the subject and knowledge.

In the cartographic alphabetization process, the cartography shows not only as a technique or content topics, but as language, with codes, symbols and signs that are needed to be learned so that the student can include himself in the communication process that the cartography represents (a science of the spatial information from graphic transmission), developing through this process the fundamental abilities of map readers and reality mappers. The indication is to initiate (first years) with the cartographic notions of area, dot and line, scale and proportion, subtitle, vertical and oblique view, two-dimensional and three-dimensional image.

There are indications to incorporate other languages, different from the most conventional ones (the verbal and the cartographic), such as movies, documentaries, media, internet, virtual games and computers. These languages have important characteristics, like: they demand a link between reason and sensibility; require interdisciplinary approach; for the communication, they demand a more synthetic and conceptual knowledge. It's important to consider that all of them are representations of the reality, they are manners to show the reality, with the inherent subjectivity, but also they are ways to build representations about the real, in other words, "they say to us about our world, but also teach us to read it from them. They legitimate, above all,

themselves as works that say about reality” (Oliveira Jr. 2009:20).

Critical Treatment about the Physical Geography Themes and the Environment Concept

The recommendation by the researchers is that these themes must be treated as a requirement of the link between nature and society, fundamental approach for the concept formation of nature as a social and historical construction, resulted from the human production. In the society/nature relation there are perverse results, but also other possibilities. It's important to see in history the progressive substitution of the natural mean for a mean much more artificialized, and the landscape, in its way, as an expression of this substitution. It's, therefore, function of the school and the Geography teaching to form a way to notice nature and the physical environment not only in its natural constitution, but as resulting means of the relation between men and nature.

According to this way of thinking, the environmental education is comprehended as a social and political practice through where the individuals can interfere in the reality around them and transform it. It's related to a change of the society posture, of attitudes to take care of the environment and the mutual respect that implies the respect to the life in its diversity. Geography always dealt with the environment questions, because it studies the relations between nature and men, searching an integrated approach. After 1980s, with the science changes and, specially, in Geography, the environment conception turned to be majorly what had as basis this relation. The school Geography, by this conceptual discussion, by the nature of its object (multidimensional), is a privileged discipline for the interdisciplinary exercise. Suertegaray (2003) indicates a Geographic teaching practice following this perspective which is to search the ambience creations, a possibility of ways coming from individuals to make interconnections collectively, enlarging the transformation power, the brotherhood, the knowledge exchanging and the social responsibility.

Approaches of Relevant Social Themes and the Effective Contribution to the Citizenship Education

This indication is related to the inclusion of contemporary spatiality themes, with great media repercussion, such as referents to the debate about gender, ethnicity, race, migration, territorial conflicts. It is suggested a systematic analysis of these themes, providing the divergence and explaining their complexity, to overcome a superficial approach, with an ideological, prejudice and spectacular view. Caso (2007) proposes for the Geography teaching an agenda of social-territorial problems, built based in the linking between the problematization of the disciplinary field and the school content and the “logic or epistemologic meaning”, “social relevance” and “psychological meaningfulness” criteria. Similarly, Garcia Perez and Alba Fernández (2008) assert that the content focus must be the social and environment relevant problems. In Brazil, this also has been a recommendation, reaching the student's motivation and his involvement to the treated themes.

It's needed to highlight, with this, the ways how the school and the Geography teaching are included to the net of social relations and how the social relations are inserted in the schools. The society, mostly in urban areas, lives a multiple, different, diversity experience; this diversity, summarized or expressed in subjective culture – students and professors – also express themselves in the school, showing themselves in the diverse learning experience.

According to Pontischka (2008, p.521), the “student nowadays is a world citizen and doesn't belong only to a local or a country”, whether because the mobility of the people is intense, or because everybody's life is full of influences that are provided from global production

process. Forming a citizen in this circumstance, in a variety of styles and inequality of human life conditions present in the contemporary world, mostly in some countries, like Brazil, it's something extremely complex and demands the professor's attention to the student's world and to the possibilities of interdisciplinary work.

Concluding, it must be highlighted that these approaches are indicated by the Didactics of Geography professors and they already make part, somehow, of teacher's knowledge. In other hand, despite of the fact that many teachers have knowledge of these indications and that they agree with this "didactic" adequation, most part of them are not orientated effectively by them, whether by practical difficulties, or linked to the conditions of the professional daily life exercise. In this way, it's important to think about these difficulties, as it will be done afterwards.

Difficulties and Challenges Faced by Geography Teachers in their Daily Life Practice

With the background of several different teacher's development courses and observing classes (internships and post graduations under my supervision), it's possible to affirm that among the difficulties related to the daily life exercise of being a teacher, they are: lack of interest of the Geography students; students learning deficiency; bad intellectual conditions and basic material for the learning process, a gap between the theoretical advances in the area and the taught content, excessive fondness to the didactic book, still seen as unquestionable reference of the structure and the theme selection and content to be taught, scarcity of continuity education opportunities, empty practices of geographic content systematized paying attention to the unity of thoughts.

In view of changing these difficulties, there are some challenges to be faced. Some of them have to do with teaching system in general and with the profession structure, which analysis overcomes this text limits. So, we stay with the necessity to return to the professor formation theme searching to add new points, beyond the principles already considered.

To help reaching this goal, it can be started with the affirmation about the main task of the professors in the Geography teaching formation course, facing the roll to teach Geography for their students. In this task, there are some unfolding ideas:

On the one hand, there is the university student and his own school journey. What is relevant about Geographic basis and its prejudice in its own schooling? In this matter, it is underlined the alert about the difficulties of modifying the conceptions/beliefs the students bring from their life experiences, about school Geography, about teaching work and about school. Mostly, according to what researches point (cf., for example, Marcelo Garcia, 2002; Tardif, 2000), the initial education courses put together only one part of the sources of the professional knowledge, from professor procedures, must have been included in this composition the life experience and before school education and their own professional practices.

For the other hand, there is the university professor himself and his own profession and education journey: in this case, it must be questioned the option of the university teacher to teach, about his beliefs and his process of professional identification. In the last decades, in the teaching journey with this subject, efforts are dedicated to find ways to create bonds between the Geography teachers' motivations and the students' motivations. We must ask if there is this bond in the education courses: Do the university professors, masters of teachers, have more motivations, somehow, next to the students, future Geography teachers? Is there entailment between the interests from the geographers and that mostly perform the task of teaching geographic content and the students (future teachers) of the Geography courses? If it is a fragile bond, from the consideration of the distance already appointed in the text among the goals from these different subjects, is it possible to take it as one of the reasons to maintain certain education difficulties and Geography professors' performance? And more: Which way is possible to

strengthen the ties between university professors and the students?

From these two briefly appointed references, the student and the professor, it is intended, to end the analysis, to add aspects for an initial discussion guideline of a professional education in the context here analyzed.

Guideline to Move Forward in the Argument about Graduation Projects in Geography (Thinking in the Future and the Difficulties Overcoming)

Learning with the Practice

In profession performance, through the practice accompaniment and through researches in Brazil, it's possible to affirm that there are positive experiences, good practices in the way to go forward in the results about students' meaningful learning, about the development of the guiding spatial thought of his daily citizenship practice.

Looking at this reality, it seems to be a good start learning with these teachers: Which are the "secrets" for the teachers' development be well succeeded? What are the revealed "secrets" by the students that has the experience of meaningful learning? What makes these teachers to do methodological, relational, intellectual choices? Sharing Shullman's concern (2005) with this type of teachers, question is done: what happens for him to be this way?

Learning with Theory

It is highlighted here the necessity to get closer to a Geography methodological-theoretical argument with the Geography Didactics studies: on the one hand, the academic school Geography are not the same thing, however, the epistemological core of Geography that feed them are needed to be known. Without good comprehension of these cores, without good method definition (world conception, of the science and the society, knowledge, of Geography) the Geography didactics teachers won't manage to overcome the stereotype that who really forms is the professor content, while they teach techniques, they are charged of the practice, secondary and external in formation.

The Professional education requires theoretical fundament, and this passes by all the moments and dimensions of the formation. And one of the problems to be emphasized is that in teacher's development courses there is carelessness with the discussion about the relation between Didactics and epistemology, in part because it's still understood that this knowledge field has only one technical dimension, not requiring theoretical discussion. That's why, it's necessary to learn with theory too, that has been incorporated the idea that the Didactics is a reflection about the teaching process, in all his dynamic and complexity, what includes the epistemological discussion.

Reflecting about Teaching Knowledge

The reflections advances about teacher's development and its practice have been underlined the teacher's knowledge questions: pieces of knowledge that are constituted in the practice and that is based from theory, from the theoretical-methodological formation. So, these constructed theoretical-practical knowledge through the initial (and continued) education are the next:

- To know Geography – To know more than the geographic content, to know the geographic thought history, to know about the study object, its categories.
- To know how to teach – to know more than teaching techniques; to know how to think about his own teaching act, as a social phenomenon, that there is an intention, that is tied to

world projects, of society, of formation in this and for this society.

- To know who the students are – to know who the students are, their motivations, their history and life context, their group and individual identity.
- To know who teaches Geography – to reflect about the professors' projects, about the motives, the professional option, the school conception and school education and the implications of these teaching practice elements.
- To know who to teach Geography for – To have a wide vision of the school subject from what they dedicate to and of their social contribution.
- To know how to teach Geography for the determined subjects and determined contexts – to comprehend the school as a social institution, his roll nowadays, his crises and difficulties

Conclusion

These topics of a discussion guideline for the advance of graduation projects in Geography are not exhaustive, but they are only the beginning, taking as a supposition the principles and the approaches previously analyzed, taking them as temporary indications that requires constant reviews, always possible to be amplified with other elements.

By different researches, it's noticed that teachers are committed with a project of student's education, many of them affirms to wish that their job contributes to change their students' life, hoping that they become more critical and more participative citizens. The teachers also sais that Geography in the school are an important element in this kind of education. But, on the other hand, they are aware of their limits and the real conditions of their work.

The research has shown different approaches of Geography teaching, but it's noticed that the studies pointing to a more meaningful Geography for the students, taking their subjectivity for granted, has happened since 1980s. So, we still have a lot of challenges to face, to turn the students' geographical thought complex, dialectic, required for a contemporaneous life. Several factors are important to overcome these challenges, among them are the indications for the teachers' development shown in this text.

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Advised by Laima Railienė, University of Šiauliai, Lithuania

Lana de Souza Cavalcanti

PhD in human geography, Research Institute Department and University, Socio-environmental Studies Universidade Federal de Goiás.
E-mail: ls.cavalcanti@uol.com.br
Website: <http://www.ufg.br/page.php>

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