

THE SCHOOL GEOGRAPHY AND THE DIDACTIC IN THE CONSTITUTION OF THE GEOGRAPHIC EDUCATION

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Abstract

This paper discusses the geographic education and, in this context approaches the geography didactics. Those two themes are inserted in the discussion over the school in modern times, considering that the 21st century presents remarkable differences from the 20th century and, the main one maybe is the speed of the information. It constitutes, then a new spatiality as a consequence of the globalization processes that demarcate the places where people live and lead them to incorporate a new kind of demand. The students (children and teenagers) arrive at school at this time presenting expectations that the school is not always able to fulfill. Those questions are discussed and, from the referential supports are presented extracts from a research conducted with docents and undergraduate students from licentiate program, in which emerge the tensions between the academic and docent interest, between the university and the school, among many others.

Key words: school, teacher training, geographic education.

Introduction

The teaching and the learning of the school geography demand the discussion the didactic, it has been a study object by the specialists, in a quest for a consolidated geographic education. It is about the reflection of the teaching act turning the content into something meaningful. Meaningful to the student life, in a way they can built intellectual tools to understand the spatiality of the social phenomenon. The 21st century is characterized by remarkable differences than what we experienced until the 20th century, the main of them maybe are the speed of the information. And, together there are all the characteristics of a new spatiality resulting from globalization processes that delimit the places in which people live in and take them to incorporate a new kind of requirements. The students that get to school in this moment have expectations that the school not always can fulfill. In fact, most of the time the school don't achieve it, even because the new world's characteristics created more expectations from school than what was proper for so long, in which was the institution, par excellence of knowledge transmission. Today the same school is being required to play roles that the family is not succeeding anymore, that are concerned generally speaking, not only the information, but the structure of the individuals.

This paper discusses the geography as a scholar discipline in this world and the school of this century, dealing with didactic and geographic education. The didactic as a mean to reflect about how to teach the discipline's specific contents and the geographic education as the search for alternatives to capacitate the children to understand the world surrounding themselves, in this case, through the study of scholar geography.

The discussion about geography teaching inscribes itself in a context that delimits the course of geographic education. This has suscitated the investment in researches to point out how the formation of docents to basic education happens, how work the university teachers of

these programs and how the performance in the basic school is, in teaching practice.

In Brazil the characteristics of teaching geography continue marked by traditional ways of teaching and the learning present itself as a challenge to be revealed in its variety of nuances. But there are, also, the trials to find ways to modify the teaching and generate apprenticeships that are meaningful. Many interesting experiences are accomplished and, lately the investigation about didactic and geographic education has contributed to perceive the advances. The didactic-pedagogic material, available to teachers and the reflections about the subject show the effort to make the discipline more in touch with the students' life and with the society comprehension from the spatial analysis. Among the subject specialists is possible to refer to: Castellar (2005, 2010), Cavalcanti (2001, 2002, 2006), Garcia Pérez (2002, 2003, 2011), Garrido Pereira (2005, 2009), Herrero Fabregat (1992, 2004, 2005), Rego (2003, 2007), Straforini (2004).

This effort is evident not only in the Brazilian geography context, as also in the Latin America where through a researchers network – REDLADGEO – the discussions about the subject are being intensified, as can be verified by the scientific production published online on the web page of the network.

It is important to explain that the reflection in School Geography – Geographic Education consists in a line of research that has its own theoretical support and methodological conduction. The conceptions and the theoretical paths that are followed are not necessarily homogeneous, but its own presentation and discussion contribute in a meaningful way to the advancement and establishment of parameter of teaching geography in particular and from school in its complexity. To research in didactic and geographic education requires, therefore, assuming the posture of scientific investigation. This is important to be reaffirmed to clear up that it is not simply to trace methodological procedures, to define strategies to build teaching or to present techniques. It is much more than that, and should be recognized that the number of teachers interested in doing such reflection is growing year by year.

Should be brought to attention that the geographic science constitutes itself with theoretical support that, along the time defines it with specific properties. It is not the case, here, approach this path, but reassure and reflect about the fact of the space always has been, during this time, the basic element of geography. A space understood as the social product, once it takes (as a stage, as a ground) the human life, it conditions and offers opportunities. And, the society, than, make its own space, complying, respecting and overcoming the natural boundaries and, the power dispute among subjects and social groups.

This science has in its composition several covered aspects (branches of geography, such as agrarian, urbane, industrial, regional, etc...), has always as central category the space and, the spatial analysis (geographic) as a way to make the investigation and analysis. As it becomes a study subject in the school, open a new line of investigation that aims to elucidate how the scientific knowledge becomes scholar knowledge (scholar curricular content).

Theoretical Analysis

During the classes realized in licenciate program in two universities (Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul and Regional Northwest of Ijuí) could be detected, with docents and undergraduate students, that there are many interpretations about those topics that was presented previously and they are loaded with theoretical influence from geographic science and pedagogy.

An agreement point nowadays is the interpretation that those – science and scholar discipline – are two ways of studying the world with its own properties each, but that link themselves in the same matrix, with the same goal, with the same object, that is studying the world, a society from the spatial analysis.

In this sense, is interesting to characterize the Geographic Education and so to verify that

scholar geography is built as scholar content, in the reference:

1. of academy from what suits to the science and the quest of explanations to mankind issues. This investigation presents important outcomes to the understanding of the world we are living in. It characterizes itself by specific procedures of investigations with theoretical and methodological supports and with its own language.

2. In the context that presents specific characteristics of the singular places and, such as, it constitutes the work with scholar curriculum. This one, demarcated by the contents of scholar curriculum and public policies that defines it.

The didactic and education geographic are characterized by, going beyond the teaching the geography, doing the contents to become meaningful for the comprehension of the spatiality which the student lives in. Beyond the geographic analysis, that demands the development of spatial ratiocination, it defines the path to analyze, to understand and to search the explanations for what is happening in the world, for the problems presented by the society. This idea about the geography teaching, although being consensus, it does not present itself homogeneously and, sometimes not even predominant at the geographic community and at the basic school, and not even at the university. The researches being conducted have been showing the existence of tensions manifesting in the work of teaching geography, and, contribute to the understanding of this reality. The problems manifest themselves, especially from the relations among several subjects involved in the process of teaching and learning geography, but also on the understanding of the question and theoretical and methodological contributions.

Another aspect that deserves to be considered is the kind of professional formation that occurs nowadays inside the graduation program that characterized themselves by forming technicians (denominated as bachelor) and teachers (license) in one program. This proposal has been considered by the studios as the most coherent, with the pretension that geography must be equally learned by the two professionals. What happen in Brazil are the teachers having an accelerated formation, where the teaching is centralized on the practical tasks where the undergraduate must learn to do “things” to teach the students. This way of doing, brings up a concept that the teacher must have the initial and continual formation studies to learn to “pass” the content. In this line of thought the professional needs to learn is related to the strategies to do the teaching, what makes the didactic a discipline for teaching techniques, and several times the instructor are from general didactic teachers and do not have the knowledge of the science and such as ignore a geographic didactic (specific). The bachelor by the other side must learn in this teaching/formation concept to be a researcher learning his science. Summarizing the teaching is characterized for being more rigorous and deep to the bachelor and shallower to the teacher.

The misunderstanding of the geographic didactic as a path to overcome the difficulties in the docent formation, takes to a false comprehension of what this subject means in the teachers formation. And, having in mind that it is still current the concept that to be a teacher is necessary to know only the content of what is being taught in the basic education’s class, the formation in the academy tends to be just learning the activities that teach you how to do it. And, so on the geographic didactic is reduced to the teaching of practical activities instead to contribute in the constitution of a framework to think the teaching and then understanding how the students learns, how the teacher organizes his knowledge and which are theoretical references that supports his posture and actions in the basic school.

In fact the concept that still prevails concerns to the absence of the debate about the cognition aspects that must be prioritized under professional formation. To understand the learning process, and how the student is (or is not) learning demands researches to be conducted to provide data, making it possible to support the work by advancing in the theorization and in the constitution of theoretical supports.

The geography, in Brazil and in other countries also, as can be seen in geography events (EGAL-Latin America Meeting of Geographers; ENG – Geographers National Meeting, and

the Geography Didactic Teachers Meeting, for example) despite all the advances of the last years, in its teaching, still has the signs of the traditional way of teaching. In general, in the basic school, the teachers work with fragments of the content, spare and loose; the contents are based in information without caring to the fact that the information is quickly outdated. In the university, during the formation, the way to deal with questions of the geographic matter is even more fragmented, from researches conducted by the academic docents. Beyond that, several times the technical dimension superimpose to the pedagogic dimension of the content handling. According to Souto González in his paper *Didáctica de la Geografía*, we need to know how someone learns and for that it is fundamental to know the aspects of the learning itself to be done by the subjects and know how to stimulate the attitude concerning the interest in understanding the world. He says that for it,

“it assumes to define the geographic didactic as a set of knowledge that not only deal with concepts of this subject. We also have to consider the social context and the communication with the students”. (Souto González, 1999, p. 12)

The author points out that to teach well one should dominate the subject of study, should have the conceptual speech organized and have suited task proposals. But, he insists that it is also needed to know how the students learn, what kind of obstacles, barriers or interests are present. And, for our concern, the author defines the geography didactic as,

“a content itself, as an object of learning, that must be learnt by the future teachers and the ones on scene... To teach better we need to know the discipline we teach (in this case the geography), as much as to detect the learning obstacles of the students” (Souto González, 1999, p. 12)

Another important aspect brought to light by this geography didactic studios is in respect of his affirmation that a good geography teacher must know the concepts derived from its own discipline and after those from other disciplines among the ones denominated as education sciences, and that for knowing geography and knowing how to teach *“it is about establishing a similarity between the learning process and the investigation process, even though they are not identical in its elaboration”* (Souto González, 1999, p.13). This is the challenge to those who intend to deal with the geography teaching using the theoretical supports that set it up and, considering the docent work as a reflection exercise capable to orientate the actions taken in the school.

But, in this process there are several sources of tension emerging during the docent formation and, revealing the difficulty to make the teaching to reach the same level as the scientific investigation. The tension appears from the necessity of the professional on the job, in other words, from the basic school daily practice and relationship teacher-student in the class. It is broadly accepted currently that university programs have a great difficulty considering that the formation is meant for the professional exercise of the teaching in the basic school, this problem manifest itself inside the specific contents and in the didactic also. In the geography it is not any different. In a research conducted with docents and students of geography (license) programs (in the context of the research program sponsored by the CNPq, *“Study of places, geography knowledge and teacher formation”*) emerge the tension between the interest of the undergraduate student and the professor, between the university and the school, among many others. The following aspects of these ones can be characterized:

1. Theoretical are those aspects concerning the dealing whit geography themes, and,

many times they are not literally theoretic, according to the term definition. The university teachers stress that the students refuse to debate the theoretical-conceptual discussion; that they do not reach the understanding of the geography basic concepts because they lack references to do so; that they do not know the history of the geography thought and of the teaching of school geography. The undergraduate students by the other side complain that there is too much theory, that do not help in the practice; that the theory is important because it bring lots of information, but the authors are too hard to understand and the text too complex, disconnected from the practice. The students tend to simplify the whole subject by saying that: the university theory is very different from the school theory and that lot of readings does not help to learn how to do it in class. It is important to point out here that what is usually understood as “theoretical”, not rarely goes beyond the strict meaning of the word. For example, there are references of theoretical as excessive reading demand, as long lectures, as information transmission. In summary one can observe that the teachers the tension is understood as the theoretical difficulty characterized for the lack of reflection exercise and the lack of dealing with concept, theorizing the reality and knowing the fundamentals of science. And, for the students side the question is reduced, simply to all that is not practical (operational).

2. Didactic are those aspects that have reference in the teaching, considering the theoretical support that delineate it. For the teacher they are identified as: lack of comprehension of the knowledge building dynamics; dealing with the technical aspects without the reference provided by the debate suited. The student side state that the formation program fail in provide teaching practical strategies; the lack of disciplines to deal with the classroom dynamics (how to treat each student according to their ages, how to teach each theme, how to evaluate); that they are never taught to prepare class plans, not even how to treat each contents; they complain that in the university is all about reading and in the school they have to deal with the students. They insist that more didactic and psychology issues should be offered to prepare them for the work in a school. It can be noticed that the teachers are worried about the cognition aspects and the students are concerned with sensorial aspects only, it means, learn techniques, to learn to build didactic material.

3. Content is what constitutes the specific part of the discipline, what distinguishes from the others. It is about the organization of the space from the social relations and interactions, among people and social groups and that involves the social-economic, cultural-political, and natural aspects. From the teachers point of view the main issue is the poor level of the students background when they arrive to the university and the lack of time dedicated to study; that the presence and overvaluation of the common sense and the lack of knowledge of the technical terms and concepts, hinder the abstraction needed to accomplish the reflection about the proposed questions. They understand the knowledge as conceptual, procedural, it is not a packed knowledge and that the political dimension of the geography is forgotten due to some fashion trends too present in Brazilian geography. All these leads towards the existence of a great difficulty in doing a geographic analysis, developing spatial ratiocination, reading the landscape and working with the concepts. The students perspective is that the contents worked in university and in school are very different, those from the university are way above those from the school and the approach is very different too. The students summarize it by saying that what should be learnt to be used in school is not taught in the university and that the university geography is not related to the school geography, having too vague contents, too broad ones. Based on that they understand that when they will have to teach to basic school students they will depend on the didactic book, and in the university the book is not even known. At the same time they assure that in the school they have to deal with lots of data/information, contents, in sum, more concrete, in the university it more about theory. Another aspect presented it is that the lack of cartographic alphabetization in the university hinders the teacher from knowing how to use the maps.

The tension that is noticed, when one listens to the teachers and undergraduates, is a sign of a serious lack of synchronicity between the teaching and the learning, in a general way and, specifically between what is intended to teach in docent formation programs and how the students realize it and what are their wishes. It becomes clear that the geography didactic is being ineffective in most of times. Beyond the problems related to the Brazilian education public policies application, there are the concrete problems that present themselves in the daily routine of a teacher. The effort of understanding the official policies runs concomitantly with the effort to understand how to solve the problems in the teacher formation programs.

Facing the modern days demands, the institutionalized education attend to a meaningful part in the youngsters' formation, and all the curricular disciplines have their part to play. And the geography that studies the world has to consider that this world is mutable, that the spaces – which are the study object – differentiate themselves as the time goes by, assuming new shapes, as they face the demands and the forms of organization of the population. Remembering Santos (1994), when he says that the space crystallizes the preceding moments, it is the place of the meeting between the past and the future, by means of the present social relations that materializes on it. If the geography studies the world that is in constant transformation, the forms to study, to understand and represent this world also change, perfect themselves and add new forms. The geographic education didactic must take into account those characteristics of the new times, the advances in science, and how the student's learning process occur, a child and a youngster that lives completely connected with the current processes of information distribution, at a point they can be called digital natives, while we as university teachers are characterized as digital migrant.

On the face of that we should act on an open pedagogic process, that allow us to incorporate the important issues of making the learning meaningful, understanding the time being problems. Accordingly to Santos (1994)

“To be effective the learning process should, at first, start from the consciousness of the current times. That means to know what the world is and how it defines itself and works, in a way we could recognize the part of each country in the planet set and the part of each person in the human society set. That is the way to make possible to create conscious citizens, capable of acting in the present and helping to build the future.”(1994:p. 121)

The geography didactic needs to be set on principles that make clear the function of the education, and specially the geographic education. And, being the teaching essentially rooted on the human condition, the fact of teaching to and learning from one of ourselves is more important to establish our humanity than any of the concrete knowledge that are perpetuated or transmitted. As presented by Savater (2006)

“There is no learning that does not imply on temporal consciousness and do not answer directly or indirectly to it, even thou the cultural profiles of this consciousness – cyclic, linear, transcendent or immanent, from maximum to minimum chronological reach are hugely variant.” (2006:p. 40)

That being said it is time to establish the existence of theoretical basis to fundament the pedagogical processes and the origins of the geographic knowledge, and those need to be dealt with in the teachers formation courses. It is important to allow the generation of meaningful learning overcoming the conception that theoretical approaches do not matter to the teacher. To do so, one of the paths to deal with the geography is to be aware of the importance of doing

the geographic analysis, having the concepts as a reference to support the interpretation of the social phenomena in the space.

Still it is worth to make a reference to the intrinsic aspects of the geography didactic and that when they are respected they can assure the effective accomplishment of the teaching and learning processes. What is the specific subject of the geography, deserves attention, because there are some sets of knowledge commonly accepted as being the geography. However, it is never too much to stress that what the teacher teaches is always selected, because there is no such thing as an unbiased curriculum and there is always some interest on its definition. It is always important to have a clear idea to whom the teaching is for. The context the student lives in is so important facing the globalization phenomenon that passes through all the social and economical phenomenon of the time being and they deserve to be considered, because the places differentiate themselves accordingly with the type of society that lives there and the ways it organizes its population. The local and global perspective presents itself as a needed mark to consider the phenomenon, succeeding one another, on the different places.

Another aspect that deserves being brought up is related with the pedagogic dimension in dealing with the subjects of study, because they carry the technical and the pedagogic dimensions. The technical dimension tells about the contents *per se*, the data that can be transformed in information and than from it to allow building the knowledge. The set of information transform itself into knowledge as they are elaborated and organized inside a context to order and systematize attributing a meaning. The pedagogical dimension can be also considered the social dimension, once it constitutes itself on the social aspect of each one of the contents. What is it for, which is the function of some contents, which are the goals of each individual? The outcome is what is denominated as geographic education in the case here presented.

Some Considerations

This reflections aim the discussion about the scholar geography, considering it a line of research with theoretical and methodological references that can give it a scientific body.

The geography didactic needs, how ever, more researches about the theoretical support of how the student learns, considering the reality in which he lives in the kind of teaching developed.

The same way it is necessary to understand, how the teacher learn to become a teacher, how he acquires the knowledge of his discipline – in this case the geography – and how the teacher works with the pedagogic dimension of those contents.

So empirical surveys, analysis and data interpretation are needed to verify what is happening currently on geography teaching; as well as theoretical reflections that allow to understand the scholar geography, and the geographic science to make the geographic education.

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