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SOME CHANGES AND PROBLEMS IN SCHOOL GEOGRAPHY

IN ZIMBABWE

by

J. W. Cowley

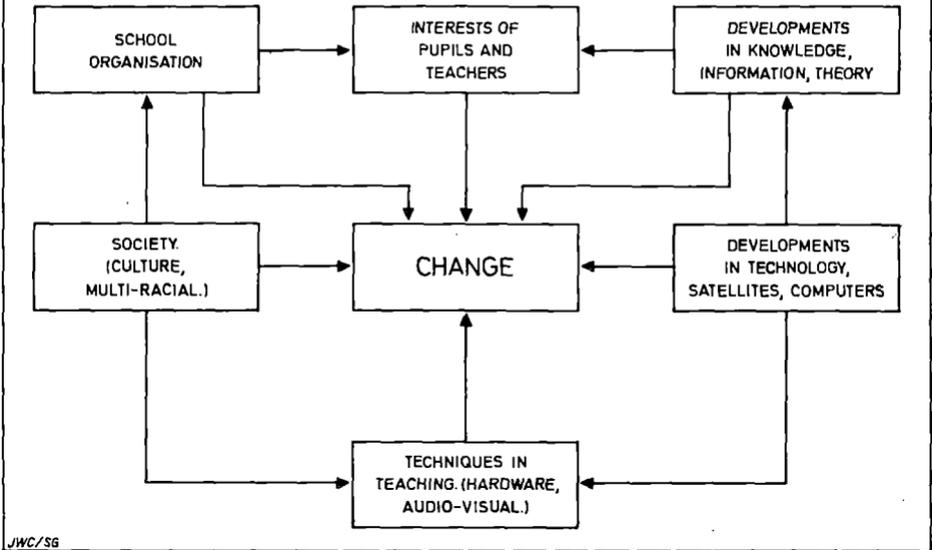
At a time when Zimbabwe moves into a completely new political experience where change is an important element, it seems appropriate to deliberate upon recent developments overseas in so far as they influence changes in geographical education in Zimbabwe. The purpose of this paper is therefore, to provide a broad perspective of developments in geographical education, particularly of those in the United Kingdom, and relate these to developments in school geography in Zimbabwe. In this way it is hoped that United Kingdom experiences will be beneficial in dealing with problems facing geography teachers in this country.

Before examining some of these developments, there is a need to consider briefly some of the factors and influences which have contributed to change. The term 'change' is not an easy word to define since it is often used in different senses in the literature. Hoyle (1972) defines change as a generic term embracing a host of associated concepts, for example innovation and development. A distinction is also made between intentional and deliberate change and change arising by accident or without intention. Whatever the exact definition or usage of the term, more directly relevant to those concerned with change, are the factors and influences that result in change. Lord James (in Watkins, 1973) suggests five factors which produce change in an educational context (Fig.1). Such factors in geographical education have not only affected perspectives and practices in teaching and learning but have influenced developments in the nature of academic geography. Without further elaboration, these factors of change can be readily appreciated. However, for the purposes of simplicity, two major areas influencing geographical educational change can be identified. Firstly, there are the pressures derived from developments in academic geography and secondly, those pressures emanating from shifts in education and educational thinking.

CHANGES IN GEOGRAPHICAL EDUCATION

At an academic level, geography has experienced a quarter of a century of upheaval with a series of so-called revolutions. These developments have been examined and interpreted at length by several geographers (Chorley, 1976; Davies, 1979; Paterson, 1980). Whether such developments are viewed as 'swings of a pendulum' (Paterson, 1980) or a shift in emphasis from 'hard'

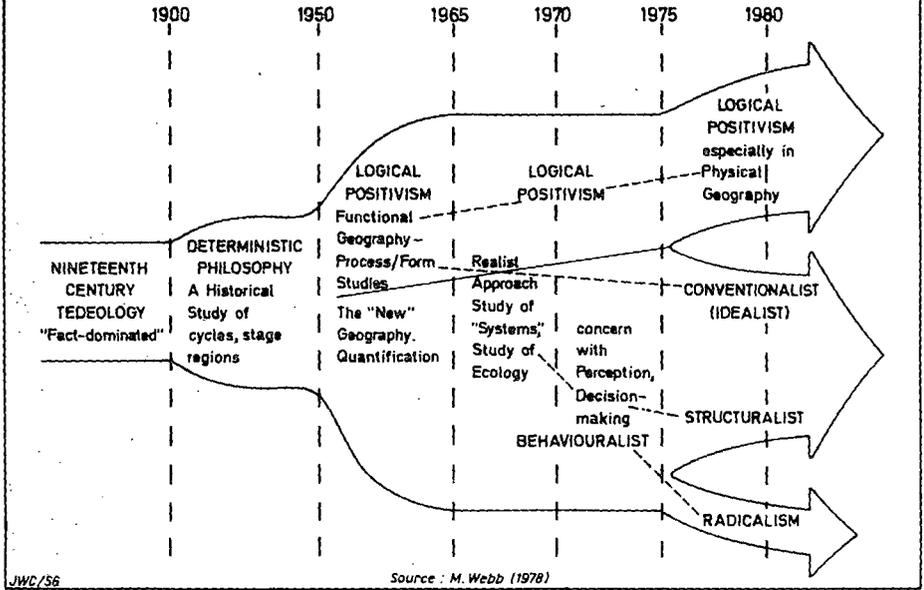
Figure 1
A SUMMARY OF SOME OF THE MAIN
INFLUENCES ON CHANGE



to 'soft' systems (Chorley, 1976), are of academic interest to many geography teachers. More directly relevant to teachers and school geography generally, is the fact that these academic changes appeared to be occurring at an ever decreasing time interval (Fig.2). Classroom practitioners are therefore being put under increasing pressure to absorb new ideas, methods and techniques while at the same time finding themselves with less time to understand fully and assimilate such changes.

Concurrent with changes in the nature of geography, additional pressures emanate from developments in education and educational thinking. A succession of government reports in the United Kingdom on education (Newson Report, (1963); Crowther Report, (1959); Plowden Report, (1967); Bullock Report) have advocated considerable change and modification. These reports have increasingly stressed the need for the development of a pupil's individual needs and interests in relation to those of society. Inquiry-based and problem-solving approaches to learning to facilitate pupil autonomy have been strongly advocated to replace more traditional rote and factual learning. Integrative and multi-disciplinary approaches placing emphasis upon the acquisition of concepts, skills and attitudes, have also been strongly recommended. Such changes in emphasis,

Figure 2
THE DEVELOPMENT OF GEOGRAPHY IN THE
TWENTIETH CENTURY



briefly outlined above, has meant that teachers are forced not only to rethink procedures for teaching and learning but also to acquire new geographical concepts, skills and techniques.

DEVELOPMENT IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

The above outlined pressures in the United Kingdom by the mid 1960's led to various attempts to accommodate such changes. Despite resistance from some fine exponents of regional geography teaching, enthusiastic lecturers from colleges of education began a gradual transformation. The agents of change in the colleges of education were ideally placed since not only did they teach geography as an academic subject but also provided professional courses for young teachers. With the assistance of the Department of Education and Science between 1969 and 1973 a number of conferences were organised and the gap between the intellectual horizons of the subject and the classroom began to close. The initial impetus gained momentum in the 1970's with various 'prescriptions for change' (Hall, 1976) produced by the Schools Council, the organisation in the United Kingdom given the task of reforming the curriculum. Several Schools Council projects in geography were initiated and developed

(Table 1), with the purpose of providing teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and confidence to implement the necessary changes in geography and education. By the mid-1970's, many of the changes had crystallised and could be seen in textbooks and examinations (Watford, 1978). School texts illustrated particularly the progress that was being made. Ideas were presented in easily digested form in the 'Oxford Geography Project' (Rolfe et alia, 1975), the 'Course in Reformed Geography' (Dinkete et alia, 1976) and 'Places and People' (Dunlop, 1976). Apart from the clear explanation and illustration of modern geographical ideas and approaches, these texts demonstrated the replacement of the 'reading book' by the 'work book' (Watford, 1978). Thus changes in educational approaches were also clearly evident.

In addition the well-funded Schools Council projects added a variety of materials, resources and suggestions to geography teachers and pupils. By the late 1970's,

TABLE 1

A SUMMARY OF GEOGRAPHY SCHOOLS COUNCIL PROJECTS

<u>Title</u>	<u>Age Range</u>	<u>Materials</u>	<u>Funding</u>
History, Geography and Social Science (1975 - 7)	8 - 13	Teacher's Guides pupil materials, multi-media resources.	£161,000
Geography for the Young School Leaver (1970 - 1975)	14 - 16	3 Resource Packs: Man, Land and Leisure Cities and People; People, Place and Work.	£ 75,000
Geography 14 - 18 Project (1970 - 1975)	14 - 18? (14 - 16)	Examples materials, Teachers Handbook, Curriculum Design, Handbook for school-based curriculum.	£ 81,000
Geography 16 - 19 Project (1976 - ?)	16 - 19	Research being undertaken.	£ 75,000 plus

it seemed that school geography in the United Kingdom had successfully negotiated some of the traumas of change and was beginning to enter a period of consolidation following ten years of rapid change. However, the changes in school geography were not without difficulties and conflicts. A number of issues evolved during the ten year period. The School Council projects produced some major areas of conflict. The introduction of controversial topics such as 'Bantustans in South Africa' and 'Inter-City Development' raised the entire question of values in geography. More conservative teachers felt geography should be value-free and therefore avoid value-ridden topics. The question of 'Whose values' was also keenly discussed and debated. In the late 1970's, the pressures of a marxist-oriented radical geography demanding a prescribed set of values worried many teachers who saw objectivity and impartiality as essential elements in teaching.

A second major issue focussed around subject autonomy. The integration of geography in 'Humanities' and 'Integrated Studies' curricula was viewed with some apprehension. Teachers felt threatened by a lack of clear-cut limits as well as the increased demands likely to be made to reappraise content and approaches to teaching.

Lastly, there was the issue of the implementation of projects. Was the considerable expense justified? Would materials produced be used by teachers or would they, after the novelty had worn off, end up on some dusty shelf? The various projects had been aware of the latter problem and had adopted different approaches to ensure effective implementation. The Geography for Young School Leaver project had used a resource producing approach with highly structured and carefully packaged materials. Hall (1976) described the approach as

"a set of kitchen units offered in knock-up form from which a complete refit requires the pieces to be assembled using a screwdriver". (p.135).

In complete contrast, the Geography 14 - 18 project used a 'social interactionist' model where teachers were encouraged to be creative and responsible for the changes introduced in the classroom. This process while creating tension was felt to be more beneficial and productive in the long term, developing a 'new professionalism for a changing geography' (Schools Council, 1973). In this way it was hoped to avoid the relegation of materials to a dusty shelf or storeroom. More recently, with increasing financial stringency, the whole question of large centrally-funded projects has been questioned. It would appear regional - based developments on a much smaller scale have greater efficiency and cost-effectiveness because of their apparent relevance and appropriateness to a local situation.

The developments and problems summarised above form an essential background to recent geographical educational changes in Zimbabwe. Changes in academic and school geography, and educational thinking in the United Kingdom have gradually filtered across to Zimbabwe, albeit with some considerable time-lag. These developments compounded by very recent political changes pose innumerable problems not only in geographical education but numerous other areas.

CHANGES IN SCHOOL GEOGRAPHY IN ZIMBABWE

Changes in school geography have occurred comparatively recently in Zimbabwe. The political isolation of the last fifteen years and the conservative nature of external examining boards, has not resulted in many changes. The examination oriented system in Zimbabwe has resulted in teachers having little incentive to change resulting in the vast majority continuing with a 'slavish adherence to the requirements of the G.C.E. syllabus.' (Foss, 1980). Attempts internally to initiate change by the Department of Geography, in conjunction with the Geographical Association of Zimbabwe, have inevitably found little support because of the prevailing examination system, many teachers feeling that while the examinations remained unchanged there was little point or need to change. Only a relatively few enthusiastic lecturers and teachers with tacit approval from the Ministry of Education have attempted to initiate change in geographical education. Informal workshops began in 1977 in Bulawayo in an attempt to familiarise interested teachers with developments in the United Kingdom and to adapt some of the materials to the Zimbabwe situation. The momentum dramatically changed with the publication almost simultaneously of the revised Advanced Level syllabus of the Associated Examining Board and the Ministry of Education's National Certificate of Education (Geography). The latter examination was aimed at the middle school and was similar to the Certificate of Secondary Education in the United Kingdom. Both sets of proposals were radically different from all geographical education that had gone before. Both were conceptually based, involving interdisciplinary approaches. Quantitative rather than qualitative approaches were demanded and the overall perspective was systematic rather than regional. Inevitably the cry for help quickly followed.

The major problem was trying to identify the type of assistance teachers required given the limited resources within the country. The Geographical Association of Zimbabwe's workshop held in August 1979, went some way to identify some of the needs of teachers. The theme of the workshop 'Geography in the Classroom and Beyond', was used to illustrate recent changes and the application of various ideas and methods to the classroom situation. The limited time available however posed more problems than those solved. Teachers felt they were unable to cope with the changes and some individuals saw early retirement

as the only possible solution. Others felt the University should mount a massive in-service programme, while a few more resourceful innovative teachers indicated that provided adequate guidance and assistance was given, the problems could be overcome.

Since those disquietening and disturbing times, some progress has been made, albeit rather slowly for some. Regionally-based workshops organised by the Geographical Association have attempted to deal with some of the problems and difficulties. The N.C.E. Committee of Geography has outlined in greater depth and detail the requirements of N.C.E. geography. Suggestions for appropriate textbooks have also been made. The Associated Examining Board has agreed to send out representatives to discuss the Advanced Level syllabus. The Department of Geography at the University has appointed a geographical educational specialist to liaise with teachers and the Ministry of Education and investigate appropriate ways which the Department can assist. Today, changes continue with the revision of Advanced Level Geography by the University of Cambridge.

From the above it would seem that change while inevitably lagging behind developments in the United Kingdom, has come more suddenly to Zimbabwe. The threat and increasing occurrence of political change has to some extent compounded these developments and poses additional problems. To deal with these present problems and those possibly of the future, it would seem essential to identify their exact nature and plan an appropriate framework for future development.

PROBLEMS IN SCHOOL GEOGRAPHY IN ZIMBABWE

The problems facing school geography in Zimbabwe are somewhat different to those faced in the United Kingdom over a decade previously. Isolation has meant not only a 'quantitative revolution', but also a 'behavioural' and 'radical revolution' to be caught up as well! In some respects however, advantages have occurred by avoiding some of the worst excesses of the 'swings in the pendulum'. Zimbabwean school geography can profit by the experiences gained in the United Kingdom. However, the problem of the type of geography to be taught in Zimbabwean secondary schools is an all important one to be decided upon. Zimbabwe is a developing country. The external examining boards despite their attempts to suit local requirements, produce examinations based upon western values and experience. Even the locally-based N.C.E. geography is modelled upon the Geography for Young School Leaver project. The question does arise now, particularly in the light of a changing political perspectives, whether a largely euro-centric geographical education fulfils the needs, interests and aspirations of the majority of Zimbabweans.

Some politicians have already indicated a desire to rewrite the history and geography textbooks! It is a matter of some conjecture as to what is to be included and omitted in such a geographical education; whether the emphasis will be radical/socialist, in keeping with expressed political sentiments, or more balanced and objective but perhaps of less direct relevance to the aspirations of the majority living in a third world country.

At an organisational level, the present structure of geographical education is confused. To date geographical education has been promoted by a number of separate bodies linked often by individuals on a rather informal basis (Fig.3). Only one body appears to be actively promoting geographical education at the moment, a result of its members being almost entirely geography teachers. Conferences, regional workshops, lectures and field trips have been organised by the Association largely in response to teacher demands. It would appear in response to the demands of change that a more co-ordinated approach to geographical education in Zimbabwe is long overdue. A central working party incorporating all concerned with various sub-committees dealing with specific issues and problems, seems to be essential to the future well-being of geographical education. In this manner the limited resources and expertise can be used more effectively to deal with changes and problems. Such a co-ordinated body would hopefully avoid anomalies which occurred recently where primary school geography as a separate subject was being phased out but at a secondary school level, was being re-introduced! Finally, many of the problems arising in school geography are a result of insufficient teacher involvement and participation. Except for a few dedicated and enthusiastic geography teachers, the majority seem unprepared or unwilling to contribute. Experience in the United Kingdom has clearly shown that change if it is to be effectively introduced and implemented, must have active teacher involvement and participation. In Zimbabwe, with only limited resources, teachers will necessarily have to play a much greater role in the development of geographical education than in the past. Recent graduates from the University, familiar with new approaches and often overflowing with enthusiasm provide an opportunity for school-based in-service training to be developed and encouraged. More experienced and long-serving teachers should use such persons as a means of up-dating themselves in the areas of specialism. Without active teacher participation and innovation within the context of the school, little is likely to be achieved in the long term.

CONCLUSIONS

School geography in Zimbabwe seems to be at a cross-roads. Definite and positive steps are required by all those concerned with its future to

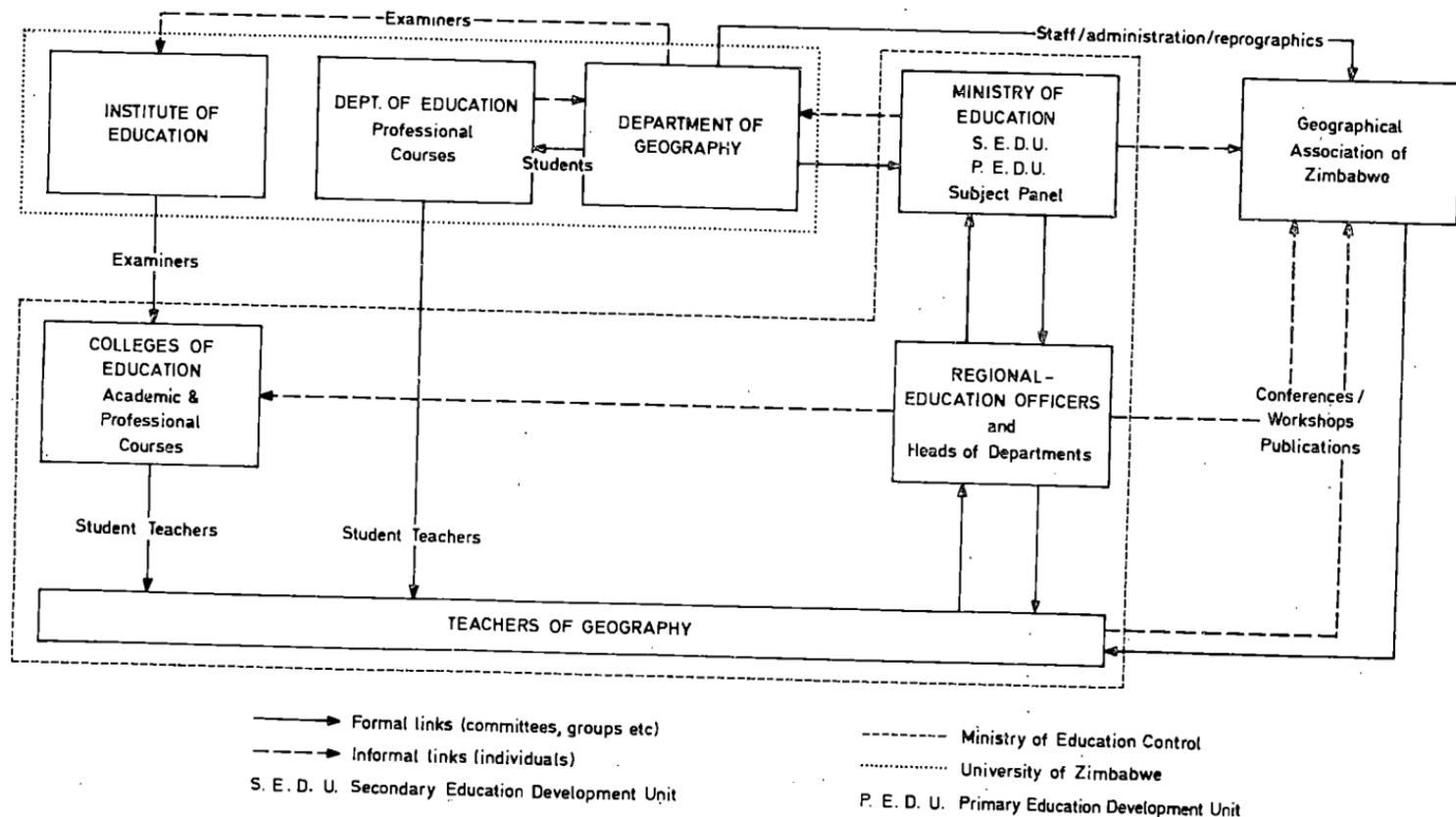


Figure 3 The Structure of Geographical Education in Zimbabwe

ensure its continued development and future quality. Decisions need to be made and taken to ensure that geographical education has relevance not only to the needs and interests of teachers and pupils but also to the country as a whole. Only the co-ordinated efforts by those concerned can hope to achieve a measure of success so that teachers and pupils can be helped to enjoy the intellectual quest.

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