



## Geography education, grey literature and the geographical canon



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### Abstract

Geography's disciplinary canon may appear a 'top-down' enterprise, focused on the formal educational spaces of the academy and the sole or joint authored monograph. This paper argues for a supplementary critical examination of the most widely encountered form of geographical education, school geography, and an associated 'counter-canon' of grey publishing literature to which geographers, educators, and geography educators have contributed. The paper suggests that such material serves to simultaneously disrupt and enliven narratives of the subject's identity and its canonicity.

This paper's empirical focus is the school teacher initiated, geography and education journal, *Contemporary Issues in Geography and Education* (1983–1991), a literary endeavour of critical vibrancy informing the dissenting activities of geographers across schools and higher education during the time. © 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

**Keywords:** Counter-canon; Dissent; Geography education; Grey literature; *Contemporary Issues in Geography and Education* (CIGE)

Any discussion surrounding academic canons arguably concerns itself with debates between orthodox and dissenting perspectives regarding the identity of the subject as a discipline. Who is invited to be involved in such debates (and who does the inviting in the first place), the processes through which debates proceed, and how debates are then recorded, curated, and performed all factor into how such discussions proceed over time and space. Such debates are shared by geographers across all stages and spaces of formal education, and yet geography educators – teachers of geography working at primary or secondary school levels – are often omitted from historiographical accounts of the philosophies and histories of the discipline.

Consideration of how the subject has been 'disciplined' implicitly reveals the cultural geopolitics of knowledge-making. Accepted knowledges come with well-trodden narratives regarding places, people, processes and ideas played out across linear conceptions of time. Those persons and organisations who dissent from orthodox accounts by questioning upheld narrative explanations are often less easily locatable, unless their dissent leads them into positions of power.<sup>1</sup> Arguably this is because they are outwith or positioned marginally to the established publishing and professional subject networks which feed into mainstream disciplinary canon-making activities. Instead, dissenting voices and versions of disciplinary

construction may be mediated by those in orthodox positions of power to cherry-pick ideas and adapt their own practices accordingly. While interpretation affords space to make palatable harsher criticism without destabilising the status-quo, a simultaneous writing out of the original dissenting voices is – whether wilful or not – often part of such a process.

Yet critical and dissenting voices are vital to recall and archive. Moreover, excavating the *modus operandi* of people who might otherwise be dismissed from historiographical accounts can expose seams of critical activities that might otherwise fail to garner attention. Researching and recording dissenting and critical voices can offer up a diverse and enriched picture of a disciplinary past than might otherwise languish or else disappear completely. While such research and record has begun for work in academic geography, dissenting voices in school geography's past remain under-explored.<sup>2</sup> This paper seeks to begin such a recovery, rewriting such voices into the geographical story, and by doing so simultaneously enlarging and enlivening the historiographies of critical geography and critical accounts of geography's historiography.

Exploring the transgressive geographies created and navigated by those desiring what might be called 'counter-canonical' versions of the subject, this paper focuses attention on the enabling and

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<sup>1</sup> See for example T Barnes *The quantitative revolution in economic geography*, in: R. Lee, A. Leyshon, L. McDowell, and P. Sunley (Eds), *Compendium in Economic Geography*, London, 2011, 39–52.

<sup>2</sup> A. Blunt and J. Wills, *Dissident Geographies: An Introduction to Radical Ideas and Practices*, Harmondsworth, 2000.

often overlooked publishing spaces of 'grey literature' and in particular they ways in which critical voices and visions of the subject have surfaced through such media. This is exemplified through the recovered archive and salvaged issues of a radical leftist geography education journal which has largely been ignored in accounts of the subjects' recent historiographies despite evidence that suggests the journal was known of across the spectrum of different geographies: school, university and 'public'. Salvaging the remaining correspondence archive as well as gleaning and gathering copies of the series reveals the diversity of critical leftist perspectives and exchanges in forging an alternative disciplinary identity for English geography education in the 1980s. Contemporary *Issues in Geography and Education* (CIGE) (1983–1991) was the journal of the Association for Curriculum Development in Geography (ACDG) an umbrella organisation conceived of and instigated through the efforts of school geography teacher Dawn Gill and a network of teachers, activists and academics. From oral accounts by those involved in its production, and from a range of published marginalia indicating where and how this journal made its presence felt across the discipline, the lives and afterlives of CIGE exemplifies the need for geography's disciplinary canons to remain loose.

Canons, texts that are considered seminal to the changing and shaping of a subject, remain relevant to philosophical, ontological, and pedagogic discussions. Framed normatively, canons appear as the solid academic foundations from which disciplinary identity is hued. Arguably more compelling are the complex and subtle contestations at play in the re-enforcement practices utilized to validate and reaffirm such canonical materials; through citations and references in journals and monographs, through teaching materials on reading lists and in lecture notes. The sensitivities and vulnerabilities of attempts at geographical canon-making are exposed at times of major changes within the discipline, serving at once to reveal the highly variegated and contextual nature of canonical construction as one set of disciplinary frameworks of theoretical and ideological conception are reinforced or removed.

This paper argues for attention to the counter-canonical. More substantive than simply an 'anti-canonical' stance, investigation of the counter-canonical brings attention to those practices and spaces where a clear counter hegemonic stance is adopted in an attempt to revise and reconstruct the subject anew. While canonical texts often – but not always – take the form of bounded tomes written with an eye to a specific professional audience, this paper looks to those who chose to publish through or initiate their own publishing output to enable a freedom of ideological debate and publishing practise. Such dissenting voices may be found in the form of 'grey literature': ephemeral or fringe texts in the form of fanzines, magazines or do-it-yourself (DiY) journals with low-cost print-runs and an eye to a wide readership where the

anticipatory geographies of ideas, pedagogies and formats are able to be published quickly, free from the constraints of publishing house production timetables, editorial guidelines and social gate-keeping that exist through established publishing routes. If canonical works in their strictest definition are physically and ideologically bound to the monograph, then grey publishing by its form alone may result in dissenting voices being excluded from canonical inclusion. If 'grey-literatures' are accounted for, they are – at best – bestowed with the title of 'classic' or given 'cult-like' status. The material addressed in this paper operates outside conventional definitions of the canon both from its school educational content, and its indeterminate form.

This paper begins by reflecting on the notable absence of school geography education and the work of school geography educators in accounts of the historiography of Geography. Asking where dissenting voices and versions of geography in and beyond schools might be found takes historiographic research to lesser-explored spaces of publishing from the recent past, notably in the area of grey publishing. By taking seriously the aesthetic, intellectual and material geographies of grassroots initiated journals and magazines a re-valuing of dissenting voices and alternative material cultures of geographical knowledge-making is made possible. The final section of the paper takes CIGE as an exemplary case through which to explore such themes.

### **School geography and the shaping of geographical knowledge-making: orthodoxy and the geography textbook**

In the last decade academic geography has seen the emergence of the sub-fields of geographical education, geographies of education and children's geographies. Such specific disciplinary sub-fields potentially offer increased space across and through which academic geographers are able to engage with the myriad geographies connected with educational processes and places.<sup>3</sup> However, despite the '... particularly rich and unexplored avenues of inquiry for the historical geographer' into the cultural and historical geographies of geographical education, the historiographies of school geography education and their attendant geo-philosophies remain a relatively underexplored area of research.<sup>4</sup> Certainly there is a wealth of compelling research undertaken in the British academy by geography educators engaged in active research working in university education departments who are primarily concerned with theoretical and empirical debates regarding the geographical content, assessment and practice for specialist (trainee) geography teachers.<sup>5</sup> Such research findings have predominantly found publishing outlet in specific geography education journals and textbooks for trainee geography teachers.<sup>6</sup> However, there remains what Marsden observed to be a gap in research into the

<sup>3</sup> For examples see R. Bednarz and S.W. Bednarz, Geography education: the glass is half full and its getting fuller, *Professional Geographer* 56 (2004) 22–27; S.L. Holloway and H. Jöns, Geographies of education and learning, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37 (2012) 482–488; S. Mills and P. Kraftl (Eds), *Informal Education, Children and Youth: Geographies, Histories, Practices*, Basingstoke, 2014; and P. Kraftl, *Geographies of Alternative Education: Diverse learning spaces for children and young people*, Bristol, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> F. Driver and A.M.C. Maddrell, Geographical education and citizenship: introduction, *Journal of Historical Geography* 22 (1996) 371–372. Quote 371. There are notable exceptions in doctoral research, exemplified by the work of JoAnn C Vender and Janet S Smith in their Women in Geography and Education Calendar project (2003–2006), funded by Geographic Education National Implementation Project (2003–2006) in the United States; by Jessica Pykett *The Geographies of Citizenship Education*, 2007, University of Bristol; Glenys Olwyn-Jones *Experience of A Level Geography Fieldwork*, 2008, Royal Holloway University of London; Helen Griffiths, *Engaging Students as Citizens and Consumers in New School Geographies*, 2010, University of Exeter.

<sup>5</sup> In England and Wales the invite-only Geography Education Research Collective (GEReCo) exists through which a core group of 'research-active geography education researchers' (G. Butt (Ed), *Geography, Education and the Future*, London, 2011, xi) produce contemporary education research. The majority of GEReCo members hold professional research positions as geography education researchers within academic departments of education and have strong links with the Geographical Association (GA). GEReCo website can be found listed in the research papers page of the GA website (<http://www.geography.org.uk/cpdevents/research>) also see <http://gereco.org> – last accessed March 2015 for a direct link). Established in 1893, the GA is independently funded and one of England's largest specialist subject teacher organisations.

<sup>6</sup> The Geographical Association's journal *Geography* is one of the three regular periodicals produced by the GA where more academic and research papers are published (*Teaching Geography* and *Primary Geography* publishing contemporary discussions and resources for teachers at secondary and primary levels of schooling respectively). The *International Journal for Geography and Environmental Education* offers space for international discussions connected with disciplinary teaching practices as well as noting global trends in the teaching of geography and environmental education.

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