

## A FEW CRITICISMS OF THE ILLINOIS STATE COURSE OF STUDY IN GEOGRAPHY

C. E. COOPER, STATE NORMAL UNIVERSITY, NORMAL

One of the most formidable arguments with which geographers have to contend is that which claims that the subject has taken so much unto itself that it is a duplication of the work found in a number of other lines of study. Of course one can prove that many of these other subjects which are so closely related to geography are but the off-spring of the parent, geography, but it is not the purpose of this paper to consider either the justice or the fallacy of the suggested criticism. We shall do better to admit that, regardless of the justice or injustice in the criticism, it is usually the best policy to remove the cause of it.

One cannot look carefully through the State Course of Study without being forcibly struck with the needless duplication of the subject-matter in "Home Geography" and "Nature Study and Agriculture". My first criticism falls upon the home geography work of the Fourth grade. Each monthly topic as outlined in the home geography work receives sufficient emphasis somewhere in the work in nature study. At best, only an introduction is needed in such subjects in this grade. Such work as the phases of the moon, a detailed study of the soil, equinoxes, solstices, and much of the star study is away beyond the comprehension of such young pupils. It is unfortunate that the vital and human subject of geography has inherited so much of this work from cartography, astronomy, and mathematics. The best part of the work, as outlined under home geography, is the work on the study of the various peoples. This is the time when children are vitally interested in the children of other lands. If geography is to be begun in this grade it ought to be correlated with language work and should take the form of geography stories. Here is the place to teach where our various foods come from, how they are gotten, and how our homes are constructed, in comparison to the homes of boys and girls in other countries.

Excursions to stores are very valuable in this connection. This kind of work is not the business of nature study.

Personally, I believe that geography can well afford to turn over to the teachers of nature study and language most of the work as outlined in home geography. There is too great a tendency to crowd geography into the grades below the eighth. I have a letter upon my desk from a teacher of geography in the seventh and eighth grades of one of our smaller villages. She states that her Superintendent is requiring her to teach the seventh and eighth grade work in one year and that he argues that geography contains so much detail that part of the work should be left out anyway. This opinion is all too common. It is a school-room tragedy to see the sixth and seventh grade children struggle with much of the mathematical geography which is outlined for them. Not long ago I watched and listened while an eighth grade class tried to wade through the work as outlined upon the motions of the world and its shape. Their teacher was as well informed as the average grade-school teacher, in this phase of geography. The children "Edisoned" the words, oblate spheroid, aphelion, etc., back to the teacher, but it took only a little questioning to show that the whole story meant very little to them. Perhaps skillful teaching and an extended knowledge on the part of the teacher could have accomplished fair results, but that is, of course, what we do not have in our common schools. Geography must be pushed up through the eighth grade and through a year in the high school, and there is no better way to do it than by permitting nature study to take its place in the lower grades. Geography study calls for mature thought, and we teachers of the subject should seize every opportunity to dignify the work by dropping the duplication and pushing its case into higher courts. On the other hand, nature study should be taken out of the eighth grade and room thus made for geography. Teachers of nature study can afford to do this if they have the extra time of geography elsewhere.

In the third month of the fifth year the work on the scale of the globe can well be omitted. School-room globes are so small that the equivalent in miles for one inch is too great a distance for children to comprehend. The time can be spent to a much greater advantage in teaching sizes and distances by means of comparisons with which the child is familiar. Nothing is gained at this age by teaching the child that the earth has a circumference of 25,000 miles. You can impress him with its size by finding out how long it would take a train going at an ordinary rate of speed to travel around it, or by some other easy comparison.

The sixth grade is not the proper place for the teaching of much of the detailed work on latitude and longitude. This part of geography should be put off as long as possible in the grades. Positions should be taught by comparisons, rather than by degrees of latitude and longitude. In the list of definitions in the work of the first month I would leave out parallels, meridians, meridian-circle, circular measure, and all of the definitions which follow them. Those terms which we do teach should not be taught as definitions to be learned and parroted in set phrases, but should be taught by illustration.

I am convinced that we are accomplishing little by trying to teach the wind system in the grades. Its place is in physical geography. The students who enter my classes in the Normal, having had no geography since the grades, are utterly ignorant concerning a knowledge of the winds, though some teacher has tried to teach them this work in earlier years. It is not just a case of forgetting because they do not even comprehend the principles of the wind system. I think that we should teach the causes of the winds, but that we should lay most of the stress upon their effects; such as, winds blowing off water, winds on leeward and windward sides of mountains, winds from the north, and winds from the south, etc. No attempt at a classification of the winds should be attempted in the grades. We are interested in the human effects of winds and not a scientific classification

which is at best only generally true. A classification is of value in high-school years as a means of determining climates but is beyond the comprehension of the grades.

Less stress should be placed upon the climatic influences of ocean currents and more upon the influences of large water bodies. Instead of teachers permitting the children to get out of the grades with the idea that the Gulf Stream is totally responsible for the mild climate of the British Isles, they should bring out more carefully the effects of great water bodies and should show that even if the Gulf Stream were not present, the climate of these islands would still be more moderate than if they were in the same latitude but surrounded by land. The effect of liberation of heat by precipitation should also be stressed.

An understanding of cyclonic and anti-cyclonic winds is hopeless in the grades, is very difficult for the high school, and will keep the beginning college student busy for some time before they are mastered. I have more calls for help from teachers, concerning these winds, than in any other phase of geography. Throughout the seventh grade, more time should be spent upon the effects of rainfall and its distribution and less upon the technical causes of rainfall.

The eight grade mathematical geography as outlined is far too abstract for grade school children. It forces them beyond their ability and tries to give them a body of knowledge which is of value to them only in a cultural way. You may argue that this knowledge is of value to them and indeed necessary for the intelligent reading of the textbook. In answer I would say that too long we have tried to mould children to the form of the textbook written by some college professor who has forgotten that he ever was young and consequently fails to make the textbook meet the needs of the child. I wish that some of the fine women who are doing the critic work in the Normal Training Schools of our country would take up the writing of geography textbooks.

The star work is of course a heritage from astronomy. We should teach what stars are, if we haven't already done so in nature study, and the names and locations of

those which will assist the pupil in locating himself. Star knowledge which is of a cultural value can be left until more mature years. Just enough should be taught concerning meteors, comets, and shooting stars to remove superstition. In the list of definitions for the first month of the eight grade I should omit the following: point; line; surface; solid; plane; plane surface; arc; ellipse; foci; major axis; minor axis; plane of the earth's orbit; perihelion; aphelion; meridian circle; and oblate spheroid.

It seems to me that there is no use in taking time to prove that the earth is round. Much of mathematical geography must be taught dogmatically, so why try to prove something so obviously true? If some pupil should want to know the proofs, then the fact that men have sailed around it, and the shape of its shadow ought to be sufficient proofs. It is inconceivable that the altitude of the stars and the pendulum proofs are more comprehensible to these children than these simpler proofs.

Similarly the proofs of the rotation of the earth are unnecessary. If they are to be used, the dropping of the ball, Foucault's pendulum, oblate spheroid, circulation of the water and the atmosphere are beyond the understanding of grade-school children. Let us put the emphasis upon the human effects of the shape of the earth and its movements, and worry less about the mathematics of the situation.

I suppose one can teach inclination and parallelism so that the child can give the facts back parrotlike but I doubt very much whether he will understand those facts. Not one student in twenty-five entering my normal-school classes has any knowledge of the width of the zones. Indeed, is it necessary in the grades to give them that knowledge? Why not spend the time to better advantage in teaching them the proportions of the continents in the various heat belts and the effect of these heat belts upon life?

The equinoxes and solstices are confusing and difficult to teach even in high school classes. As for the change of seasons, we should stress their effects more than their causes. A few simple demonstrations of moving the

globe around a child ought to be sufficient to show him the changing position of the direct rays of the sun. Latitude and longitude should be taught in this last grade but even here much of the detail must be left out. The International Date Line is incomprehensible to grade-school pupils and it takes a clever teacher to make it plain to a high-school class. Pay more attention to comparisons of various places as to latitude and longitude and less to the details of number of degrees, etc.

In short, one can take the mathematical geography as outlined in our State Course of Study and make the average freshman in our normals and colleges work exceedingly hard to master its principles. Much of it does not function in the later life of the average individual.