

Report on the Forum on the Role and Application of Fieldwork Techniques in the Teaching of Geography at the Lower Secondary Level in Hong Kong.

The H.K.G.A. organized a forum on the "Role and Application of Fieldwork Techniques in the Teaching of Geography at the Lower Secondary Level in Hong Kong" on 19 February, 1983 from 2:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. at Chung Chi College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong as part of the activities of the annual Hong Kong Geography Day.

The Forum was chaired by Mr. Chan Pui-kai, the vice-chairman of H.K.G.A. (1982-83). Three guest speakers were invited to give brief introduction on the topic from different perspectives.

Mr. Chan Pui-kai, lecturer of Geography Department at Northcote College of Education, discussed on the role and characteristics of fieldwork in the study of geography.

Mr. To Ka-yan, the geography panel chairman of Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Chang Ming College, addressed on the difficulties in conducting fieldwork in the lower secondary level.

Mr. Lai Shiu-choi, Secretary of the Hong Kong Geographical Association, discussed on the role and application of fieldwork in school geography. He also introduced the elements of fieldwork in the syllabus and the syllabuses for the lower forms.

Detail versions of the above speeches would be found in separate sections in this and next issue of the Hong Kong Geographer.

About seventy teachers and guests attended the forum. Many expressed their opinions upon the practical difficulties and suggestions on fieldwork for Forms One to Three in Hong Kong.



editors of the Hong Kong Geographer

David K.T. SHAN, CHAIRMAN

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Part I of the Hong Kong Geographer will report the activities of the HKGA and hopefully to inform members of other activities related to geography in Hong Kong sponsored by other institutions. Part II of the Hong Kong Geographer will include short feature articles for general readers. These features do not reflect the views of the Hong Kong Geographical Association. The contributors are solely responsible for their papers.

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PART I

I. Announcement

(1) The forthcoming 14th Annual General Meeting of the Hong Kong Geographical Association will be held on Saturday, February 11, 1984 at the Seminar Room of Geography Department, Hui Oi Chow Science Building, Hong Kong University at 10:05 a.m. The agenda of the A.G.M. will be as follows:

- (1) To adopt the Minutes of the 13th A.G.M. held in Rm. 611, Chung Chi College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.
- (2) To adopt the Hon. Secretary's Report of the year 1983/84.
- (3) To adopt the Hon. Treasurer's Report of the year 1983/84.
- (4) Any Other Business.

(2) On the same day (i.e. 11th February, 1984), the Hong Kong Geography Association and the Department of Geography and Geology of the University of Hong Kong will jointly organized the 4th Hong Kong Geography Day in Hui Oi Chow Science Building, the University of Hong Kong. The Day's Programme will start at 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., including three lectures and one public forum. Members are cordially invited to participate and the details of the programme are as follows:

- (1) 10:30 a.m.-11:30 a.m. (Rm. MG02, Hui Oi Chow Bldg.) Mrs. Fong Lee Mo Kwan on "Geographical Environment of Country Parks in Hong Kong".
- (2) 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. (Rm. MG02, Hui Oi Chow Bldg.) Dr. Li Si Ming on "The Value of Time in Transportation".
- (3) 2:30 p.m.-3:30 p.m. (Rm. 103, James Lee Bldg.) Dr. Anthony Yeh on "Computer Cartography".
- (4) 3:30 p.m.-4:30 p.m. (Rm. 103, James Lee Bldg.) forum on "Recent Development of Geographical Education in Hong Kong". (Chaired by Mr. Chan Pui Kai)

PART II

The Role and Application of Fieldwork Techniques in the Teaching of Geography at the Lower Secondary Level in H.K.*

Lai Kwok Chan**

Why Fieldwork

Geography is concerned with study of man's physical and socio-economic environment, and direct observations must be made in the field. Just as laboratory work is an essential part of science education, fieldwork is a normal, integral and important element of geographic education. It would be desirable for us, as co-workers in geographic education, to convey this to more school administrators, colleagues and parents.

At a time when moral education of juveniles are under grave concern, it is worthwhile to note that fieldwork also contributes towards this area. Firstly, it fosters students' positive attitudes towards concern for environment and enhances social awareness. Secondly, through joint efforts in data collection and compilation, it helps pupils to realize the importance of group co-operation. There is relatively little an individual alone can accomplish in a field project. Thirdly, it highlights the responsibility of an individual in a combined effort. A student will realize that the erroneously collected data of one person alone will undermine the accuracy of the whole project.

Progressive Development in Fieldwork

"Progression in geographical teaching consists in

* Revised text of an address given to the H.K. Geographical Association, 19 February, 1983.

** Mr. Lai is the Inspector of Geography Section, Advisory Inspectorate, Education Department and is the organizer of the Geography courses at Field Studies Centre, Sai Kung.

moving from the particular to the general, the simple to the complex, the concrete to the abstract; away from the immediate experience of the learner towards the common experience of mankind."¹ Overseas educationalists have emphasised on the importance of a similar progressive development in fieldwork throughout secondary schooling. Some go as far as to suggest that it should begin early in the pupils' school lives, preferably in primary schools.

Fieldwork can be developed with ever-increasing degree of detail and depth with the growth in age and ability of pupils (Figure 1). Generally, lower form pupils are able to undertake small-scale studies with directly observable and concrete examples. They are usually held in the pupils' immediate local environment. For higher form pupils, they can be assigned field work with a higher level of sophistication, leading to understanding of more complex relationships and formulation of values and attitudes. Moreover, concepts learned in local studies can be applied to regional, national and global issues.

Practical Problems and Suggestions

Many practical problems exist in organizing fieldwork in lower secondary forms -- the young age of children, the teacher/pupil ratio, the number of classes a teacher has to take, the concern for safety by school heads and parents, the disruption of school time-tables, the taking up of Saturdays and holidays etc. While some of these constraints cannot be overcome, there still exists plenty of grounds for manoeuvre.

The immediate school environment often provides ample resources and opportunities for conducting fieldwork. For instance, measuring tapes and compasses can be used in classroom and school grounds to teach direction and scale; selected vantage points from school roof-tops and nearby hillslopes often command a good view of the surrounding physical and

urban landscapes, and granite landscapes are very commonly found around Hong Kong schools, thus saving the trouble of leading a whole day journey to over-saturated "meccas" like Cheung Chau to observe similar features. Besides, most schools in Hong Kong are situated within an urban setting, and fieldwork on local buildings, local shops and services and traffic counts can be readily carried out.

Pupils themselves may also have access to useful resources -- their families and neighbours may provide useful data sources for socio-economic surveys. In fact, a local secondary school had successfully organized 200 Form Two girls to collect data from over a thousand families in the school district without having to go to the streets.

In case of not having enough teachers supervising the students in the field, senior form students can be recruited to serve as group leaders. They can also help in the evaluation of field methods used, through which they can acquire valuable learning experience themselves.

Due to various reasons, sometimes it might be difficult for a geography teacher to obtain support from his head or colleagues in organizing a field trip per se. In this case, fieldwork could possibly be integrated with regular school functions like the School Open Day, exhibitions, displays or school outings. Furthermore, an original display on topics like "Knowing Our School Surroundings" or "The Geography of Our School District" will certainly provide the students with more interesting and rewarding experiences than to request them to make a reproduction of paragraphs and diagrams from their text-books on topics like "Trade in Hong Kong" or "The Victoria Harbour".

When it is impossible for a teacher to take care of all the classes he teaches within the school year, fieldwork may be incorporated into activities of school clubs and societies like the Scouts and Guides, Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, Community Youth Club, and of course, the Geography Society.

While safety of pupils should be of prime consideration

¹ Editorial, Teaching Geography, Vol.5, No.4, April 1980, p.

and proper precautionary procedures be followed in every field trip, such considerations should not be stressed to such an extent that it virtually precludes any fieldwork from actually taking place. Many other school activities -- e.g. physical education, science laboratory work, school picnics and outdoor woodwork and metalwork, domestic science etc., -- are all bound to expose students to a certain degree of risk. It would be absurd to suggest cancelling these altogether just "for the sake of safety".

Management in Fieldwork

When an enthusiastic teacher has finally overcome all the difficulties and got to the business of conducting fieldwork, it would be a pity for him failing to make full use of the occasion, and finding his students indifferent at the end. A fieldwork will be more successful if the pupils are briefed of its objective beforehand. They will find the work more rewarding if given an interesting local problem to examine or given a worthwhile hypothesis to test. On the field, it might be better not to let forty or more pupils standing all the time, empty-handed listening to "field teaching", while the teacher has to compete with hundreds of distractions. Each pupil should be provided with a base map or a recording sheet and given a task to complete. Mapwork could be readily integrated into fieldwork -- use of scales, grid references, conventional symbols and simple map interpretation could all be included. In addition, students could acquire a wide variety of techniques, ranging from finding one's location, field sketching to interviewing.

The teacher might regard himself as a "field supervisor or manager", and not just a lecturer, for too many field trips fail to reap their full fruits not because of academic reasons but because of inadequate management. Several areas deserve prior preparations -- e.g. acquiring up-to-date base maps and aerial photographs, preliminary survey of the field sites, planning alternative routes and points of stop, checking fares and bus time-tables, and getting hold of a light-weighted portable amplifier which is available locally at low prices.

Fieldwork planning would have to include the follow-up work in classroom. One or two lessons might be used for data processing, representation and analysis. The pupils would be made aware that data gathering in the field has a definite purpose, and the material gathered outside is relevant to classroom work. The teacher could assist the pupils to use their data to reformulate their initial hypothesis and to draw up their own conclusions.

The New Form One to Three Syllabus

The new Form One to Three Geography Syllabus, adopted by the Curriculum Development Committee in 1983, clearly directs attention to the importance of fieldwork. It suggested over twenty fieldwork possibilities for teachers' consideration, most of which are listed under the Form One Syllabus on the Geography of Hong Kong. However, it does not imply that fieldworks have to be squeezed in the year of Form One. Many topics can be carried out in Forms Two and Three, with an intention of integrating local studies into the study of regional and international issues.

Resources Provided by the Education Department

The Advisory Inspectorate of the Education Department provides guidance to school teachers by formulation of the Geography Syllabus, by school inspection and by preparation of the Standard Equipment List. The Field Studies Centre in Sai Kung periodically organizes field study courses and visits for students of local Colleges of Education and Schools of Education. It has also gradually built up a collection of reference materials on field studies, particularly those related to Sai Kung area.

The sixteen issues of the Geography Bulletin, edited by the Geography Section in the past years, contain a lot of original materials on field sites in different parts of Hong Kong (Figure 2).

Conclusion

"Fieldwork gives opportunities to acquire information at first hand and the relationship of geographical features to their real situation. It is an active means of learning, whereby pupils take part in gaining knowledge through their own effort, instead of the teachers always expounding and pupils listening. It is stimulating and the conclusions are indeed an enlightening, effective means of learning".¹ There are indeed certain difficulties in organizing fieldwork for lower secondary forms in Hong Kong, but with some flexibility and endeavour, we should be able to contribute to this valuable part of secondary school education.

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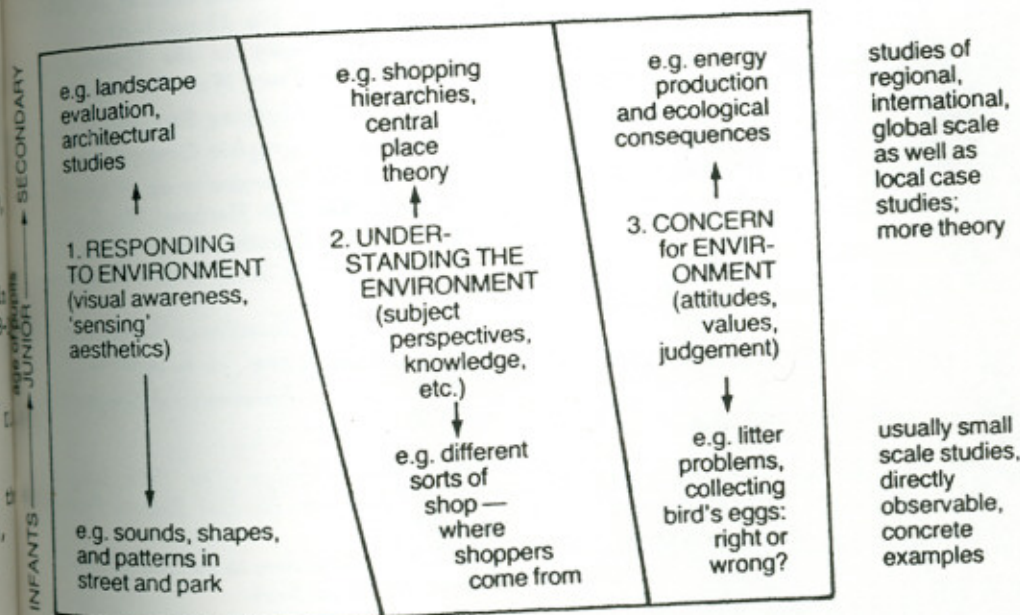
¹ Education Department, Syllabus for Geography Forms I-III, 1983. (in print)

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From Mills, David (1981)

GEOGRAPHICAL WORK IN PRIMARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS
The Geographical Association, p.50



Possible Proportion of Three Elements Changing with Age of Pupils

FIGURE 1 Children's relationship to the environment
(after R. A. Beddis, Avon Schools Environment Project)

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FIGURE 2



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