

GEOGRAPHY IN THE ORGANIC LAW FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE EDUCATIONAL QUALITY (OLIEQ). A LOST CHANCE?

M^a Ángeles Rodríguez Domenech

Departamento de Geografía y Ordenación del Territorio. Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha
Mangeles.Rodriguez@uclm.es

I. INTRODUCTION

The recent reform of the Spanish Educational System which has been accomplished through the OLIEQ in December 2013 and its imminent implementation in the academic year 2014-2015 in Primary Education and Vocational Training, and its postponement in Compulsory Secondary Education and Bachillerato, sets out a reflection about the contents that this law offers. Every educational reform usually entails, as you might expect, curricular changes from the different areas of knowledge which they are part of, by giving renewed concern to researchers and teachers of every level of such areas. This derives from the desire to know how its discipline is organised from the normative point of view. We all have the aspiration and look forward to see how the current condition of the knowledge in each area is considered in such an educational reform, how the didactic approaches that have taken place until now and have been tested as effective have been taken into account. Moreover, we would like to see that its selection in the system can achieve the proper educational aims.

Along these lines, the Spanish Association of Geographers (from now on SAG) and the Geographers Association have developed, have published and have presented some documents where they have stated the role of Geography in education to the responsible politicians when a new educational law has been advertised, then when the normative drafts have been presented to develop such a law and finally in its constitutional processing and its promulgation. These politicians have been compeled to the oficial proposals instead of to the ideal of the discipline proposal. However, we must value the effort and the results this collective has obtained.

Some gaps which have been detected, in their opinion, on the draft of the Royal Decree (from now on RD) presented by the Education, Culture and Sports Department (from now on ECSD), which regulates the basic curriculum of Primary Education, Compulsory Secondary Education and Bachillerato have been published. The SAG and the Geographers Association

have made some proposals to improve the aforesaid curriculum. Such projects, together with their experience and knowledge, have been supported in a survey to geographers with the aim of seeking out their opinion and curiosity and of overstepping the professional field to shed some light on the normative expression of the discipline to the legislator.

To contribute to this objective in this Project (March 2014), we intend to analyse, from the Geography perspective, firstly, the reasons through which a reform in the Spanish Educational System (from now on SES) has been contemplated and the transformations this draft has followed to become a law (Organic Law 8/2013). Secondly, we mean to suggest the main differences between the situation of Geography in the current law (2006) and the new one (2013), that is to say, between the Organic Law of Education (2/2006) (from now on OLE) and the Organic Law for the Improvement of the Educational Quality (8/2013) (from now on OLIEQ). We must advise that such a comparison has been made taking into account the Royal Decrees published by the ECSD to develop the law (RD 126/2014, which regulates the curriculum in Primary Education and RD 127/2014 in Basic Vocational Training) and the drafts of RD in Compulsory Secondary Education and Bachillerato. Although these drafts are not decisive, through them we may figure out the educational function, the contents and the distribution of time in the curriculum in Geography in this new law if there are not any changes.

Last but not least, we analyse to what extent the gaps the geographical knowledge have in the OLE have been rectified or perpetuated and at the same time, we make some proposals to improve them. Therefore, we will base on what the SAG have published, on some projects which have been published by some Geography teachers in different educational levels and on our own reflection and experience.

II. GEOGRAPHY CONTENTS IN THE OLIEQ AND THE DIFFERENCES IN THE OLE.

The main evolutionary studies about the curriculum in Geography in non-university levels have been carried out by Souto (2003, 2004, 2011) and by González Gallego (2001, 2011). In this Project, the analysis of the curriculum in Geography is focused on the OLE and the recent reform of the Spanish Educational System (OLIEQ). We have taken into account two aspects: the laws themselves as framework of selection and the Royal Decrees where the contents are developed and established.

II.1. The structure of the SES in the OLIEQ and its differences between it and the OLE as framework of selection in Geography.

Before dealing with the situation where the geographical contents appear in different educational levels in the OLIEQ, we have to consider its general aspects, as well as the changes it represents in the OLE. We understand these considerations will help us focus on the situation proposed in Geography. We make reference to aspects such as the classification and organization of different ways of teaching; as it is known as «Basic education»; the elements of the curriculum and the organization of different educational periods (Chart 1).

Chart 1
GEOGRAPHY / SOCIAL SCIENCES IN THE OLIEQ AND OLE

Stage in the SES	OLE		OLIEQ	
	Academic year	name	Academic year	name
BASIC VOCATIONAL TRAINING			2nd year	Social Sciences
			1st year	Social Sciences
BACHILLERATO	2nd year (Humanities and Social Sciences)	Geography	2nd year (Humanity and Social Sciences)	Geography
CSE	4th year	Social Sciences, Geography and History	2nd course (4th year)	Geography and History
	From 1st to 3rd years	Social Sciences, Geography and History	1st course (1st, 2nd and 3rd years)	Geography and History
EDUCACIÓN PRIMARIA	From 1st to 6th years	Natural, Social and Cultural scientific knowledge	From 1st to 6th years	Social Sciences

II.2. Geography in the RD

The schedule establishment for the OLIEQ for the academic year 2014-2015 will implement the current legislation for the odd academic years in Primary and Basic Vocational Training, whereas CSE and Bachillerato will be ruled by the current RD in the OLE.

a) Geographical knowledge in Primary Education

Geographical knowledge in Primary Education as it was previously said, are enclosed in the Social Sciences area, due to the fact that Scientific Knowledge has been divided into Natural Sciences and Social Sciences areas and this new area is included into the core areas (Chart 5).

The most significant criticisms this change has received have been: the recentralization of the curriculum; due to the evaluation, the importance of the contents, the evaluation criteria and the evaluation learning, as opposed to the objectives and specific competences each subject develops (Bolívar, A. 2014); and «breakup» of the Scientific Knowledge in two different areas.

From our point of view, we consider that there has been a progress in the treatment of Geography in this educational stage in the OLIEQ. Nevertheless, there exist some pending aspects we need to specify that may improve or get it worse in the situation of our discipline. We are making reference to the fact that the contents block (Chart 5) where the Social Sciences are organised must be taught for 6 years, the period of time this stage lasts. However, there is no specification about the way these contents must be provided through

the academic years or the way they must be combined with the History contents. We neither know whether the learning must be done in a continuous way so that we can go in depth in the contents or if students must study every single block just once in the stage and therefore, it must be adapted to the pupils ages in that specific moment. On the other hand, we are in the dark about the weekly schedule we must dedicate to this area.

b) Geographical knowledge in CSE

The OLIEQ regulates the OLE in the articles from 23 bis to 29 and in the draft of RD it is included in the core subjects, the so called Geography and History. Such a name is a positive specification for our discipline of Social Sciences as a whole, which was taught in Primary Education. At the same time, it is identified as the Geography subject we can find in Bachillerato.

One of the positive aspects we have noticed between the draft and the Organic Law which was passed in terms of the learning of Social Sciences, Geography and History is that in the 4th year of CSE, in the draft bill it was not compulsory for every pupil, it was just an optative subject depending on the form chosen. Nowadays, this subject is compulsory for everybody in the 4th year apart from the form chosen. This Criticism was first explained in the 1st European Conference of Didactics of Geography forum which was held in Zaragoza in November 2012 and it was also presented by the Spanish Geographers Association to the pertinent educational authorities.

Our proposal of specification would be the following: the first block about the physical environment will be taught in the 1st year and the second block about human space in the 2nd year and the third block about History in the 3rd year. The subject in the 4th year of CSE (Geography and History) would be taught as part of the curriculum, that is, as Geography for the Contemporary World which would begin with basic historical antecedents, especially from the second half of the last century. This subject would explain the big challenges, problems and instabilities in the current world perfectly. Here, we would include some of the topics we can find in the two previous paragraphs, as well as some contents from the current curriculum in the 3rd and 4th years.

We cannot forget that the curricular revision of Geography has a pending challenge on the fringes of the epistemological evolution of the concerning geographical science, which is innovation in geographical education, the new didactic European aspect of education through competences, paying special attention to knowledge and interaction with the physical world, information process and digital knowledge and social citizenship competences (Miguel González, 2012: 21).

c) Geographical knowledge in Bachillerato

In terms of Bachillerato, a priori, the academic ordinance in Geography does not change. However, a curricular revision means a chance to revise, adapt and improve.

As regard to the contents of this discipline (Chart 8), they focus on the Spanish Geography related to the European and worldwide space and they have been better specified in the OLIEQ than they were in the OLE. So, we understand that it is more

logical although more classical. Let's take as an example the comparison between block 3 in the OLE and the specification of the same contents in blocks 2, 3, 4 and 5 in the OLIEQ.

In Bachillerato, in the OLE, as well as in the OLIEQ, in practice we must start from scratch. In this sense, the Physical Geography is not seen deeply in the 1st year of CSE in the OLE (five years before) and in the OLIEQ, at this moment it is not known when this part of Geography will be studied in CSE, as we previously said, in terms of schedule and contents. This situation provokes that students find it difficult to study this subject.

The existence of university entrance exams in the OLE means a sword of Damocles in the teacher who teaches these subjects in the 2nd year of Bachillerato because these subjects, such as Geography, must be evaluated in this test. As the outline for the course is very extensive and it is compulsory to teach it entirely and deeply because the student will take an exam at the end of the academic year, it is very difficult for the teacher to teach every single content due to the lack of time. Moreover, they cannot use more practical didactic methodology or make use of Geographical Information Technologies, which is essential to improve the interaction with the physical world competence.

d) Geographical knowledge in Vocational Training.

One of the main changes in the OLIEQ are the qualifications in Basic Vocational Training, aimed at pupils who have taken the 1st course of CSE and are not going to promote to the 4th academic year (or, exceptionally to the 3rd academic year). The teachers team or the school counselor will decide whether they must take it or not.

The qualification students obtain when they take Basic Vocational Training is recognised academically and professionally and through it they can access directly to bachelor's degree in Vocational Training. It has the same labour effects (but not academic) than the qualification obtained in CSE to work in private and public jobs and it let them take the final evaluation test in CSE (final exams) and in case they pass it, they can obtain the qualification in their corresponding option in CSE.

Geography appears in the common modules through Social Sciences subject, in particular in Communication and Social Sciences Block. So, Social Sciences are expected to be taught in the two academic years which are part of the course. This is a progress in our field, because all the pupils who decide to take this course will learn it.

III. PERPETUATION OF GAPS AND PARTIAL OMISSION OF PROFESSIONAL PROPOSALS. A LOST CHANCE

At the beginning of this article, we stated that a legislative reform of educational nature provides an opportunity of change between professionals of every area of knowledge. It is intended to collect on it the current condition of knowledge in every related area, they are considered didactic approaches which have been produced until this moment and which have proved their efficiency and whose selection in the system allows to achieve their own educational objectives.

Consequently, we understand we must underline the detected gaps we have found in the rule reformed (in this case, the OLE), we must know the proposals which have been made

to improve them (specially those proposals made by the SAG) and finally, we must value to what extent those gaps have been rectified and if such proposal has been considered in the new law (OLIEQ).

IV. CONCLUSION

An educational reform, as it has been previously said, is a good chance to correct and improve the gaps detected in the general system and in every discipline in particular. The professionals of every subject are the most interested and the most trained people to propose, after some surveys and debates, and draw up in a deeply consensus, the proposal they consider as the most convenient.

In this sense, we consider that legislators and the educational Management must rely on those proposals made by professionals in order to establish the curricular development in the related school subjects by leading and combining the particular interests of every group and by paying attention to the general benefit.

In our opinion, these two principles have not been taken into account appropriately in terms of Geography in the OLIEQ because there are not important changes in courses and academic years with respect to the current OLE. Moreover, there is not improvement in the contents as they have not been adapted to the development in our discipline. So, we consider it has been a lost chance. On the other hand, the current gaps should be checked by the Autonomous Communities in the published Royal Decrees (Primary and Basic Vocational Training) and by the ECSD in the Royal Decrees draft (CSE and Bachillerato) until they can be promulgated. On the contrary, these gaps and errors will be perpetuated and we will get by without the rich and plentiful contribution of geographical knowledge which can provide in the comprehensive training of people.