

Geography Education and Geographical Naming

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What is the role of geography education relative to the geographical naming of features? Geographical names are the textual labels assigned to locations on Earth. Students studying geography learn and use geographical names to add meaning to and develop a worldview much as they use vocabulary words to add meaning to the reading of literature. The name of a place or feature is often the initial evidence students encounter that captures the values, associations, and emotions that a people attach through time to a feature by virtue of its geographical label. This attribute of geographical naming is a part of the power of place that is prominent in geography education. The power of geographical naming presents an opportunity to incorporate educational values with the study of Earth, its people and features. Geographical names are more than markers on Earth's surface. They reveal the story of the sequent settlement of a place, reveal hidden dimensions of the past, provide evidence of social inequities, express values related to a place, and are significant attributes for developing a 21st century worldview.

1. Introduction

Geography education has an important role and serves as an important component of the social and ethical values that characterize a society. It adds to the geocapacity of a society to provide for its members in a human, peaceful, and secure fashion. Geocapacity is analogous to the qualities a passenger expects when traveling on a well-designed ship, whether it is a space ship, air ship, or a ship that sails on Earth's oceans. The passengers expect dependability, reliability, and navigability. Those qualities permit a ship to arrive at its destination with assurance and careful guidance. Geography education is similar to the dependable, reliable, and navigable ship. The important role for geography education is to enable students to arrive at adulthood with the necessary geocapabilities to serve as responsible citizens, with knowledge, values, and skills that complement and benefit society. Relying on analogy again, those

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geocapabilities require four qualities that each employs the word “ship.” They are scholarship; artisanship; stewardship, and citizenship. Those are the four ships of geography education, and they progress in a complementary manner through one’s education in geography. The geographic voyage develops a reliable and accurate worldview of Earth and its inhabitants. While the role of geography education is similar to that of a reliable ship, it is a ship of the mind and human character.

2. The challenge for geography education

Scholars are regularly creating new knowledge or transforming existing knowledge to either reaffirm or arrive at new conclusions. How does the new knowledge diffuse to the general population or to specialized groups of academics who share an interest in the topic? The major means of knowledge transmission is the system of education, both formal and informal. A large part of the formal education is comprised of learning content in school or using the skills acquired in school to learn content in the workplace and in meeting responsibilities within one’s community. This is scholarship. The production of new knowledge and the assimilation of existing knowledge are largely dependent on adequacy of professional education. Professional education includes formal preparation in a variety of careers, including doctors, lawyers, and teachers for the work they expect to undertake during their lifetimes. This is preparation for artisanship. Professional education functions in concert with the academic disciplines to develop learners prepared to address the world issues and contribute to the development and betterment of societies. This is stewardship. Participation in one’s community and devoting critical, but constructive attention to issues and socially constructive values is essential to the attainment of civic ideals. This is citizenship.

Academic disciplines have an enduring and essential connection to the professions, especially to professional education where preparation in the essential content and skills necessary for becoming a teacher. The discipline of geography has an enduring relationship with education through the field of geography education. In most countries, students study geography in school in the primary and secondary years. Geography education begins with young children and is nurtured steadily during the periods of elementary, secondary, and post-secondary schooling. The binding relationship between academic geography and learning geography in school is widely

recognized as a means to serve as positive stewards in an every changing in environment. It is recognized when critically considering the past, present, and future issues of territory, claims to natural resources, and the reinstatement of cultural traditions such as geographic names. Geography education examines the conditions on Earth, its peoples, physical environments, natural resources, and the linkages that connect places. Geographical education topics engage students in critically analyzing the spatial patterns and relationships between and among numerous of Earth's dynamic features.

Scholars who specialize in geography education benefit from the strong tradition within academic geography that informs geography education regarding the content and skills that are essential for students in primary and secondary school. Academic disciplines and the educational profession sometimes take different theoretical and practical positions on teaching and learning. It is as if they are on different tectonic plates and do not share the overall mission of teaching important content, values, and skills to young people. When those fault lines occur, it requires coordination and cooperation to build well-traveled bridges crossing between tectonic plates. Geography and education are no exception. In geography education, we build bridges to improve the geographic knowledge and the worldviews that students develop. Geographical naming is an important structural component in building the educational linkages between geography and education.

3. Geography and geographical naming

The early development of geography as an academic study comprised three major content components of educational significance. First was the physical surface of Earth with its geomorphologic, climatic, and hydrological features. The record of physical geography as a school subject is well established. In most countries, the study of physical geography begins with maps and local observation, and in the 21st century continues to include virtual field study and international comparisons of student research. The second component of geography education includes the spatial patterns on Earth that develop as people interact with the natural environment. Spatial patterns and their relationships are used to explaining the coincidence of soils and a particular land use. Spatial patterns also explain the relationships between

accessibility and urban or economic functions. The relationships between people and natural environments have been a main topic since the early years of the discipline. The third component of geography education focuses on names. The names on Earth are the identification markers for places and regions. For example, the place where I live is Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA. It is a unique name and people often ask questions about its origin. The origin of the name has several interpretations, but evidence from an 1823 atlas credits the name and meaning to the Potawatomi tribe of American Indians. It is interpreted to mean “boiling pot” or “place where the water boils” and is derived from an Indian legend. According to the legend, a young man seeking a young woman in marriage was required to run a specified distance before the water in a pot reached the boiling point. If the run was successful, then the marriage was approved. If the water boiled prior to the return of the runner, then the marriage was not approved. Thus, the geographical name, Kalamazoo, represents a place, an Indian culture value, a social tradition, family structure in marriage, and tribal ritual based on the boiling water. The Potawatomi tribe was attributed for designating “kikalamezo” as the geographical name for the location along the river. European immigrants used the name to apply to the river and the location of their settlement as it became a trade center. Students studying geography and history are able to attach significance to the geographical name of the place that represents an Indian cultural value. Once the origin of the name is studied, it has greater meaning to students than if it were just the name, Kalamazoo. There is more to a name than the word that represents it.

There is a tension within geography education regarding the learning of place names. Place name learning has a tradition of rote memorization rather than associational learning of the name with its origin or some other important attribute. The study of geographical naming is quite different from the learning of place names. Geographical naming is an exploration into the historical geography of a place or region. The geographical name that one observes on maps, in narratives, and foremost in the values and expressions of people has a much deeper meaning than just the name. The geographical name links people together across periods of celebration and despair. Place name learning results in a name of the map. Geographical naming delves more deeply to the reasons for the name and its persistence through time.

A geographical name represents baggage from the past and provides insight to the events, changes, and difficulties in a place. Names also represent hope for the future. The past to future continuum is apparent in the naming and renaming of geographical

features. Streets and parks in the United States are named and renamed to honor Reverend Martin Luther King. The supra naming of the Salish Sea in the western waters of Canada and the United States was in recognition of Indigenous peoples who inhabited the region prior to the arrival of the Europeans.

Geographical naming discussions to resolve the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* naming issue are a step towards peace and harmony in Northeast Asia. However, with issue such as the *East Sea/Sea of Japan*, an open discussion regarding the geographical naming issue and its resolution is necessary. To all parties in a geographical naming issue, a geographical name is more than just a name. It is a geographical expression of culture, values, and traditions. Geographical naming issues are social and educational equations where the sum of one plus one is greater than two.

4. Adding educational value

The challenge for geographical education is to prepare learning experiences that enable students to identify a geographical or social issue, collect evidence representing all aspects of the issue, examine the evidence, judge the reliability and validity of the evidence, take an informed position on the issue, and present their position through discussion, writing and taking action. There is value added both educationally and geographically with each component of the process. Geographical naming lends itself to the practice of inquiry that is essential for developing skills in critical thinking and problem solving. Those scholarly skills are a major goal of geography education. Geography education enables students to explore the world and its peoples, including the blemishes as well as the achievements.

What is the value that geography naming adds to the geography education? It enables a person to make the transition from viewing the world from an egocentric perspective to a perspective that is socio-centric. The socio-centric perspective enables a person to critically review and acknowledge evidence supporting another person's perspective of an issue, or his or her worldview. There are four compelling reasons why the study of geographical naming adds value to geography education. The value added dimensions of studying geographical naming entail existential, ethical, intellectual, and practical components. When combined, they complement the process of becoming educated geographically.

5. Geographical naming and education

Geographical naming builds scholarly interest in places that is deeper and more meaningful than a place name itself. Human beings, in a philosophical sense, become human by interacting with and coming to understand the world inhabited by other humans. Wilbur Zelinsky, a cultural geographer who studied the significance of geographical names, was a proponent for using three components of culture that had been introduced by Sir Julian Huxley Zelinsky 1996Aunger 2002(.). They were artifacts, sociofacts, and mentifacts. The same geographical name may imply an artifact, a sociofact, or both, depending on the intention of the group that gave the place a name. Geographical names are applied to physical and cultural features. A name may be an artifact, just as an ancient bowl unearthed in an anthropological dig is an artifact, or it may be a sociofact if it represents a cultural custom, as does the example of Kalamazoo. In either case, it is the inquiry into the geographical name and the results that provides greater meaning to the name. A geographical name assigned to a particular location or feature represents a community social value or belief. Huxley referred to them as sociofacts. Sociofacts represent the social structures of a family, tribe, or society. Societies differ depending on the availability and use of resources. For example, societies that depend on the resources of the sea are often organized to respond to the different demands and opportunities that arise in a marine environment. These may include the processing of products from the sea, or designating specific areas of the seas for use by particular groups. The third of Huxley categories, mentifacts, comprise the attitudes, values, and beliefs that people have as part of their learned behaviors. They refer to the work of the mind in the expression of feelings, interests, and dispositions. Artifacts, sociofacts, and mentifacts have important roles in the study of geographical naming, but perhaps the mentifacts are the most complicated to unravel because they are in the minds of individuals responsible for the designation of names and the usage of names. A geographical name, in terms of mentifacts, may mean different things to different individuals and groups. Each of the concepts, artifacts, sociofacts, and mentifacts, contributes in an important manner to adding value to geographical education. However, the mentifacts remain the elusive dimension that is recognizably present, but challenging to substantiate to others. It is the mind's view of the geographical naming issue.

Zelinsky developed a compelling case for using Huxley's artifacts, sociofacts, and

mentifacts in cultural geographical studies. The three categories accommodated a wide number of topics that contribute to the human experience when they are applied. They include concepts, such as place, home, habitat, and natural landscape that contribute to the human existence. While not all academics in geography agree with this position, it does apply to geographical naming. Geographical naming captures the cultural attributes and historical contexts of people living in particular places. A geographical name conjures up expressions of the past, the meanings of the present, and anticipation of the future.

6. Geographical naming: the existential view

Geographical education builds a passion to explore, observe, and reflect upon the world around us. We often refer to it as developing a worldview. Geographical education and the naming of geographical features present the opportunity to delve into the existential qualities of a name, especially the mentifacts that influenced a name. Prominent surface and ocean features are given geographical names through time by people holding particular values for and beliefs about the features. Experiences associated with the place activate the emotional attributes of the name, which are often powerful expressions of attachment to both the name and the feature. Names of the features provide an anchorage both physically and culturally for individuals and societal groups. The *East Sea/Sea of Japan* naming issue is one such example where the name has a particular significance to the Korean culture that goes beyond a simple one to one explanation. .

Geography education has the mission to explain the linkages between people and environments, including the value laden, emotional attachments. Geographical names are an avenue leading to explanations about places.

7. Geographical naming: The ethical view

Geographical naming provides a significant experience in the practice of ethical reasoning. Examining data and making judgments based on evidence from maps and narratives requires diligence and perseverance. Desirable ethical traits include being

kind, open-minded, impartial, truthful, honest, compassionate, considerate, and honorable. Ethical standards provide important guidelines to examine and research geographical naming using scholarly tools. For example, conflicting or confounding geographical names require close attention to historical maps, written accounts of naming decisions, and scrutiny of the social, political, and territorial contexts within which a name gained usage. Geography education applies rigorous ethical standards to the issues that accompany naming issues. Geographical naming is a window on the world. Naming has a long tradition, incorporated within the tradition of studying “place” and diverse natural and cultural influences that have influenced places.

8. Geographical naming: the intellectual view

The study of geographical naming provides the window for examining facts, concepts, and principles that lead us to ask questions and seek explanations about people, places, and environments. These are the ways that geography education provides intellectual reasons for studying geographical naming. There is the mystery or suspense in studying the roots of a geographical name. For example, an informal name given to a wide swath of the Atlantic Ocean is the infamous Bermuda Triangle. Aircraft and ocean vessels disappeared into this part of the Atlantic Ocean without any apparent reason. Is it fact or fiction? The myth provides an opportunity for students to apply intellectual reasoning to determine the basis of the myth, and the reasons for the persistence of the informal geographical name, Bermuda Triangle.

Research and study of geographical naming is an academic pursuit. Evidence is identified, collected, and organized using spatial and temporal perspectives. It must then withstand the rigors of cross-examination and argumentation that provide an authoritative account of the name’s origin. Toponymy, the study of geographical names, is an exacting science that sometimes follows an irregular pathway of evidence. The evidence may be on old maps that require forensic treatment to decipher the geographical names archived within their cartographic renderings. The intellectual challenge of geographical naming detective work that engages the scholar can also engage younger students in geography education. The scholarly inquiry regarding geographical names on maps or names used as common parlance to identify places enable students to investigate the name, delve deeply into local culture, myths, and

names from the past in order to formulate a worldview that includes the past influences on geographical issues of the present.

9. Geographical naming: practical reasons

Geographical naming has a very practical element that serves geography education in two practical ways. First, geographical names serve as macro and micro addresses to find where we are on Earth, where we are going, and where we have been. Geographical names are the reference points that people commonly use when navigating Earth. Geographical names provide anchorages to the familiar. They also provide encouragement to explore the unknown, and they give rise to speculation about the characteristics of the unfamiliar and what unfamiliar places will be like. A geographical name informs us about a place so that we anticipate with some certainty what we will observe.

Second, there are emotive connections with geographical names. Students become more passionate about the content of learning when emotions are engaged. Those emotions connected to geographical naming may be rooted deeply in geopolitical and historical contexts. For example, in the United States the term South is a geographical name for a region that has different meanings and geopolitical connotations. The geographical name represents the states that seceded from the United States in the 19th century during the U.S. Civil War. In its 21st century context, South represents a region of the U.S. with mild climatic conditions and the destination for millions of people engaged in migrations in the late 20th century, mainly from the northern states. The geographical name is indicative of the power of place in locational, social, and economic contexts. The power of the name South resonates differently between longtime residents and recent migrants to the region. The differences rest with the emotional attachments that the long term residents and more recent migrants attach to the name, South. This practical recognition of emotions associated with geographical naming is an engaging discussion point in geography education.

10. Sea names and naming issues

In the 21st century, students encounter place names, but few students encounter geographical naming issues. This is despite the prevalence of geographical naming issues that occur as territorial, land, and marine claims impact the international relations among countries they are studying. Geographical naming issues and associated land or sea claims present rich materials for students to discuss and resolve based on their research and studies. The students, as interested groups, may engage in geographical naming discussions and role-playing to examine the causes and consequences of the issues. Geographical naming is not included in the geographic topics recommended specifically in national or local curricula or standards, except where it is a national issue, such as in Japan and the Republic of Korea with regard to the East Sea/Sea of Japan naming issue. However, national and international naming issues provide students with opportunities to examine the significance of a name. Sea names often provide international considerations of naming issues, thus extending the evidence collection and discussion to two or more countries that share shores on a sea. Sea names also reveal the significance of Earth's water bodies that geography students experience due to the major emphasis on Earth's terra firma, or land surface. There are two examples of sea names that are geographical naming issues.

First, the Aral Sea has taken on a meaning that encompasses two major issues in humans' role in changing the face of Earth. The first is the consequence of environmental degradation, since the desiccation of the sea has made the name, Aral Sea, synonymous with a huge environmental disaster. Second, the Aral Sea name has raised attention to the widespread concern with environmental sustainability. Both of these are relatively recent developments since the waters of the Aral Sea in the 21st century are greatly diminished compared to the sea's original basin. The geographical name, in this case remains the same, but the sea has given way to an entirely new context since the water surface is largely diminished. With time maps will display the name, Aral Basin, rather than Aral Sea since the sea may completely become dry land in the 21st century due to the capture of it recharge rivers for irrigation projects.

Second, the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* naming issue presents an opportunity for geography education to use naming in quite a different manner. Information and data from old maps, the historical references in narrative accounts, and the research to date regarding to the names assigned of the body of water may each be used in an inquiry

model of investigation. The rationale for the study of the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* is based on the following points.

- 1) The *East Sea/Sea of Japan* geographical naming issue applies the concept of naming in contrast to memorizing a place name and location.
- 2) The *East Sea/Sea of Japan* naming issue is well suited for inquiry since map evidence is widely available in atlases and electronic media representing both the Korean and Japanese sides of the issue. The opportunity to research and review original documents and verifiable information is an important component of inquiry.
- 3) The *East Sea/Sea of Japan* geographical naming issue has two proponents each presenting claims to support a name for the water body between the Korean Peninsula and the Japan Archipelago. The data representing the two positions on the name, that of the Republic of Korea and Japan, provide opportunities for critical thinking and argumentation. Students using inquiry processes take a position on the issue based on evidence and engage in argumentation with scholarly support for their position on the preferred geographical name, or dual naming.
- 4) Larger societal issues may be examined in conjunction with naming provides opportunities for examining larger regional issues, such as peace and harmony in Northeast Asia (Stoltman 2014). In the case of the Aral Sea, it is sustainability of the environment that is the larger issue. The East Sea/Sea of Japan naming issue gives rise to the analysis and discussions of social justice. While social justice issues have root causes and are referenced to different periods, the examination of the conditions and investigation of the consequences are viable topics for students in geography education. Social justice enables students to delve into contexts and consequences relative to geographical naming of a place or feature. Geographical naming that occurs under duress or in the absence of representation is not ethical. Social justice is a topic that has emerged in geography education in recent years in several different contexts.

An example is colonialism during the first half of the 20th century in Northeast Asia. The conditions, including geographical naming, that resulted from colonial policies and the consequences of those policies in the 21st century are topics that lend themselves to

the study of social justice. Geographical naming provides a means to study the cultural traditions of a place, and to examine past geographical naming and practices curtailing national representation on international commissions that reviewed names in accordance with principles of human rights and social justice.

11. Summary

In this paper, I have distinguished between the learning of geographical names, often referred to as place names, and the study of geographical naming. The latter is the process whereby the traditions of a people and culture are embedded within a geographical name. The emotions, spatial attachments, and traditions of people are anchored to geographical names. Why are geographical names important? They are important because they represent the cultures and traditions that people have acquired and imprinted on life ways, maps and in minds. They are important because they tell a segment of the story of people and their collective experiences. They are important because they represent the anchorage to locations on Earth that have special emotional meanings or memories. A geographical name may also reveal negative experiences or represent a strong nationalistic position when the name is used. Through inquiry and critical thinking, geography education provides a scholarly gateway to the study of geographical naming.

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