

Exciting Geography

What is it and how can it be
developed in secondary schools?

Exciting Geography

- What does *exciting geography* mean?
- Is geography an exciting subject?
- What can we do to make it exciting?
- How to develop an exciting geography in secondary schools?

Exciting geography

First of all, what does “exciting” mean?

What the word “exciting” means?

Exciting: adj. = causing great interest or excitement

Interest: i) **Wanting to know more** = the feeling that you have when you want to know or learn more about sb/sth; ii) **attraction** = the quality that sth has when it attracts sb’s attention or makes them want to know more about it

Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English (2000). Sixth Edition

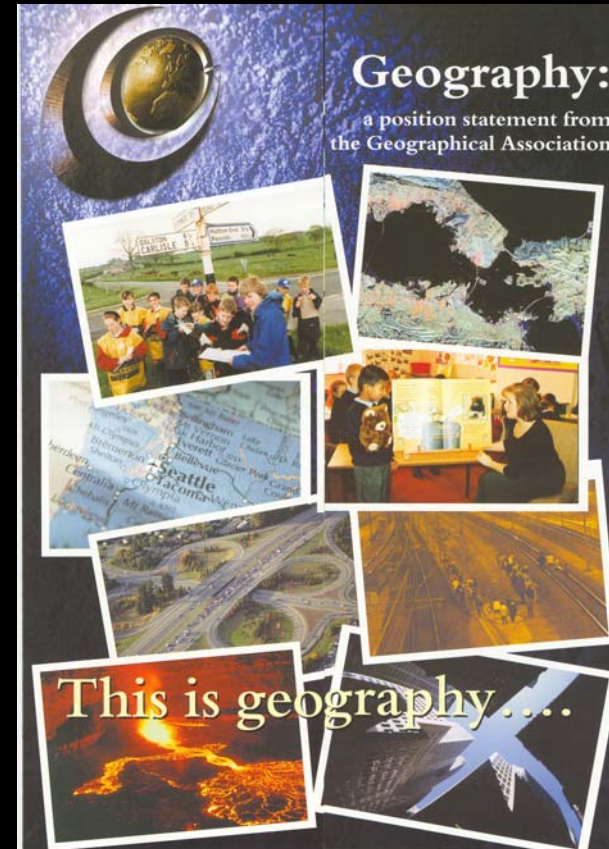
What the word “exciting” means?

Exciting: adj. = causing great **interest** or **excitement** **Excite:** i) to make sb feel very pleasure, interested or enthusiastic, especially about sth that is going to happen; ii) to make sb feel a particular emotion or react in a particular way

Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English (2000). Sixth Edition.

Is geography exciting?

If **Geography** has the potential presented in the position statement of the Geographical Association, we have all reasons to believe that geography can be **exciting!**



Geography ...

- Secures **locational knowledge and understanding of spatial relations** – how places are interconnected
- Develops a **knowledge and understanding of current events** – from local to global
- Explains **geographical patterns and processes** – physical and human
- Enables **well-informed judgements** about environments and supports an **understanding of sustainable development**

Geography ...

- Addresses the **complexity of human and physical environments**
- Makes **connections** between natural, economic, social, political and technological systems
- Develops the **skill of visual literacy** – interpreting maps, graphs, diagrams, aerial photographs and satellite images

Geography ...

- Provides opportunities through fieldwork, for the **first hand investigation** of places, environments and human behaviour
- Provides a meaningful context for **developing transferable skills** – literacy, numeracy, ICT, problem solving, team work, thinking skills, enquiry
- Prepares for the world of work – geographers, with their **skills of analysis and synthesis**, are highly employable

Geography ...

- Stimulates an interest in, and a wonder of, the world around us – it gives young people a **desire to explore** and enables them to travel confidently
- Gives real purpose for **using new technologies**, such as GIS
- Empowers all young people to **become active global citizens**
- Helps students to understand that there may be more than one way of tackling **specific real-life problems**

Geographical Association, 2002

But in practice what happens?

- The question is to know if the potential presented by GA has real practical results
- In Portugal we are still far from this reality



So let's see

- In classes description is preferred to explanation, which makes questioning difficult
- the organization of syllabus by “closed” themes difficults the connections between natural and human systems
- all learning activities take place inside the class room, opportunities to first hand investigation through fieldwork barely exist

So let's see

- the dictatorship of contents relegates to secondary plan the development of visual literacy and transferable skills
- the transmission of knowledge by the teacher leaves the student little space for discovery and little desire to explore the world around us
- Inadequate teacher training and the insufficiency of equipment in the classrooms aren't favourable to the use of ICT, like GIS, Internet,...

Exciting geography

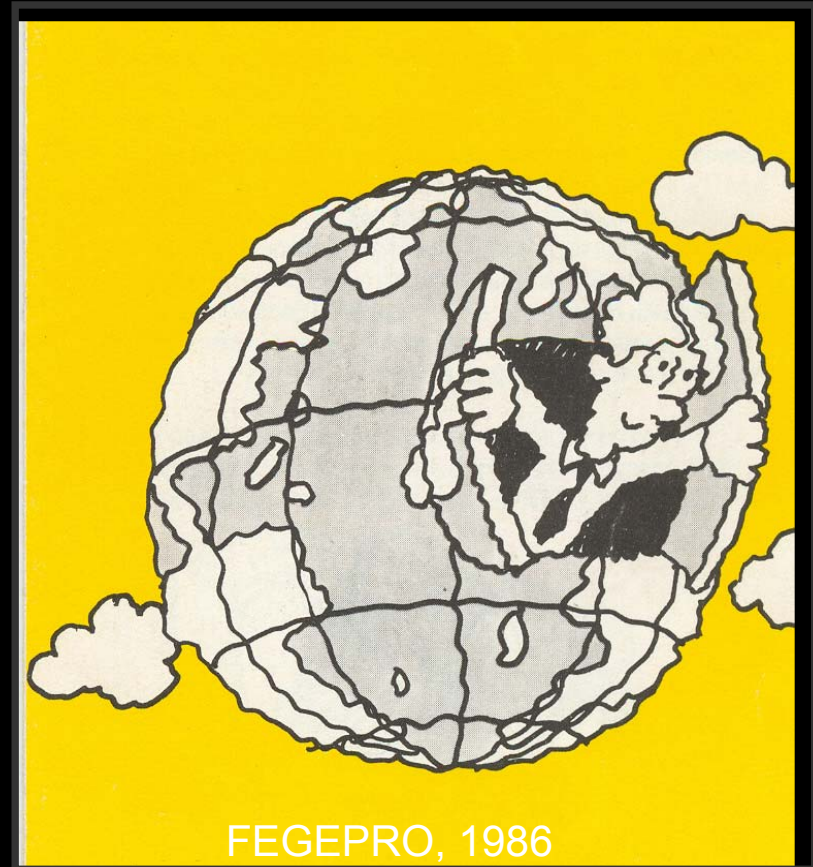
What can we do?

Three ideas

- to practice an exciting geography depends basically on the interest of contents, and on the teaching methods
- to be exciting, geography needs to offer good learning experiences
- the internal structure of classroom and the ambience of learning matters, as sceneries on a stage influence the acting

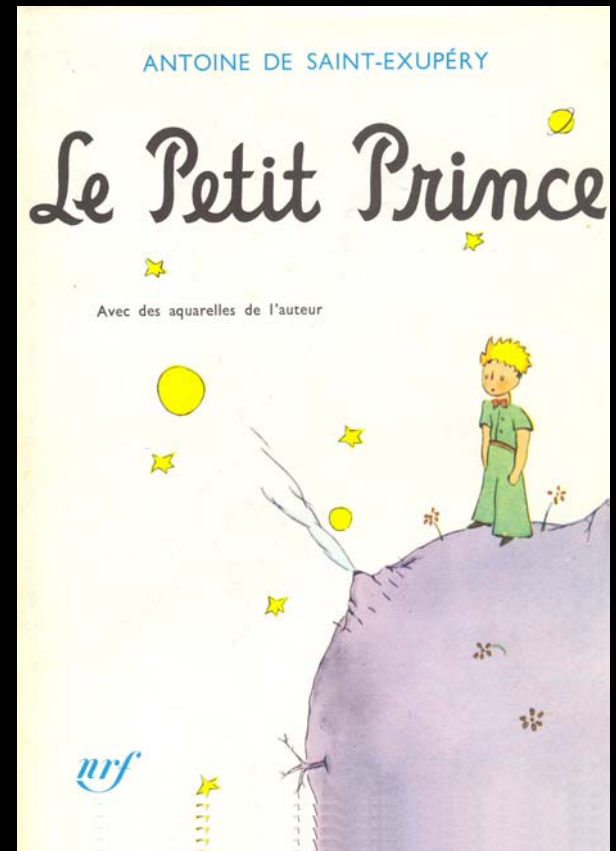
What can we do?

we must turn
geography into an
open window for
knowledge of the
world around us,
and the learning
experience into an
adventure



What can we do?

Saint-Exupéry writes about geographers and explorers. Perhaps the best way to make geography exciting is **to turn learners into explorers**. Explorer in a sense of the one who tries to discover, which searches for, examines or observes.



What can we do?

- we need geography classes **to give us wings** not cages (Rubem Alves)

In cages, birds unlearn the ability to fly. They are no longer birds. Because flying is their nature. An exciting geography doesn't love caged birds, it creates wings. It exists to give birds courage to fly.

What can we do?

- Geography must offer **tools** and **toys** to students

“**Tools**” are sources of knowledge that allow us to solve every day problems.

“**Toys**” are one of those things that without real utility, can give pleasure and joy to the soul.

(Rubem Alves)

What can we do?

- We need classrooms to become more **learning places**

In our schools, a lot is taught but too little is learned.

Whereas teaching spaces are focused on the teacher, learning places depart from the student, considering several dimensions: their ideas, their potential, their limitations...

To summarize ...

**Exciting
Geography**



**Good
learning
experiences**



- ✦ Lessons that create wings, that love birds in their flight
- ✦ Lessons that offer tools and toys
- ✦ Promote thinking skills and enquiry
- ✦ Privilege constructive methodologies

To summarize ...

**Exciting
Geography**



**Good
learning
experiences**



- ⊕ Interesting themes
- ⊕ Meaningful problems for students
- ⊕ Innovative working methods and techniques
- ⊕ Enjoyable working environment
- ⊕ Real-life problems