CAN GEOGRAPHY LEAD NEW AGE THINKING ABOUT SCHOOLING?

Margaret Robertson
La Trobe University
IGU-CGE London, April 2007
In brief yes!!

But venturing forward, alert, alive and assertively needs courage and a sense of adventure
The obvious....

- “The most fundamental point may be the easiest to overlook. The study of geography deals with a key dimension of life – **space and place in the real world**: without an understanding of that dimension no young person is properly educated”

(Walford, 2001)
Moving with the times
The pedagogical ‘space’ for geography

Sustainable cultural pedagogies connect with the subjectivities of the learners
Are schools keeping up?
Traditions – ‘blind spots’ and alleys

‘Home Turf’
- Landscape
- Space
- Place
- Patterns
- Fieldwork
- Prediction

Tools - Methodological traditions – the grand narratives
The Geography Education research canon

- Predictable and normative (Livingstone) – ‘right methods’; universal values and ‘truths’
- Familiar Power-knowledge-agency bases - Governance by tradition (‘environmental determinism’; descriptive and prescriptive; fieldwork; systems approach; regional geographies)
- Limited reference to philosophical and epistemological issues – i.e. ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions (Gregory; Harvey; Massey; Pile; Thrift)
Re-imagined Geography - on ‘being’ – *The beyond ‘post’ movement ‘new turf’*

- Post-colonialism (Bhabha; Nandy)
- Post-structuralism (Gregory)
- Post- ‘orientalism’ (Said)
- Post-capitalism (Harvey, Gibson-Graham)
- Multiple perspectives – Marxist; feminist, neo-capitalism, white, indigenous, queer, hybridity
- Global agency
- Secular politics
- ‘Environmentalism’
- Power-knowledge-space stories
- Shifting agency e.g. China, India ascendancy

- Counter-geographies
  - Juxtaposed with nationalism
  - Redefining citizenship values and rules
  - Localising the global
- Subjectivities ‘personal geographies’ (Matthews; Valentine)
- Cultural imperialism
- Politics of diasporas - borderless
- Dynamic social, economic, political and spiritual governance
- Aestheticism and architectural landscapes (Yi-Fu Tuan)
- Re-positioning of Physical Geography
The irony!

- Teachers are not acquiring the skills and competencies to teach the discipline – they face the need to meet all the new curriculum and reporting challenges etc.

- In the ‘real world’ GIS is mainstream: Google earth and GPS fitted cars bring geography to everyone.
Doreen Massey in ‘for space’ (2006) sums

• “What if we refuse to convene space into time? What if we open up the imagination of the sinly narrative to give space for a multiplicity of trajectories? What kinds of conceptualisation of time and space, might that give on to”
Locating the emerging cultural ‘aesthetic’ – assumes shared learning

Values and beliefs
- Includes traditional disciplines
- (EU, US, ??)

Knowledge
- influence of pragmatics (China??)

Sense making
Skills
- Politicians
- Bureaucrats
- Schools
- Teachers

Where do WE fit??
Some thoughts on specific applications to ‘education’ in geography education research

- Acceptance of fundamental geographies
  - Nature and landscape in real time and space
  - Patterns of movement and mobility build on those fixed constructs......
    - Hence,

- Recognition and acceptance of multiple geographies and pedagogies
  - The 24/7 world
  - The Macdonaldisation syndrome
  - Acceptance of learners (lifelong) as constructors of knowledge
  - Encouraging diversity and rewarding multiple narratives
Our challenge as geographers in my view is ----
‘Guiding the ship through un-chartered waters - Continuing the Discontent’

- Operationalising research ideas – from theory to research design, negotiation, implementation, reporting and educational policy
- Informed agency – ongoing reflection
- Lived experiences and acceptance of multiple narratives (Dewey; Le Febvre; van Manen)
- Risk taking – personal renewal
- Forward living – futures oriented
- Merging ‘archaic’ with the ‘present’ to imagine the ‘future’ (Bhabha; Cloke et al.; Gregory; Matless; Massey; Macnaghten; Soja; Thrift; Taylor; Trudgill; Valentine; Walford)
### Opportunities - need for spin, spin, spin…

- Mainstreaming of digital technologies – socialising influences
- Environmental urgency – our responses
- Government’s need to manage information flows – applied processes
- Nation building and global partnerships – expanding networks
- Geography's (the discipline and its traditions) inherent strengths in
  - *Inter-cultural learning*
  - *Comprehending diversity*
  - *Identity building*
  - *Fieldwork – GIS applications*
Towards sustainable lifestyles

Research responsibility and public accountability

- Understanding political, economic, social and environmental ecologies
- Educating our young to process information efficiently, ethically and judiciously
- Leading civic action e.g. water, forests and biodiversity management; healthy lifestyles; social and economic independence
- Building education capacity in poor nations
- Challenging ‘known’ assumptions with quality arguments and evidence
So how to bring schooling closer to reality?

Choose a real issue in a real context which will affect local people!
The Place
Unlike the impact of drought, floods and earthquakes we need not wait for a disaster to happen – if we think beyond the traditional ‘space’

Thank you