

THE PRODUCTION OF MAPS FOR STUDENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF SCHOOL CULTURE*DOIN DE ALMEIDA R.**Universidade Estadual Paulista, RIO CLARO, BRAZIL*

The objective of this article is to present a methodology for the production of maps developed for children at junior school (7 to 10 years), based on the research we have been undertaking since 1997 at the Laboratory of Research for the Teaching of Geography and Cartography for the production of maps and local atlases. We carried out surveys about the production of maps and school atlases for different municipalities in the state of São Paulo. The first of these was conducted between 1998 and 2000 for the production of an atlas for three municipalities. Between 2002 and 2004 we undertook some research to discover how teachers use these school atlases. A third experiment was carried out between 2006 and 2008 for the preparation of an atlas for a municipality which forms part of metropolitan region of Campinas (SP). From these experiments we tried to draw some conclusions which would increase our knowledge of School Cartography. The research was based on the school culture, taking into consideration school knowledge and practices such as social construction. Therefore, we don't see it as knowledge originating from the prescribed curriculum, rather as knowledge replete with meaning and values provided by the groups that we find at school. The school's role is to impart certain values and knowledge to students. Taking this in consideration, the collaborative action-research between the university and the local department of education was the methodology we applied (D. Jean Clandinin & F. Michael Connelly). This concept underpinned the three aforementioned projects, whose results were used to propose a methodology for the production of local atlases for children. The fundamental points of this methodology are: a) conduct a thorough research of the students' background and the culture and values associated with their community in order to identify the elements that make up the local culture; b) choose a thematic axis around which the contents of the atlas should be organized. In our research the central axis discusses identity and belonging; c) to develop atlases that are appropriate for each teaching level. Thus, it is not advisable to have only an atlas for all levels of primary school. For the most elementary level the maps should have large-scale details and the key should be produced by the students themselves. However, a certain level of standardization is required for the symbols used in the key, as well as a certain categorization of knowledge, which, in turn, gives rise to a negotiating process in terms of accepting what should remain on the map as something legitimate. The legitimization of knowledge, in the context of school situations, results from the relationships established between the subjects (teacher and students) and from the tension between the knowledge to be taught (prescribed by the curriculum) and the knowledge brought by these same subjects. We believe that this argument should be taken into account when choosing the thematic maps presented in the school books and atlases. The issue of the key, therefore, is strongly linked to the establishment of meaning, so that the summaries can be presented on the maps. Thus, it is necessary to "negotiate" which the symbolic forms will be contained within it. The choice of the symbols draws attention to the meanings, which are attributed to them culturally and socially. A sign takes on different meanings according to the cultural context of its readers, and also possesses a political character, because it transmits inherent conceptions to the symbols themselves. For instance, using a weapon as a symbol for "security" brings about a strong sense of violence, whereas the use of a police siren can denote "help" or "protection". The meaning of these educational activities became more explicit upon becoming discoveries made by the students, from knowledge arising from their daily experiences in the place that they live. Thus, the geographical concepts and their representation emerged in a contextualized mode, and the production of knowledge became more significant.