

Down to Earth: Contemplative Thinking Exercises for Geography Education

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Abstract

Contemporary geography education is mostly based on rational linear thinking skills, such as observation, explanation, interpretation, calculation and analysis. Even field trips – according to many the ‘heart’ of geography – are often organized in a logical, rational manner, in which learners step-by-step improve their understanding of the functioning of the world. Yet there are other, different ways to gain geographic knowledge and understanding that are as old as human existence. Contemplative thinking exercises offer an alternative approach that changes the habitual rational way of studying geographical topics to a state of deeper awareness, concentration and insight. By activating a set of neural structures involved in attention and relaxation, contemplative thinking exercises promote creativity and ‘deep’ knowledge instead of ‘surface’ knowledge. This paper explores the value of contemplative thinking exercises for geography education, both during geographic field trips and in the classroom.

Keywords: geography education, contemplation, meditation, field trips, experiential geography

Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand - Albert Einstein

Whatever exists in the universe, whether in essence, in act, or in imagination, the painter has first in his mind, and then in his hands - Leonardo da Vinci

Introduction

At the age of 16, Albert Einstein carried out a famous thought experiment that would have a memorable role in the development of his special relativity theory: he *imagined*

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chasing after an arrow of light (Norton, 2012). Leonardo da Vinci's quest for truth is claimed to be based on the same principle as the thought experiments of Einstein. Just like Einstein, da Vinci got a great part of his inspiration and knowledge from deep thinking exercises: curious like a child, and layer upon layer, he intensely contemplated on all kinds of topics, in his lifelong search for the essence of things (see Gelb, 2004).

Einstein's and da Vinci's muses have become very famous and worldwide praised. Still, only few contemporary scientists would admit that they gained their knowledge from imagination or contemplation. Instead, most scientists claim to use rational, linear thinking skills, based on a combination of observation, explanation, interpretation, calculation, analysis and evaluation. As a consequence, our teaching system is mostly based on the same rational principles: linear and analytical. On the other hand, creative associative techniques, such as Buzan's mind mapping and Osborn's brainstorming, enjoy worldwide popularity in classrooms. Both techniques share a lot in common with the techniques performed by Einstein and da Vinci: their spontaneous, free, limitless and unjudged nature is said to promote creativity and to support 'deep' knowledge instead of 'surface' knowledge (Davies, 2010; Gelb, 2004; Buzan, 1996).

Though mind mapping, brainstorming and other creative associative methods, are generally accepted as useful educational techniques, the use of contemplative thinking exercises in education has only recently gained interest, though this is rapidly on the rise. Outside the field of education, contemplative exercise have already enjoyed a high popularity for a longer time, probably in reaction to our era with great emphasis on speed, productivity and efficiency. Patients use it as a complement to their medical treatment, employers use it to prevent burnout amongst employees, CEOs use it for leadership building, artists use it to enhance inspiration and creativity, and parents use it to let their hyperactive children relax and focus. Dozens of scientific publications on the effect, techniques and functioning of contemplative practices, most of all meditation, have been published. Though still many questions remain, it is by now generally accepted that these practices have the ability to start a set of integrated physiologic and psychological changes that activate neural structures involved in attention and relaxation (e.g. Lazar, 2000).

In education, the usage of contemplative exercises is most often restricted to improving well-being and social competence of the learners, for instance by using meditation as a relaxation method. Only rarely are these exercises aimed at enhancing academic achievement. As a consequence, scientific research done on the effect of contemplative exercises in the classroom rather focusses on stress reduction and the improvement of social skills, while their effect on cognitive skills is only mentioned in the sidelines, if at all. Although many popular articles claim that contemplation improves academic achievement (e.g. Wickelgren, 2012), Waters (2014) only found three peer-reviewed studies on the impact on academic achievement of contemplative, meditative programs in secondary education. These three studies reported strong improvements of academic achievements after meditative exercises: two of them found significant improvements compared to randomly assigned control groups, while the third study based its findings on self-reported improvements by the candidates. Waters

furthermore mentions twelve other peer-reviewed studies that measured the effect of contemplative practices on well-being and social competence of learners; the majority revealed significant, though small, beneficial effects.

The lack of attention of the effect on contemplative thinking practices on cognitive skills is surprising. After all, its underlying principle is the same as that of Buzan's worldwide performed mind mapping technique, or Osborn's famous brainstorming method: it prepares the mind to process information in new ways and approaches the teaching material from a comprehensive, all-encompassing point of view. And not to mention: it worked for Einstein and da Vinci, so why wouldn't it work for other learners as well?

In this paper, I explore the possibilities of contemplative thinking exercises for experiential geography education. By experiential geography education, I mean – following Kolb (1984) – geography teaching whereby “knowledge is created through the transformation of experience”, either during geographic field trips, or during imaginative mental journeys in the classroom. Of course, the use of contemplative thinking exercises could make sense for the teaching of any topic and any subject area. Yet geography education seems to be a very eligible candidate, due to its sensory characteristics. In fact, practically every topic dealt with in geography class can be discovered by musing on its sound, appearance, smell, feeling or taste.

It is important to emphasize that this paper does not contain any empirical data about the usage of contemplative exercises in geography class. In way, this paper is a contemplative exercise itself: it contemplates on what would happen if teachers would use contemplative thinking exercises in geography class. Future research is planned to gather empirical evidence from case studies about the effectiveness of this method.

In the following sections, I start with a description of contemplation and the thinking processes involved. I then continue with an exploration of the possibilities of contemplation in education. The subsequent section focuses on the significance of contemplation in experiential geography education, followed by a section with some practical considerations for geography teachers. An example of a contemplative thinking exercise for experiential geography education can be found in the appendix.

Contemplation

Contemplative practices are as old as humanity. They have their roots in ancient religious and spiritual practices, but are in no way reserved for religious aims solely. Instead, the current growing interest in contemplative practices in western society is often rather secular and thus not connected to any belief system or religious affiliation. Often the current rise of contemplative practices in western society is considered a reaction to the fast moving world in which we live. A world with a great emphasis on efficiency, speed, productivity and the rational, cognitive mind. A world in which every ounce of productivity is squeezed out, every week, day, hour, minute or even second. Contemplative practices start from exactly the opposite approach: slow, without any goal to reach, and without any judgment about being false or true, good or bad.

Though the word ‘contemplation’ or its synonym ‘meditation’, may for some evoke mystic or even trippy associations, it is in fact done by everyone now and then. Webster’s, for instance, defines ‘contemplation’ as ‘the act of thinking deeply about something’ or ‘the act of looking carefully at something’. In a similar way, meditation is defined as ‘to focus one’s thoughts on’ or ‘to reflect on or ponder over’. Daydreaming or reverie could thus to some degree be considered contemplations as well. Indeed, just like during contemplating, daydreaming and reverie cause a change in brain activity from secondary (logical, analytical) process thought to primary (creative and analogical) process thought (Martindale, 1975, p. 91). Still, Cardoso’s (2004), operational parameters of meditation make a clear distinction from daydreaming: meditation uses a specific, clearly defined technique, consisting of muscle relaxation, ‘logic relaxation’, and a concentration focus (‘positive anchor’) or a turning off focus (‘negative anchor’). Often people learn to meditate by instruction, but theoretically it can perfectly be done without the presence of an instructor.

The basic assumption of these musings consists of the idea that all people see the outside world through a filter of internal, often unconscious thoughts. Our worldview is therefore never transparent and unmediated, but rather colored by previous experiences. Contemplative exercises strive after a non-judging, patient, clear, trusting, non-striving, acceptant and non-holding mind. By focusing the attention to a ‘positive anchor’ (object, concept, thoughts, sensory experiences) with a ‘beginners mind’, a more pure view of the situation as it is will unfold (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, pp. 21-30). The naïve, curious and fresh nature of the ‘beginners mind’ thereby serves a turning-off focus (“negative anchor”; Cardoso, 2004), in order to avoid ‘undesirable’ thinking, such as analysis, explanation or judging.

The ‘beginners mind’ is a very essential concept of contemplation, as our existing knowledge often blocks the road to new insights and understanding. A good example of the value of the ‘beginners mind’ is offered by Mednick (1962, p. 224), who describes how, during an introductory psychology course, a first year-student correctly pointed out an essential error in a “well known interpretation of a well known experiment”. While the teacher’s mind was limited by previous experiences and unconscious thoughts, the student’s naïve view brought him to a very creative and valuable insight.

The underlying principle of contemplation (but also of creative associative techniques in its original free-form structure as proposed by Buzan and Osborn) can best be compared with the ‘aha-moments’ everyone now and then has. Typically, those ‘aha-moments’ do occur unexpectedly, while waiting for the bus, or in the middle of the night, or when vacuum cleaning the house. It thus seems as if ‘aha-moments’ cannot be evoked, but occur spontaneously. However, as Hender (2001) argues, theoretically everyone has the ability to be creative – the ‘aha-moments’ – but there are many blocks that may limit these creative ideas. Following this argument, ‘aha-moments’ typically occur when the mind is influenced by stimuli unrelated to the problem involved. The explanation for this is that “unrelated stimuli provide a greater degree of perspective shift with respect to the problem. The greater the perspective shift, the more likely that

‘remote’ elements will be formed into new combinations, and hence produce more creative ideas” (Hender, 2001, p. 2).

In a similar way, both Martindale (1975) and Fink (2009) argue that creative persons are more able to associate ‘broad’ or ‘flat’. Their ability to think flexible, and to shift from abstract and analytical thinking to primary thinking (reverie, dreamlike mentation, meditating), causes the generation of new, original ideas. Medneck (1962) even claims that “among chosen combinations, the most fertile will often be those formed of elements drawn from domains which are far apart” (p.221).

Primary thinking in education

Contemplative thinking exercises form a good addition to other learning techniques, both creative associative *and* linear analytical (see figure 1). The work of psychologist Martindale (1999), for instance, showed that primary, flat associational thinking (and thus creative) patterns particularly take place when a person is in a state of low cortical arousal and high alpha activity. These statuses can be provoked spontaneously through relaxation and day dreaming, but may also be evoked intentionally, by creative associative techniques or contemplation.

Decades of brain research has, however, not given a conclusive scientific understanding of how this ‘broad’ or ‘flat’ thinking works in the brain. Bruer (1997) therefore even explicitly warns against applying neurosciences in the classroom, though he admits that cognitive sciences - the interdisciplinary study of the mind and its processes - has a lot to offer for teachers: “Practical, well-founded examples of putting cognitive science into practice already exist in numerous schools and classrooms. Teachers would be better off looking at these examples than at speculative applications of neuroscience”. One good example of this is the combination of primary (flat, associative) and secondary (rational, linear) thinking. This combination often leads to ‘aha-moments’, and thus profound understanding: “deep understanding is a unity of thought, emotion and sensual knowledge” (Hope 2009, p. 179).

Nevertheless, the educational usage of contemplative thinking exercises is still in its infancy. Other techniques (mind mapping, brainstorming) that appeal to the same brain activity of low cortical arousal and high alpha thinking enjoy wide popularity in schools. With good reason: mind mapping and brainstorming² are welcome supplements to the frequently used linear (text-based) approach that leaves little room for alternative understandings of relationships between concepts. Yet remarkable as it may sound, the

²Originally, the idea behind these creative associative techniques was *not* to steer students in a certain direction, but rather to open the mind for all kinds of relations, without judgment. Unfortunately, the ‘free-form’ structure of mind mapping and brainstorming is nowadays often seen as limitation of these techniques. Critics argue that mind maps are often hard to read for others, miss a clear link between ideas, and therefore fail to build the ‘big picture’ (Eppler, 2006). To overcome these ‘shortcomings’, other techniques, such as concept mapping have been developed (Davies, 2010), that lay more emphasis on the ‘proper’ way ideas relate to each other. However, the names ‘mind mapping’ and ‘concept mapping’ are often used indiscriminately.

disadvantage of these techniques is that they immediately aim at discovering relations. Following Evans (1992), one should first achieve a broad understanding of a problem or topic, before starting to explore linkages and relations. By at first only exposing yourself to a topic or object with an inquisitive, naïve and unjudged mind, the own psychological perceptions can be overcome. Creative associative techniques should therefore come *after* contemplative thinking, in a learning phase in which people want to explore linkages and relations, followed by a phase in which the ratio takes over to analyze and interpret these linkages (see figure 1).

Contemplative thinking in education is thus about observing. Learners observe all the thoughts and sensory experiences that come up in its purest form: without rejection, without judgment, without analysis or explanation, without being false or true, good or bad. Instead of aiming at the reproduction of the 'truth', contemplative thinking exercises only open the road for new perspective shifts that otherwise wouldn't have been discovered.

Also, contemplative thinking exercises are a good manner to solve the entrapment of 'unknown, unloved'. Every teacher knows the situation in which learners automatically lock their mind, when dealing with certain topics or skills. Or, alternatively, the situation in which a learner is only motivated by the fear of getting bad grades ('last year, I did not understand anything of plate tectonics'), and therefore studies extremely hard. In both cases, chances are likely that these learners will only obtain 'surface' understanding out of fear of the unknown. Indeed, research has shown that 'surface' learning often happens when learners are anxious about failures and faults (Hope, 2009, p. 170). The only way to get out of this entrapment of 'unknown, unloved' is getting newly acquainted with the topic, by deep exploration and inquiry without prejudices, former experiences or judgment. Small contemplative thinking exercises in which all senses are activated can help learners to fully embrace a topic, to be fully into a landscape or object by all senses. Simply accepting a landscape or object 'as it is' and without the fear of making 'false' interpretations or 'wrong' relations, forms a good departure point to build upon. This occasional 'first' acquaintance (the 'beginners mind') will diminish stress, as prejudices and former experiences are left out of the picture. Learners will therefore calm down, a prerequisite for deep learning (see Hope, 2009, p. 170). Also, a positive attitude towards a problem can increase one's success to solve it (Evans, 1992).

Critics could argue that contemplative thinking exercises lack two essential criteria of good education: visible learning (Hay, 2008) and cooperative learning (Slavin, 1991). Silently *musings* on a topic, object or landscape does after all not give the teacher any insight into the learner's mind, and will always be done individually and never in cooperation with other learners. This 'disadvantage' however, is at the same time its strength: criticism is often the fatal blow for creativity. As long as no one checks the 'correctness' of the thoughts, the learner will feel completely free to take up whatever alternative thinking path conceivable. Without any limits to creativity.

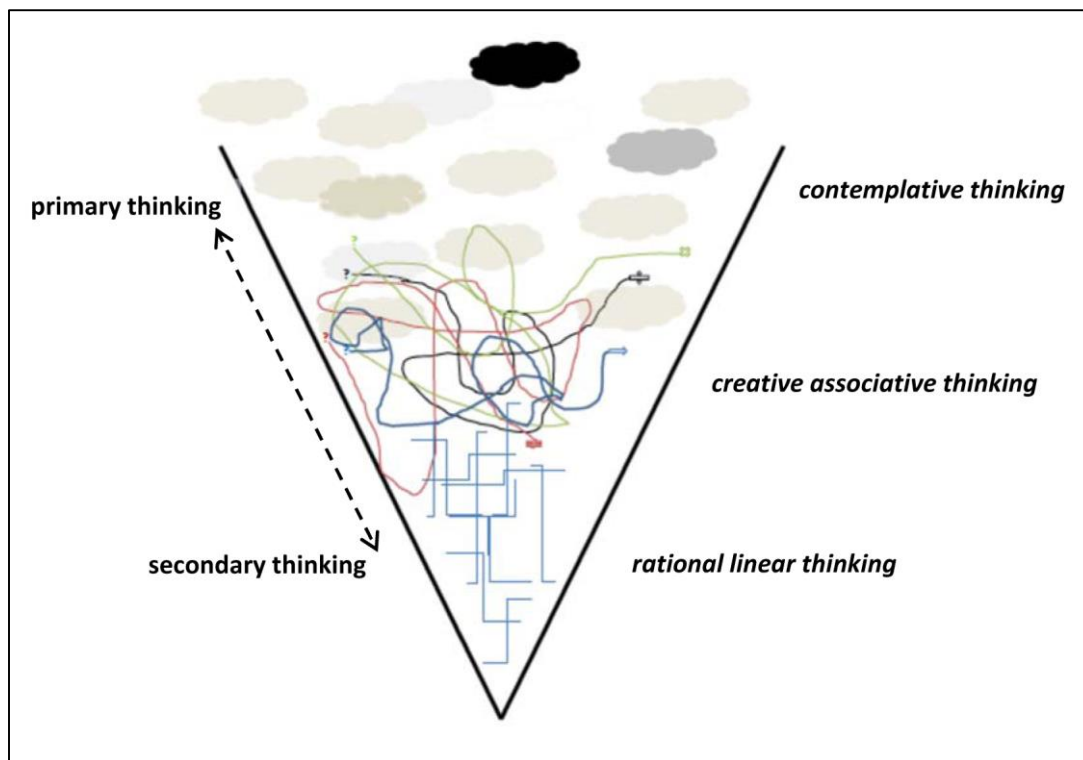


Figure 1.
Different kinds of thinking: contemplative, associational and rational linear thinking

'Slow geography' education

Geography education is most of all a “spectacular discovery of the world around us” (Van der Schee, 2009, p. 7), in which all our five senses are stimulated. Practically every topic dealt with in geography education can be *experienced*, varying from plate tectonics (sniffing at a piece of lava), to societal segregation (observing life circumstance in a ghetto) or climate (feeling the wind blowing from a high pressure area to a low pressure area). As a consequence, field trips are generally considered intrinsically part of good geography education: by means of field trips, learners can experience the outside world and actively engage by looking, smelling, hearing, tasting or feeling. Field trips are therefore supposed to allow learners to explore, understand, analyze, develop, review, prove or refute, value or criticize the theoretical and practical concepts taught in class (Fuller, 2006, p. 19). These trips thereby fit very well into Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory that translates experience through reflection into concepts. Still, even when a field trip is out of reach, reading a text, looking at a picture, listening to a story, or simulating a situation can theoretically serve as substitute ‘experience’ as well (Healey, 2000).

Though I firmly underline the importance of field trips for geography education, whether real or substitute, I am not convinced that experience automatically unveils the ‘real’ world. After all, much of our geography knowledge is in the mind (Massey, 2006,

p. 51), and thus blurs our view on reality. I therefore call for the introduction of phases of ‘slow geography’ teaching: small breaks during which learners silently contemplate with all their senses on a landscape, object or theme, and try to loosen themselves from all the mental luggage they carry with them. Field trips seem to suit perfectly well for this purpose, as learners can expose themselves sensory to the new landscape they find themselves in (see appendix). Yet musing on the sensory sensations of an object in the classroom (stone, piece of lava) will have the same effect. Even imaginary sensory experiences will do, for instance when imagining oneself as a drop of water moving through the environment (when trying to understand the water cycle and water resources). By occasionally slowing down and contemplating on the sensory experiences of a landscape or object from a wholesome, spontaneous, curious, unjudged, perhaps even naïve point of view, learners open their minds to a wide range of broad associations (see Martindale, 1975 and Fink, 2009).

The significance of experience for geography education was already underlined by Sauer (1956, p. 295-296), who stated that geography is “first of all knowledge gained by observation, that one orders by reflection and retrospection the things one has been looking at, and that from what one has experienced by intimate sight comes comparison and synthesis”. Though Sauer did not explicitly mention here the usage of other senses (taste, smell, hear and touch), his message is clear: geography is most and all a “reading of the face of the earth” (p. 290). Still, just like I argued above, Sauer certainly would not have agreed with the way most field trips are organized in contemporary geography education. As most field trips have nowadays ready-made educational goals, there is little room left for real experience. The fact that learners should afterwards control prescribed skills, know certain facts and understand certain principles, means that we let them ‘discover’ what is already known.

Instead of reproducing pre-described knowledge in a restricted period of time, Sauer (1956) strongly advocated the need for “*slow* [my italics] accumulation of knowledge, experience and judgment”. He argued that only a quiet and alert mind is able to observe each detail and composition, which is a prerequisite for the real gathering of wisdom. Sauer’s comparison with the way of looking of ‘primitive’ tribes is very telling: for them, an observing mind means the avoidance of danger or getting lost, for our learners it means understanding the real nature of things, without the load of prejudices and former knowledge we all carry with us.

The idea that experience – either during geographic field trips or in the class room – rather reproduces knowledge instead of creating new insights, is also brought forward by Nairn (2005). Nairn convincingly argues that learner’s ‘direct’ experiences during field trips hardly contest their existing mental ideas. Instead, these ‘direct’ experiences often rather reproduce the learner’s stereotypes or the ideological system they belong to. Even self-reflection does – according to Nairn – not automatically result in a different attitude. Hope (2009) adds to this that people differ in their ability to be ‘open’, and thus to experience the world from different points of view: some people are more willing to get rid of prejudices and former experiences, while others have more difficulty to see the world from a different perspective.

Nairn's (2005) assumption that the 'real' world is never transparent and unmediated can be explained by means of the Object Relational Theory. This theory particularly emphasizes the mental representations we all have in our minds. These mental representations are often that powerful, that being in the 'real' world (e.g. during geographical fieldwork) most often rather confirms our existing views, instead of throwing a new light on it (see Melano Flanagan, 2011 for a more extensive explanation of the Object Relational Theory). This theory thereby at least partially goes counter to Kolb's experiential learning cycle, as this cycle presumes that phases of active experimentation and concrete experience, almost automatically leads – after a phase of reflective observation – to abstract conceptualization (Healey, 2000). Finding 'new' insights during geographical field trips is therefore rather unlikely, as these phases of active experimentation and concrete experiences are most often accompanied by previous experiences, knowledge and unconscious thoughts. The only way to get out of this entrapment is by adopting a 'beginners mind' that quiets "the habitual chatter of the mind to cultivate a capacity for deepened awareness, concentration, and insight" (Hart, 2004, p. 29). After all, "it is not individuals who have experiences, but subjects who are constituted through experiences" (Scott, quoted in Nairn, 2007, p. 295).

Contemplative exercises in geography class

Dealing with the world we live in, geography education appeals to all our five senses. Yet the problem is that we let our learners often only use these senses partially: we let them see without really seeing, we let them hear without really hearing, we let them smell without really smelling, we let them taste without really tasting, or we let them touch without really touching. As long as prejudices, former experiences and habitual thought routines blur our learner's vision, we cannot expect them to get a deep understanding of our world, let alone that they will gain new geographical insight.

Contemplative thinking exercises use these sensory experiences in a manner that is not accompanied by interpretation or classification. Instead, learners are invited to experience a landscape, object, or theme with a non-judging, patient, clear, trusting, non-striving, acceptant and non-holding mind. Contemplative thinking exercises thereby interrupt fast habitual thought routines, deepen awareness (Hart, 2004, p. 29) and let learners 'slow down' for a while.

Integrating contemplative thinking exercises in experiential geography education is not complicated. It does neither require turning existing lesson series upside down, nor does it involve a teacher skill that is hard to learn. The only requisites are patience, some time, and a ready-made text for the teacher to read aloud (see appendix). By occasionally slowing down learners will get used to the contemplation technique. Experiences in secondary schools have showed that learners generally receive these exercises positively, and that their enthusiasm increases rapidly after a few sessions (Luvaas-Briggs, 1984; Erricker, 2001).

Contemplative thinking exercises should never be done in isolation: following Martindale (1975), the generation of new ideas most often happens during shifts from

secondary (abstract and analytical) thinking to primary (associative) thinking (see also figure 1). The variation of alternating sessions of primary thinking through contemplation and secondary thinking through analysis will make a welcome change. Contemplative thinking exercises can therefore be done in every stage of a lesson series: right at the beginning, to get acquainted with a new topic, but also in the middle or at the end of a series to re-approach an already familiar topic with the naïve, unknown attitude of a beginner.

Contemplative thinking exercises are suitable for all learners, not only for those having trouble understanding a geographical topic, but also for those learners who are theoretically capable of developing new insights and new geographical theories. Of course, not all learners are that highly-gifted, but as long as we only let learners ‘discover’ what is already known – as is now often the case during experiential geography education – we do not use the full cognitive potential of our learners.

To take advantage of their full cognitive potential, we should occasionally let the learners think free: without judgment about being true or false, bad or good. Real progress is only accomplished by free thinking: without free thinking, we would still teach our learners – and let them ‘discover’ - that the world is flat. Indeed, Walter Christaller – the designer of the ‘central place theory’ – did not achieve his knowledge by repeating and combining what is already known. Instead, his famous ‘central place theory’ was gained by free, slow thinking:

“Public opinion says that creative scientific ideas are born on a desk. That does not have to be right. Mine were born walking, in nature”³ (Christaller, 1968).

Down to earth

I started this paper by referring to Einstein’s and da Vinci’s *muses*. By deep thinking exercises, both Einstein and da Vinci gained a great part of their knowledge and insight. Why not trying the same technique for our learners in geography class? The problem is: there is not much known yet about the cognitive and affective effects of contemplative thinking exercises on learning processes. Admittedly, there is a multitude on research on the effects of contemplation on wellbeing and stress management. Yet little research has been done on the effects on learning, let alone on the usability of these techniques in geography education.

In this paper, I have argued that it sounds reasonable that these exercises will be effective in education, more specifically in geography education. After all, contemplation causes a change in brain activity from secondary (logical) to primary (creative) processes, which is a requirement for ‘aha-moments’. I therefore call for future research that should first focus on gathering qualitative empirical data by means of case studies: how do learners in geography class experience these exercises? How does it affect their motivation to go deeply into a subject of geography? How does it

³Es herrscht allgemein die Meinung vor, die schöpferische wissenschaftliche Arbeit werde am Schreibtisch geboren. Das muß nicht sein. Die meine ist im Wandern, in der Natur geboren worden.”

affect the cognitive understanding of the geographical topic dealt with? Which phases of geography education are particularly suitable for these kind of thinking exercises? And not to forget: how do geography teachers experience leading these exercises?

Of course, let's get down to earth: most of our learners are not as genial as Einstein and da Vinci. But is that a reason to keep them away from flat associational thinking patterns that can lead to surprising aha-moments? Still not convinced? Then, go outside, sit down on a bench in the park, put both feet steady on the ground, take an upright position, take a few deep breaths, and focus one by one on the sensory sensations that you experience.

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Appendix

Example of contemplative thinking exercise for secondary geography education (partially based on Hart 2004, p. 35-36). Duration: approximately 10 minutes

This contemplative thinking exercise is particularly suitable for secondary geography education. It can be performed in any landscape (on a beach, in the woods, in the middle of a big city, etc.). Just let your students sit down on a bench or tree-trunk, or on the floor in tailor's posture. Tell them that you are going to read a relaxation text, and that they are not supposed to talk in between. Read the following text aloud, in a very slow pace. Pause your speaking regularly.

Please, take an upright position and try to keep this position during the rest of the exercise (PAUSE). Try to move as little as possible, unless I tell you differently. If you feel something itching or hurting, then just observe this sensation, but try not to do anything about it.

Close your eyes if you feel comfortable doing so. Just let go and allow yourself to be silent and not to do anything for about ten minutes (PAUSE). Now, take a few deep, slow breaths: inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth (PAUSE). Keep focusing on your breathing, but allow it now to flow in and out without effort (PAUSE). If you find yourself thinking, distracted, working on a problem, don't fight it, don't get stuck in it. Just allow yourself and all your sensations to be just like they are, and redirect your awareness back to your breath, and to non-doing (PAUSE).

Now keep your eyes closed and tune into the landscape where you find yourself in right now (PAUSE). Try to concentrate on the sounds of the landscape. Gently open yourself to the sounds of the landscape, without the need to change anything or to classify it. Just meet all the sounds of the landscape gently, as if you are a radio receiving radio waves (PAUSE). Do not search for sounds. Just let them come and go (PAUSE).

Now, let go all the sounds you hear, and focus on the smells of the landscape. Allow yourself to welcome all the smells around you. Do not classify the smells as nasty or nice; just smell. If you don't smell anything, don't bother. Then, simply observe that you don't smell anything (PAUSE).

Now, let go all the smells of the landscape, and focus your attention to your taste. Open your mouth a little bit and let the taste of the landscape enter your tongue. If you don't taste anything, then simply observe not tasting (PAUSE).

Now, let go the taste of the landscape, and concentrate on what the landscape feels like on your skin (PAUSE). Perhaps you feel the wind blowing or rain drops on your

nose, or the sun shining on your skin. Or perhaps you only feel your clothing. Everything is all right. Just feel what the landscape feels like, without classifying it or trying to figure it out (PAUSE).

Now, let go the way the landscape feels, and turn your attention to your sight. Open your eyes and look at what appears in front of your eyes. Do not search for anything, or classify it as nice, or ugly; just look carefully (PAUSE). Now, gently turn your head around and observe the landscape around you in an inquisitive way. Take your time in observing every detail around you, but do not categorize it. Just look.

Now, gently come back. Stretch your muscles if you feel like doing so (PAUSE). Take your time. You may notice the sensations of a clearer mind. As you move through your day, you can take a breath and find that sensation again.

Biographical statements

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