

## Different approaches of geography teachers to how and why they teach economic geography

[Extract from John Morgan (2006) 'Geography – a dynamic subject' in *Secondary Geography Handbook*, Sheffield: GA]

'Bob was a geography teacher who was trained in the 1970s, a time when positivistic approaches were being introduced into school geography. He thinks that students should be introduced to important spatial concepts such as 'least cost location' and 'accessibility'. Bob believes that economic geography is all about introducing students to the general principles of location and the factors that explain why industries locate in particular places, and how changes in the location of industry can be explained by geographical factors.

Sara agrees with Bob that it is important that students understand the factors that explain the patterns of economic activity. However, she is not convinced that the various 'models' provide realistic explanations. In her teaching of economic geography Sara tends to stress the ways in which individuals make decisions based on less than perfect knowledge. Sara is also concerned that some approaches in economic geography tend to have a 'mechanistic' view of economic decision making, and attempts to get students to think about the consequences of changing patterns of economic activity. She asks the question of 'who gets what, where and why? And tries to identify the impacts of changing patterns of economic activity.

John studied geography in the late 1980s where he encountered some of the ideas of 'radical' geographers such as David Harvey and Doreen Massey. He was also influenced by his own experience of economic change, as he grew up in a mining town which was affected by the miners' strike of 1984-5. John considers that much of the explanation offered in geography textbooks prevents students from understanding the real causes of economic change – the clash between capital and labour. In his teaching, John tried to get students to understand the historical context in which work takes place.

Like John, Mary studied geography in the 1980s. She was particularly influenced by the work of feminist geographers who argued that geography tended to ignore the experience of half the world's population – women. In teaching about economic geography Mary is concerned to question the distinction between paid and unpaid 'work' and provide studies of economic activities that are dominated by female labour.

Paulo is a recent graduate who has been influenced by some of the ideas in the new economic geography influenced by post-structural theory. In particular he is concerned that the types of representations of the economy found in school geography tend to offer a rather simple and 'cleaned up' version of economic reality. This has the effect of marginalising other accounts of

economic life. In his teaching Paulo tries to offer students a set of different representations of economic life, stressing the many ways in which people make a living. For instance, he introduces 'case studies' of local economic trading systems and 'alternative' lifestyles based on co-operation.

Ayeesha finds that much of the economic geography she has taught in schools so far tends to focus on industries and activities far removed from the experiences of the students she teaches. There is also a focus on the patterns and processes of production. More recently Ayeesha has tried to refocus her teaching on the act of consumption (what people buy, where and why) and then trace back the links between the consumers and producers. In doing so, she finds that she spends time teaching about patterns of retailing and advertising and 'trying to help students to consider their consumption choices.'