

# WHERE IS RESEARCH ON GEOGRAPHY TEACHING IN BRAZIL HEADING TO? TAKING A LOOK AT ITS ELEMENTS AND STATUS IN THE FIELD

PARA ONDE ESTÃO INDO AS INVESTIGAÇÕES SOBRE ENSINO  
DE GEOGRAFIA NO BRASIL? UM OLHAR SOBRE ELEMENTOS DA  
PESQUISA E DO LUGAR QUE ELA OCUPA NESSE CAMPO

¿PARA DÓNDE ESTÁN LLENDO LAS INVESTIGACIONES  
SOBRE LA ENSEÑANZA DE GEOGRAFÍA EN BRASIL? UNA  
MIRADA SOBRE LOS ELEMENTOS DE LA INVESTIGACIÓN  
Y DEL LUGAR QUE ELLA OCUPA EN ESE CAMPO

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## Abstract

This paper presents a discussion grounded mainly on results from an exploratory study on the state of the art of research on Geography teaching in Brazil. The study's main source of data was a survey on theses and dissertations submitted to Brazilian postgraduate Geography programs from 2000 to 2015. Results confirm that the field of Geography teaching has advanced significantly in the last two decades and has consolidated itself in research.

Keywords: Geography teaching, research, postgraduate Geography programs.

## Resumo

O texto apresenta reflexões com base, sobretudo, em resultados de um estudo exploratório sobre o estado da arte da pesquisa sobre ensino no Brasil. Tal estudo teve como fonte principal de dados um levantamento de Teses e Dissertações nos Programas de Pós-Graduação em Geografia no Brasil. Para tanto, considerou-se o período de 2000 a 2015. Os resultados do estudo confirmam indicações de que essa área tem tido nas duas últimas décadas avanços significativos e consolidação como campo investigativo.

Palavras-chave: Ensino de Geografia, pesquisa, pós-graduação em Geografia.

## Resumen

El texto presenta reflexiones basadas, principalmente, en los resultados de un estudio exploratorio a respecto del estado actual de la investigación sobre la enseñanza en Brasil. Ese estudio tuvo como principal fuente de datos un análisis de las Tesis y disertaciones de los programas de Posgrado en Geografía en Brasil. Para eso, se consideró el período de 2000 a 2015. Los resultados del estudio confirman indicaciones de que el área ha tenido, en las dos últimas décadas, avances significativos y consolidación como campo investigativo.

Palabras-clave: Enseñanza de Geografía, investigación, posgrado en Geografía.

## Introduction

In events relating to Geography, particularly to Geography teaching in Brazil, such as Enpeg and Forum Nepeg (teacher training)<sup>1</sup>, it has

often been declared that research in this field has progressed and gained legitimacy within the academy. Certain questions must then be asked: has this research field in fact progressed both quantitatively and qualitatively? What kind of progress is it? What sort of investigation has been carried out within this field? Is it possible to assess the academic production available? Have previous studies already given a clear picture of this production? Further still, what sort of contributions can such an assessment offer (or has offered) for the emergence of new studies and for Geography teaching practice?

To introduce and elaborate on some answers to these questions, this paper offers a panorama on Geography teaching in Brazil in the last thirty years, i.e. since the 1980s. More specifically, the following sections present lines of research that have been popular for the past 15 years based on a review of titles, abstracts, and keywords from theses and dissertations of Brazilian postgraduate programs. Such a review aimed to map major studies with regard to research topics, analytical categories, and predominant research methodologies. In addition to this objectively gathered and systematized source of data, this article also takes into account my own experience and academic production in Geography as well as similar analyses carried out by colleagues.

### **Pertinence and relevance of studies from a state-of-the-art perspective**

Despite being aware of the limitations imposed on studies which aim to outline the state of the art of a given field of knowledge based solely on official and publicized academic work, hence leaving out different contexts, institutional relations, and debates held in classrooms or in academic events, I believe that the effort of producing such studies is still relevant. Such a scope provides diagnoses which identify the trajectories of particular lines of research and are necessary both in assessing the history of the academic production and in pointing out ways towards its development. These diagnoses are important to the group of researchers in this particular line of work, for they enable us to perceive and publicize what is already under way and what still remains to be done; they are also useful to each individual researcher because they expose certain demands for advancing the debate, and may assist him/her in identifying the relevance of his/her own research for the field and for society.

Such studies gravitate around the writing of inventories capable of identifying trends, emphases, and methodological and theoretical choices. However, the review grounding the discussions in the present article<sup>2</sup> is restricted to the analysis of titles, abstracts, and keywords found in theses and dissertations produced within a given period, in an attempt to uncover themes, clear theoretical choices, and stated objectives and methodological procedures. Analysing discourses within the production in question evokes the work by Bakhtin (1992), i.e. it conforms a critical reading that involves both what is written and the ability to perceive the surrounding context of the text. Therefore, the reader is able to interpret what is written and what is not. Through the analysis of the material available in this sort of exploratory research, my aim is to present a specific understanding of the knowledge that has accumulated in the field of Geography teaching, as well as its theoretical/methodological perspectives and limits.

In studies involving systematization, such as this one, the aim to consolidate a scientific field cannot be overlooked because these studies bring forth that field's main concerns, supporting frameworks, trends, and topics, in addition to providing indicators of the historical evolution of its academic production, of the leading institutions and the geographical distribution of that production, as well as the educational levels that have been given greater attention by researchers. Hence, studies such as this often attempt to provide an understanding of the knowledge accumulated in a given field within a particular time and space. According to Romanowski and Ens (2006, p. 38-39, my translation)<sup>3</sup>:

The interest on research studies that address the “state of the art” derives from their broadness of scope, which points to paths that have been taken and to aspects that have been investigated instead of others. Producing these reviews makes it possible to contribute to the organization and analysis required in the definition of a research field or area, besides showing possible contributions of research to social ruptures. Analysing an investigative field is crucial in these times of intense changes associated with constant advances in science and technology.

In order for this article to accomplish these goals, in dealing specifically with research on Geography teaching, it requires more than simply identifying the field's academic production; it seeks to analyse this

production despite the limited material (basically abstracts and keywords from theses and dissertations), categorizing it, revealing its approaches and perspectives as well as summarizing its social and academic relevance. This objective is in tune with researchers' movements at various levels, e.g. those organized by research groups of didactics in Geography from across Brazil; by Latin American researchers in REDLADGEO<sup>4</sup> colloquiums; by researchers from Spain and Portugal, whose concerns have been presented and debated, for instance, in the latest *Geocrítica*<sup>5</sup> conference; and by the Commission on Geographical Education of the International Geographical Union – IGU<sup>6</sup>, which highlights the role played by Geography teaching in understanding today's world and its complexities, as well as the research demands such a role involves.

This debate cannot move forward without considering the current social and historical context, particularly the educational programs and policies which stem from movements like the ones mentioned above. In fact, developments in studies on Geography teaching are closely linked to social demands brought to the fore in different periods and contexts, and these demands often influence the implementation of public programs and policies. This is the case, for instance, of the Brazilian *Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais*, part of the country's educational policy from the 1990s which aimed to provide nationwide curriculum guidance to all school levels and subjects; and also of the *Diretrizes para a Formação de Professores* drafted in the 2000s, which offered guidance and set standards for structuring teacher training courses. Policies such as these and others that have been more recently drafted and implemented affect Geography teaching practices in direct or indirect ways and this, in turn, presses an agenda for discussion and research which interferes with the field's lines of investigation. Therefore, it is important to point out that a broader understanding of themes and even of research methodologies calls for the analysis of this social and historical scenario, even though such an analysis is not explicitly outlined in the present article.

### **Geography Teaching: a discussion on this research object within the 1980s' revival movement and its effects**

Within my own intellectual production, I have sought to discuss and present my understanding of the distinction and relationship between

the “geographies” exercised by society. They are as follows: 1 – daily geography, i.e. spatial knowledge that is produced and applied by people when dealing with everyday life – it contains elements from common sense which are also made up of scientific knowledge; 2 – academic geography, i.e. knowledge produced by research in geographical science and systematized for dissemination within the community of geographers (including those in initial training); 3 – school geography, which is produced, organized, and practised in schools. While they possess specific, distinct structures, their main reference is the geographical science.

Research on Geography teaching can be found at the borders and interfaces between these geographies because it takes into account what has been produced within the scientific community or in the practices of teacher training, of Geography teaching at elementary school level, of daily life. As for “Brazilian geographies”, both academic and school-based, they have parallel histories, especially as far as their early twentieth-century institutionalization is concerned. Since then, they have converged and influenced one another, albeit maintaining their identities and specificities.<sup>7</sup> Over this trajectory, the 1980s is often appointed as the pinnacle of the period in which the so-called “Geography revival movement” (both academic and school-based) took place in Brazil. This movement was initially characterized by the fight for dominance of two major groups: one defending “conventional” Geography, whose structure had remained the same since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the other representing a new Geography, which strove to replace the traditional Geography and proclaimed itself “critical” based mainly on a Marxist orientation<sup>8</sup>.

In the context of this movement, various analyses and proposals were devised to denounce the official, utilitarian, and ideological nature of the geographical science, as well as to warn against its pretense neutrality and “innocence”, features which were strongly present in the Geography classroom. As a result, to propose new ways of working with Geography, efforts were made to further the understanding of space, its historicity and dialectical relationship with society.

This “revival movement” during the 1980s, therefore, also focused on Geography teaching, assigning greater social meaning to it. The movement put into question Geography’s conventional structure, which was dichotomic and fragmented (made up of “separate parts”) in that it

approached natural phenomena, on the one hand, and human phenomena, on the other. As Moreira (1987) warns, traditional geographical discourse had a standard structure which needed overcoming; it was represented as N-H-E, i.e. school-based geographical contents were approached in a fragmented way, grouped under the broad axis of nature, humankind, and economy. It became necessary, thus, to create a new structure whose central axis was space and the social contradictions it conveyed, a structure guided by the cause-and-effect analysis of the location of certain spatial structures.

During this period, debates on what Geography stood for in schools and what would be necessary and important to teach were mostly spearheaded by leading geographers within the revival movement, who were involved in discussing the entire discourse and practice of Geography as well as its epistemological and political matrices, but who were not necessarily researchers on teaching. This was the case of Ruy Moreira, Carlos Valter Porto Gonçalves, Ariovaldo Umbelino de Oliveira, and José Willian Vesentini.

Moreover, since the movement's earliest formulations, there were different interpretations on the notion of critical Geography or even critical geographies, despite the predominance of the Marxist discourse. However, this diversity was further expressed and consolidated during the 1990s, resulting in the acknowledgement of a plural and wide-ranging Geography, both in its themes and theoretical/methodological approaches.

During the 1990s, society underwent a major referential crisis with the downfall of the so-called political and economic blocs from the first and second worlds, followed by the gradual collapse of socialist experiences in several countries; this process peaked with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. For the scientific and educational scenario, the context of this crisis led to the expansion and consolidation of different interpretative reference models of reality; the latter became more complex than the analytical macromodels which stemmed from "metanarratives." Hence it became possible to include in the academic scenario postmodern and post-structuralist reflections and proposals for interpreting reality.

The legitimation of new theoretical and methodological reference models in Geography was a major feature of this period, and new guidelines

for Geography teaching were also gradually established. Alternative proposals that are more directly and clearly linked to pedagogical and didactic orientations began to define different methods for teaching Geography. These new guidelines helped reaffirm Geography's relevant role in people's education, at the same time acknowledging that changes related to the spatial daily life of a globalized, urban, informational, and technological society require an interpretation of space that includes subjectivity, everyday life, multiscalarity, communication, and the various languages of today's world. During this period, thanks to the opening of institutional spaces for teaching research – observed mainly in theses and dissertations submitted to postgraduate Geography programs –, it became possible to more systematically expose the fragile echoes of Geography's revival movement (which could alternatively be called the movement of critical geographies) within teaching practices. This is confirmed by Zanatta (2010, p. 303, my translation):

It is also clear that the real status of Geography teaching in the 1990s shows that the proposals which addressed the transforming role of Critical Geography were modest and limited. On the other hand, that decade witnessed a considerable growth in the number of geographers involved with teacher training who began to take part in research on Geography teaching, clearly interested in turning to Pedagogy and Didactics in order to find the necessary resources to improve Geography teacher training.

In short, research at teaching, undergraduate, and postgraduate levels, as well as involving elementary education teachers, consolidated its position during the 1990s and 2000s. It gained academic space, theoretical depth, and thematic expansion. It began to focus on a wide range of themes and to propose certain approaches, such as those described in the following section.

### **Recent research trends in Geography teaching: what Brazilian postgraduate studies have to say**

In previous studies (Cavalcanti, 2010a, 2010b), motivated by the need to identify the most recurrent research proposals in the field of Geography teaching, all of which had greater resonance in teaching practices as evidenced by published works, I was able to systematize

certain methodological guidelines for Geography teaching: 1– Place as a crucial concept in approaching geographical contents; 2– Formation of geographical concepts that instrumentalize spatial thinking; 3– Development of abilities of reading and mapping reality through graphical and cartographical language; 4– Development of the ability to use “alternative” languages (music, poetry, cinema, literature, electronic games, and other digital products) in geographical analyses; 5– Critical approach to physico-natural issues (including environmental issues).

Based on the methodological proposals identified and on practical experience, it is safe to say that advances in Geography teaching comprehension and practices have, in fact, occurred. However, school routine has also revealed conventional practices that are still distant from the proposals brought forth by academic research. These proposals result from a systematic investment on Geography teaching research which has become more visible since the 1990s and consolidated its position in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, according to a review conducted by Cavalcanti, Callai, and Castellar (2012). Their review, covering theses, dissertations, and journals produced between 2000 and 2009, confirmed the expansion of research and publication in the field of Geography teaching.

This investment on Geography teaching research has been particularly intense in postgraduate programs, both in Geography and Education. In fact, geographical investigations have been generally conducted in association with postgraduate Geography programs. Programs’ organization, distribution, and lines of research have been the focus of several researchers<sup>9</sup> seeking to understand the trajectory of research on Geography. Commonly cited features include programs’ evident concentration in Brazil’s Southeast and South regions (linked to these regions’ economic and productive concentration), at least up to the 1990s, as well as their gradual expansion in the last two decades, combined with a tendency towards interiorization and a more equitable distribution nationwide.

Therefore, despite the fact that Geography teaching research is not restricted to the postgraduate scope, I believe that investigating lines of research and theses and dissertations on Geography teaching opens up important paths for theoretical reflections and for new proposals for Geography teaching in Brazil. Lencioni (2013) analyses terminological changes in lines of research from postgraduate Geography programs, e.g.



the use of “environment” instead of “nature”, “geoprocessing” instead of “cartography”, and “management” instead of “planning.” More than an inclination for passing trends, these changes represent the research context and theoretical and methodological choices available.

Regarding specifically the context of teaching research carried out in Brazilian postgraduate Geography programs, it follows the field’s general movements: little quantitative demonstration during the 1970s and 1980s followed by a significant expansion in the next two decades, particularly in Southeast Brazil, despite a tendency towards a more equitable distribution nationwide. As stated by Pinheiro (2005, p. 53, my translation), data from his study confirms “a concentration of research on Geography teaching in the Southeast region, accounting for approximately 68% of the total, half of which is carried out in universities from São Paulo state”<sup>10</sup>. Pinheiro (2005) highlights the wide range of research topics on Geography teaching found in postgraduate programs throughout Brazil. He identified 10 thematic focus areas, in order of quantitative relevance: 1– teaching and educational practice; 2– spatial representations; 3– environmental education; 4– teacher training; 5– student traits; 6– schoolbooks; 7– curricula and programs; 8– concept formation; 9– content/method; 10– history of Geography.

Thematic diversity within Geography teaching research has also been categorized by Callai, Castellar, and Cavalcanti (2012). The categories viewed as representative of research topics in the studies surveyed are as follows: 1– concept formation; 2– teaching in varied contexts; 3– history of school Geography; 4– methodologies; 5– different languages; 6– teacher training, knowledge, and practices; 7– curricula and public policies; 8– schoolbooks.

The increase in the number of postgraduate Geography programs and the expanding institutionalization of lines of research on Geography teaching<sup>11</sup> conform a visible trend, although one that has apparently been little explored. This is pointed out by Lencioni (2013, p. 17, my translation): “As for Geography teaching, despite figuring among programs’ lines of research, its presence is still modest.”

To broaden the investigative scope and considering exclusively postgraduate Geography programs, the data gathered by the NUCEF group enabled me to verify that of the 62 programs registered in 2015, 17 have specific lines of research on Geography teaching, as is shown in Table 1:

Table 1 - Lines of research on Geography teaching in Brazilian postgraduate Geography programs – 2010-2015

Program number	Year of foundation	Master's/ Doctorate	Number of lines of research	Lines of research on teaching	Number of studies on teaching M D T
11	1995/2006	M/D	3	Geography Teaching/Learning	32 - 8 40
14	1998/2003	M/D	3	Geography Teaching, Methods and Techniques	10 - 0 10
16	2013	M	2	Space, Teaching and Representation	0 - 0 00
22	2004	M/D	3	Geography Education	23 - 0 23
23	1976/2004	M/D	4	Education, Culture, Politics and Innovation in Contemporary Space Production	02 - 0 02
24	2011	M	2	Geography Teaching	12 - 0 12
30	2006	M	3	Geography Education and Teaching	06 - 0 06
36	2013	M	3	Geography Teaching	03 - 0 03
41	1999/2004	M/D	3	Geography Teaching	53-11 64
43	2012	M	2	Geography Teaching	04 - 0 04
45	1990/2001	M/D	5	Core unit: Geography in Educational Processes	00 - 0 00
47	2013	M	3	Education, Health and Culture	00 - 0 00
51	1976/1983	M/D	5	Geography, Teaching and School Cartography	18 -17 35
53	1970/1946	M/D	7	Geografia, Education and Teaching	30- 20 50
57	2015	M	3	Formative Processes, Practices and Teaching in Geography	00 - 0 00
58	2015	M	3	School Geography: Teacher Training and Geography Education	00 - 0 00
62	2014	Prof. M	2	Methodology in Geography Teaching Geography Knowledge in Schools	00 - 0 00
Total in teaching area	-	-	-	17	245

M: master's degree

D: doctorate degree

Prof. M: professional masters' degree

T: total

Source: Elaborated by the author.

The programs' spatial distribution is shown in the map below:

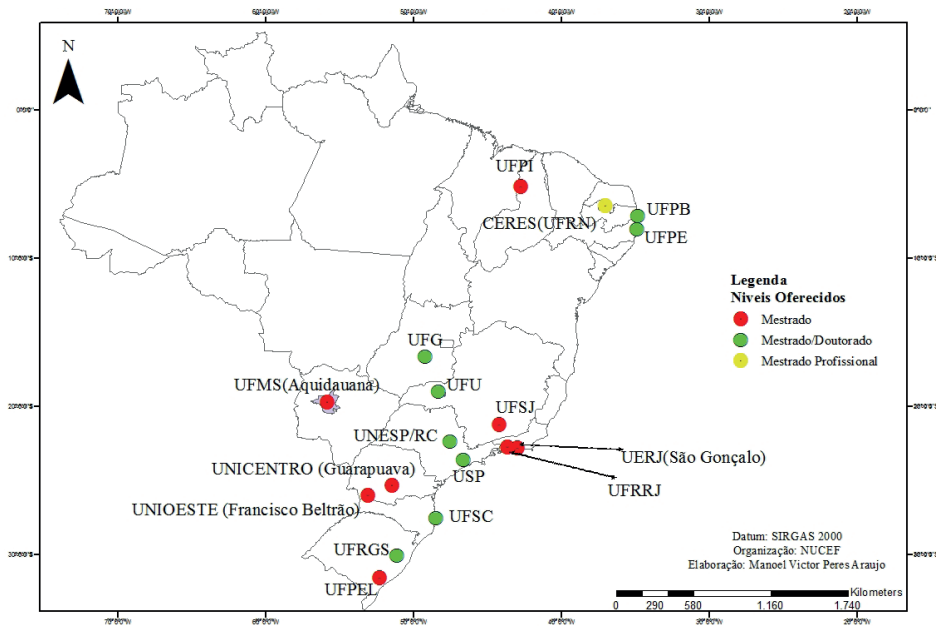


Figure 1 - Spatial distribution of lines of research on Geography teaching in postgraduate programs, Brazil – 2015.

Source: Elaborated by Manoel Victor Araújo.

These 17 programs, with specific lines of research on Geography teaching, make up a diversified group: nine of them offer master's and PhD degrees (the remainder offer only masters degrees) and eight are older and consolidated courses, having been established before 2010. Within this group, one of the programs offers a professional master's degree on Geography teaching, as well as two lines of research directly linked to teaching. Concerning the terminology used for lines of research, the term "Geography Teaching" predominates; the broader term "Geography Education" is often used; moreover, some lines of research include varied terms like "health", evidence of the attempt to cover different trends for research and its possible interfaces.

To outline an up-to-date profile of research that has been carried out in the field, therefore contributing to uphold previous studies, I analyzed abstracts and keywords<sup>12</sup> from 430 essays, comprising 338 dissertations and 92 theses, submitted to 62 postgraduate Geography programs from 2000 to 2015. I applied the same categorization as that used by Callai, Castelar, and Cavalcanti (2012), but with minor adjustments to better fit the topics addressed by the essays. This body of works, categorized by thematic focus areas, is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 - Thematic focus areas in theses and dissertations on Geography teaching (Brazil, 2000-2015)

Thematic focus	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		N/I
	M	D	M	D	M	D	M	D	M	D	M	D	M	D	M	D	
Number	69	07	31	02	12	04	67	19	24	04	77	37	28	10	22	04	13
%	6,04	1,62	7,20	0,46	2,79	0,93	15,48	4,41	5,58	0,93	17,90	8,60	6,27	2,32	5,11	0,93	3,02
Total	17,66		7,66		3,72		19,89		6,41		26,50		8,59		5,04		3,02

M: masters degree

D: doctorate degree

N/I: not identified

Source: Elaborated by the author.

In categorizing these essays, I took into account their titles, abstracts, and keywords, as well as researchers' choices regarding the dominant thematic focus. I was conscious of the possibility that different choices could have been made, i.e. it is often possible to refer an essay to one or more thematic focus.

Of the eight thematic focus areas, three grouped a higher number of essays: thematic focus 1 – Concept formation, with 76 studies at master's and doctorate levels (17,66% of total); 4 – Methodologies, with 86 studies (19,89% of total); 6 – teacher training, knowledge, and practices, with 114 studies (26,50% of total).

Concept formation (thematic focus 1), which included essays on student learning in general, was identified in 17,66% of works in the database. They address concepts in general or one of the broader concepts, e.g. place, territory, landscape, and environment, or even specific concepts in geographical analysis, e.g. culture, *cerrado*, countryside, city, geopolitics, relief, and migration.

Regarding the topics addressed by studies within thematic focus 4, methodologies, the most prominent are those on the use of information and communication technologies, particularly geotechnologies; on the use of varied languages, e.g. music and comic strips; on cartographic literacy (digital and tactile), especially mental maps; on the potential of fieldwork/environmental studies for geographical learning.

As for the studies concerning teacher training, knowledge, and practices (thematic focus 6), the most prominent are those that analyse teacher initial training and training stages, although some also focus on continuing education. There is also a significant number of studies on teacher practices and specific contents.

Regarding studies which address Geography teaching in various contexts (thematic focus 3), the most prominent are those concerning rural education, education in specific communities (indigenous and *quilombola* groups), and schools for children with visual or hearing impairment. The challenge facing these studies is to understand and/or propose teaching practices that respect the specificities of individuals involved and enable these specificities to be respected and used in favour of students' geographical learning.

Studies on schoolbooks (thematic focus 8) address their historical background, the ways in which they are used in everyday classes, or even the way they approach specific contents, e.g. nature, place, and migration. Throughout these studies as well as in others which used schoolbooks as a supplementary analytical object, there is a clear notion that they represent a major resource for Geography teaching in view of their constant use in school activities and must, therefore, be under constant analysis on the part of teachers and researchers.

The least common thematic focuses were 3 (history of school Geography) and 7 (curricula and public policies). This finding carries with it some concern: why are there few studies addressing these topics? Are they not relevant? Are they regarded as specific objects from other fields of knowledge (history of geographical thinking and educational policies and school curriculum, respectively)? Could there be a link between this finding and theoretical vulnerabilities in the field of Geography teaching? Regardless of actual answers to these questions, I believe that for the scope of this article it is important to point out these possible gaps in the line of research under analysis in order to bring to the fore demands for future research.

Concerning the keywords which accompany the 430 abstracts, I decided to exclude those that were very generic and of little use for identifying research trends, e.g. “teaching”, “Geography teaching”, “school Geography”, “education”, “geographic education”, as well as those that were too specific and referred to the place where the study was carried out, to a particular school, topic or research methodology. The aim of this analysis was to broaden understanding of the main concerns surrounding this research field, hence I sought to identify words which could relate to the thematic focuses proposed. The survey produced 858 words, which were grouped according to their frequency, firstly in terms of their literal repetition and secondly in terms of approximation with correlated meanings. The resulting groups are listed in Table 3:

Table 3 - Keywords in theses and dissertations on Geography teaching – Brazil, 2000-2015

Groups	Recurrent words	Number of occurrences	Total
1º. Words related to the teacher, his/her training and knowledge	Teacher training	50	130
	Teacher knowledge and practice	68	
	Initial teacher training	12	
2- Words related to the student and learning methodologies	Learning and students	35	104
	Methodology	69	
3- Words related to the school and its curriculum	School structure	34	189
	Curriculum and schoolbook	91	
	Pedagogical proposals	11	
	Teaching level	53	
4- Words related to social themes			14
5- Words related to geographical content	Space and its adjectivizations	32	322
	Cartography	90	
	Cartography, language and inclusion	12	
	Various geographical concepts and contents	188	
Other words			99
Total			858

Source: Elaborated by the author.

As far as the first group is concerned, there is a clear emphasis on words which directly address the teacher. These words were also found in essays' abstracts and titles, therefore exposing this as a major thematic focus, a finding that confirms the field's real concern with this research topic.

The second group, which refers to the student and his/her learning processes, comprises words more directly related to a learner's universe, e.g. "student", "young people", "youth", "student authorship", "learning process", "construction of knowledge", etc.; there are also words which reveal a direct concern with methodological alternatives for student learning (this also confirms the above-mentioned emphasis on thematic focus 4). Frequent words linked to methodology included "fieldwork", "teaching methodology", and "information and communications technologies (ICT)" (combined with words like "online education", "virtual learning environments", "learning objects", "Internet", "educational softwares", "electronic games", etc.).

The third group shows an emphasis on curricula and, particularly, on schoolbooks, the latter appearing 26 times as a keyword; this finding reinforces the major role already played by schoolbooks in thematic focus 8.

The fifth group also draws our attention due to the considerable number of identified words, a finding which confirms researchers' concerns over geographical contents and the challenges posed by concept formation and learner abilities. In this group I highlight references to cartography, with recurrent words like "mental maps", "school cartography", "cartographic literacy", and "cartographic language", as well as words associated with the geographic information system (GIS), e.g. "remote sensing" and "satellite images." Another interesting result refers to the most frequent concepts found in keyword lists, evidence of the most researched geographical contents; among those with the highest number of occurrences are "daily life" (ten occurrences); "environmental education" and related words, e.g. "environmental legislation", "environment", "degradation", "sustainability" (46 occurrences); "place" (26 occurrences); "culture" (six occurrences); "city" and related words (nine occurrences); "rural education" (six occurrences); and "landscape" (six occurrences).

As regards essays' methodology, based on abstracts' clear indication or on my own inferences grounded on descriptions of methodological

stages and procedures,<sup>13</sup> I was able to conclude that the majority of studies are structured as qualitative research (in 276 abstracts, or 64% of the total, the qualitative approach was explicitly or implicitly elected) in its broad concept, ranging from ethnographic studies to those which include quantitative data with statistical treatment. The qualitative approach covers research on empirical practices and realities within specific school events, aiming at exploratory, descriptive or case studies which are often structured as participant research or action research. The most popular analytical instruments used are classroom and school observation; interviews and/or questionnaires with students and teachers; focal groups or discussion groups; life story research with teachers and/or students; application of alternative solutions to a given problem.

In summary, this is simply one possible interpretation of the essays identified in Brazilian postgraduate Geography programs from 2000 to 2015. Other interpretations are both possible and necessary to better understand the collected data, as has already been mentioned. For the time being, my interpretation has the task of confirming previous data, hence indicating the growing number of studies in this field, their thematic diversity, and the consolidation of their results towards advancing both thinking and practice on Geography teaching.

### What happens now to research on Geography teaching? Temporary considerations on the status of Geography teaching research

As a researcher in Geography for the past twenty years and as a teacher and participant of various events on Geography and Geography teaching, I believe that this research field has had its relevance acknowledged in the academic community and in social practices – more specifically, in teaching practices. Such relevance is grounded on the complexity of its object of study – Geography teaching in its many modalities, levels, and contexts – as well as its problematics. That is the reason why the field's expansion and consolidation within Brazilian postgraduate programs are both important and necessary for the continuance of studies, for the development of their theoretical reflections, and for the efficacy of their proposals for Geography teaching/learning practices.

It is widely known that more structural changes in education and school-based teaching surpass the scope of academic research, given the



fact that they are more dependent on public policies addressing education and schools. Nevertheless, academic research on the teaching of specific subjects, such as Geography, offers a theoretical and empirical framework for those movements – whether institutional or non-institutional – which endorse such changes.

Moreover, the consolidation of this research field greatly contributes to Geography as a whole, for given its focus on a major practice of Geography, the latter's advance as a science and as a way of reflecting about society depends upon it. Hence, even though there are currently 17 programs which offer specific lines of research on Geography teaching, the data shed light on theses and dissertations which address the issue despite being linked to other broader lines of work that intersect with teaching; thus it was possible to include as objects of study no less than 430 essays, 245 of which were linked to specific teaching-based lines of research and the remaining 185 to other lines of research.<sup>14</sup> Another interesting finding was that, of the 17 programs which offer specific lines of research on teaching, eight are recently-created master's programs, some of which had not produced finished dissertations by 2015 (end limit of the period under analysis), even though it is safe to assume that several of them are currently under way.

In summary, the collected data confirms the consolidated status of this research field, as well as its thematic diversity and institutionalization at postgraduate level. The data also enables me to reject the claim that this research field “has a timid presence” in postgraduate programs and to confirm its de facto significant presence within Geography studies.

## Notas

1 *Enpeg* or *Encontro Nacional de Prática de Ensino de Geografia* (National Conference on Geography Teaching Practices), a biennial meeting held in various Brazilian cities, aims to bring together researchers in the field to present their work and to discuss relevant current issues. *Forum Nepeg* is a biennial event which gathers researchers of didactics in Geography and focuses on Geography teacher training. It is promoted by the Núcleo de Estudos e Pesquisa em Educação Geográfica – Nepeg (Study and Research Centre in Geography Education), led by teachers from Universidade Federal de Goiás and Universidade Estadual de Goiás

2 The survey was carried out by the research group Núcleo de Pesquisa sobre Currículo, Ensino e Formação de Professores – Nucef (Research Centre on Curriculum, Teaching and Teacher Training), led by Lucineide Mendes Pires and housed within the Laboratório de Estudos e Pesquisa em Educação Geográfica (Lepeg) of the Instituto de Estudos Sócio-Ambientais (Iesa) of Universidade Federal de Goiás (UFG). The query basis for the survey was a list of theses and/or dissertations on postgraduate programs' websites, digital libraries, and/or on Plataforma Sucupira (Capes). Concluding this research and its resulting database has involved a few setbacks, the major one being the difficulty in accessing information concerning postgraduate programs, due to website settings, lack of information available (titles, abstracts, and/or keywords) and/or non-updated data. I believe this is a major issue for postgraduate programs and it calls for a collective taskforce.

3 All quotations were translated from Portuguese into English.

4 REDLADGEO is a network of researchers from Latin America whose aim is to foster discussion on Geography teaching in that part of the world.

5 I refer to the thirteenth edition of the Coloquio Internacional de Geocrítica held in Barcelona on 5-12 May 2014.

6 See the 2016 International Charter on Geography Education (International Geographical Union, 2015), signed by Vladimir Kolossov.

7 In Cavalcanti (2008), I present my own interpretation of Geography's academic and school-based structures.

8 In order to better understand this period's proposals for geographical analysis (which resonate on discussions on teaching), it is interesting to consider works by Zanatta (2010), Moraes (1989), and Vesentini (1992, 1995) on the various orientations regarding both the so-called classical (or traditional) Geography and critical Geography (or Geographies, more inclined to humanist Marxism or to structuralist Marxism).

9 Regarding this topic, please refer to Guidugli (1986), Carlos (2003), Suetergaray (2003), Pinheiro (2005), Silva (2011), and Lencioni (2013).

10 Pinheiro's study covered 277 masters' dissertations and 40 doctorate theses which were submitted to postgraduate Geography and Education programs in different Brazilian regions up to 2003.

11 It should be stressed at this point that studies on Geography teaching are not restricted to the usual lines of research; several of them are carried out within different lines of research and are supervised by professors who do not regard the topic as central to their academic and research interests, but who nevertheless recognise its relevance. However, institutionalizing lines of research that specifically address this topic implies acknowledgement and legitimacy that are crucial to understanding the field.

12 Not all essays had their abstracts available online, therefore they were included in the survey in view only of their partial data.

13 Reading these abstracts enables us to perceive their relevance for future bibliographical research as well as for bibliographical reviews, but it also exposes certain vulnerable points as far as structure is concerned – sparse information, in some cases –, which made it difficult to depict a broader idea of the type of research intended: problematics, objectives, methodology, basic sources, and results.

14 Once again, these were the studies I was able to identify through the Nucef survey; I considered the collected data sufficient for the analysis at hand, given that it represented a significant portion of the national academic production at postgraduate level. Even though the survey was carried out by the research team with rigour and seriousness through an exhaustive search, I am aware of its incompleteness; many studies were not included in the survey due to technical difficulties on programs' websites or on Plataforma Sucupira, problems with data collection methodology or technical setbacks with data access and availability. I am aware that several other studies address the topic at hand in Brazilian postgraduate programs in Geography and Education, but it was not possible to include them in the present analysis.

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