

Ecological Numeracy: Quantitative Analysis of Environmental Issues

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Geographers Count: A Report on Quantitative Methods in Geography

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Abstract

This report is drawn from a project funded to better support the teachers of quantitative methods in UK social science. In it we identify the types of quantitative methods taught in the geography curricula for UK schools and universities, and discuss attitudes towards those methods amongst students and teachers. We argue that geography has benefited from its position at the intersection of the sciences, social sciences and humanities, retaining a quantitative component. Consequently, levels of basic numeracy and data handling have remained relatively high, leaving the discipline well placed to respond to the call for greater quantitative training within the social sciences in the UK. However, we also suspect that the typical levels of quantitative training in university human geography courses are not sufficiently high to compete on the international stage. As the title suggests, our report is focused on geography. However we raise issues germane to other disciplines including what actually we mean by quantitative methods, what should be taught in a twenty-first century curriculum, how to meaningfully embed those methods in the substantive themes and teaching of a discipline, and whether more should be expected as a minimum standard of quantitative competence than the existing Quality Assurance Agency benchmarks require.

Keywords: Geography, teaching, quantitative methods, curriculum, numeracy

Introduction

Within the UK, there has been widespread concern at the low and declining levels of quantitative training provided for students in many of the social sciences (economics and psychology generally excepted). Students, it is argued, are generally "adept at critique [...] in the précis and juxtaposition of arguments, and the rhetoric of essay writing". However,

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