

Book Review

Butt, G. (Ed.). (2011). *Geography, education and the future*. United Kingdom: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd. ISBN 978-1-84-706498-1. 272 pages, \$31.83.

Geography is clearly a social science discipline that is in a state of flux in the American education system. As many school districts look to replace geography at all levels, from elementary through high school, one must feel that school boards and administrators alike need to take a close look at the major themes addressed through this comprehensive work. This fine collection of essays from noted geographers encourages geography teachers to assess the relevance of the geography that they currently teach and consider which aspects of geography really matter.

According to the introduction of the book, each author, as a “stimulus” to their contribution was asked to consider three important questions in relation to the future of geography education:

1. How can geography education prepare young people for the places, environments and societies they will inhabit in the future?
2. How should geography be reframed to take into account, and have something significant to say about, the major social and environmental changes wrought by growing consumption, restructuring of economies and technologies, and the dynamic connections between local and global?
3. How can geography and geography education present an agenda that can be taken seriously and implemented in the 21st century?

From my perspective, as a teacher of geography at both the secondary and post-secondary level in Danbury, Connecticut, USA, I was particularly drawn to the conclusions made in relation to two of the related themes addressed in the book. Those being “Place, Space and Change” under the direction of Editor John Morgan and “Global, Ethics, Environment and Citizenship” which was edited by Fran Martin. For example, while reading through the essays, as a teacher of Advance Placement Human Geography (APHG) I found myself thinking about the relevance of teaching APHG which is the fastest growing AP course offered by the College Board. In chapter six Dr. Morgan discusses the concept of the “Politics of Place.” Early on in the course study with my

students I have them take a serious look at what is meant by the idea of “sense of place.” Students are asked to analyze their surroundings at different scales, both visually and through written response to the questions posed by the author. For example, looking at the social, economic, political, and environmental interdependency of our community while thinking about how our community holds on to its distinctiveness while the forces of globalization have created a modern sense of “placelessness” where each individual place looks very similar to others in varied regions of the world. Moreover, having students evaluate and analyze their spatial identity; or as the author notes, getting students to understand “who they are” and “where they belong” as our day to day lives become more wrapped up within the 21st century processes of “modernization, marketization, and change.”

As the reader moves throughout this work one clearly ascertains that each chapter builds a compelling case for the role of geography education in today’s education landscape where geography has taken a back seat to other social science disciplines, such as civic education, as well as the significant emphasis that American education is now putting on the promotion of math, science, and English courses. This change in attitude, away from the relevance of geography education, is being promoted as a way to get American students to become more competitive with foreign students in a 21st century interdependent world. Tragically, if one took a really close look at the interdependent nature of both physical and human geography, one would clearly see a world where geography education and its associated relevance should be considered a priority for future global citizens. In chapter 11, Dr. Fran Martin does an excellent job of drawing together essays that consider how issues of “sustainability and environmental protection” have come to be so significant in the modern day geography classroom; specifically, in relation to my own teaching, the discussions on the importance of having students become effective global citizens in an ever changing interdependent world. For example, since 2002, citizenship education in the United Kingdom has been a compulsory course, likewise, here in the state of Connecticut, USA. The challenge for me and for other geography teachers here in the U.S. is to find ways to tackle citizenship education through the teaching of geography. Unfortunately, in many instances in the U.S. geography education is not considered as relevant as formal citizenship or civic education. In this chapter, Dr. Martin does an excellent job of making the relationship between geography education and citizenship education and highlighting the opportunities and challenges “faced by teachers responsible for tackling citizenship issues through geography.”

The importance of the nature and perspectives of geography education, along with the vital geographic content and skills taught in elementary and secondary schools leading into adult life should not be undervalued by those making education policy decisions. The contributors to this book place geography and 21st century subject based expectations on the same educational playing field, making practical and very relevant connections among ethics, citizenship, and geographic content at the elementary and secondary levels of schooling.

As a geographic educator at both the secondary and post secondary level it is clear to me that this book should be required reading for all geography teachers who wish to structure their curriculum along with their associated methods and strategies to make geography relevant to both current and future citizens of the 21st century.

In closing, as the world becomes much more interconnected and teaching geography should be at the forefront of course offerings, those who are at the vanguard of geographic education do a masterful job in this book of presenting their case as to why we should not let this opportunity pass us by.

References

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