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EDITORIAL



## Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in geographical education – for whom and for what purpose?

When we talk about geography education, we are describing the phenomenon that is concerned with the subject content that is taught, the way it is taught and how we will know if students have learnt what has been taught. While these notions can be described differently, depending on the theoretical paradigm or geographical traditions you are trained in or have come to know about, the outcomes of geographical education are concerned with the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment of learning geography. As geography educators, we are interested in what subject matter knowledge should be included, and which excluded, and even how some content should be abstracted or simplified for the curriculum. In addition, we are interested in the skills and dispositions associated with this knowledge. How these topics are then taught and learnt is also of prime concern to the geography educator (Chang, Wu, Seow, & Irvine, 2018, p. 4). Finally, we need to know how much has been learnt and how this information can help us refine our taught curriculum better (Chang et al., 2018, p. 50). Indeed, articles in recent IRGEE issues are concerned with topics such as powerful geographical knowledge and the place in curriculum, assessment and curriculum, relational thinking in geography, systems thinking in geography, and citizen participation in environmental education.

While the majority of articles published in IRGEE thus far are concerned with the geography curriculum, pedagogy or assessment, there is one article in this issue about participation for environmental education that resonates with the editors. We argue that geography education must matter to the child or student and it should not be just about the subject-matter knowledge to be learnt. We must educate a whole child for the purposes of allowing the child to thrive in a world with unprecedented changes to environment, society and technology. Teaching geography has never been more challenging. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) for 2030, outline the aspirations of a better world “of the people, by the people and for the people” (UNESCO, 2015). Unfortunately, the aspiration for these 17 goals also describe some of the key challenges to humanity today. Set against rapidly evolving and uncertain issues in environment, economy and society, geography educators have to understand the needs of our learners in order to teach them well (Chang, 2014, p. 36). Geography is concerned with asking questions of “Where is it?”, “What is it like?”, “Why is it there?”, “How did it happen?”, “What impact does it have?” and “How should it be managed for the mutual benefit of humanity and the natural environment?” (Commission on Geographical Education, 1992, p. 5). These guiding questions define how school geography draws on the academic discipline of geography to help the child thrive in an ever-changing world.

What must be learnt is embodied in the curriculum. The curriculum is not just an operationalisation of some ideas about how knowledge should be learnt but it

encapsulates the relationship between what has to be learnt, how it is learnt and who is to learn it (Tyler, 2013). Indeed, John Huckle's article in a recent issue diverging from Maude's (2018) account of powerful geographical knowledge, regards geographical knowledge as powerful as if it is critical and empowering. To be critical, it should expose the structures and processes at work in the world that lead to injustice, a lack of democracy, and a failure to realise sustainable forms of development. It should unveil ideology that hides these structures and processes and should offer social alternatives or ways of realising justice, democracy, and sustainability that can empower individuals and communities as they apply theory to practice. If geography teachers are to understand this knowledge and draw on it in their curriculum making, Huckle argues, they will need to be introduced to the philosophy of knowledge (Huckle, 2018, p. 1). The recent lineup of articles on powerful geographical knowledge from Stoltman, Lidstone & Kidman (2015), Slater, Graves, & Lambert (2016), Maude (2018) and Huckle (2018) describes only a small fraction of the range of issues that could be discussed. IRGEE editors would like to encourage contributions on the topic of powerful geography knowledge to take this "debate" (Maude, 2018) further.

Geography curricula have been keeping up with rapidly changing issues that impact humankind. These include greater focus on topics of environmental change and globalization. But education is not just about teaching knowledge. . Indeed, students have to learn to apply concepts, principles, and skills that are part of geography's knowledge (Slater et al., 2016). Relational thinking and systems thinking highlighted in this issue are just some examples, but beyond these we need to consider inquiry pedagogies, differentiated learning and how technology must play a role as well. Above all, geography education must help students develop "an imaginative mind" (Pauw, 2015). The 1996 "Delors Report" on Education for the 21st century to UNESCO argues for education that is based on learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together (Delors, Mufti, Amagi, Carneiro, Chung, Geremek, & International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century 1996). This vision resonates with the aspirations of geographical education for the 21st century as outlined in the 2016 International Charter on Geographical Education (International Geographic Union – Commission on Geographical Education, 2016). So, beyond knowledge, we must be able to help geography students learn skills and attitudes that will help them for the 21st century. Issues of assessment must also be considered for we cannot help students in their learning if we are unable to find out how much they have learnt (Voltz, Sims, & Nelson, 2010). Indeed, regular and useful feedback are crucial to help students use assessment for learning (Black & William, 1998). This has implications for both curriculum and pedagogy.


Finally, education must matter. Geography education must matter to people and the world they live in. Geography is a product of thinking and reasoning about humans and the world they live in (Golledge, 2002). Beyond thinking about how academic geography can shape the curriculum, how pedagogy can be improved and how learning should be assessed, there is a dire need for geography to be relevant to the learners in their times. In a world which is beleaguered by globalization, climate change, and development issues, Geography as a school subject can and will educate our students and citizens on how to respond to and live in these changing times (Tan & Chang, 2008). Studies have shown that even when people are provided with information about climate change, for example, there will be some who do not believe, and are highly unlikely to act on the information they have learned (Adger et al., 2009).

While we do not and should not dictate that students must take action for the environmental and developmental issues they encounter, we must always remember education aims to broaden minds and develop in students the capabilities of asking questions for clarification and verification (Chang et al., 2018, p. 7; Muller & Young, 2008). There has not been a reduction in the number of articles on environmental education in this journal (Kidman & Papadimitriou, 2012) but we continue to encourage more articles that will help us understand how to teach geography and environmental topics better. Indeed, we will need to strike a balance between developing learners who can critically engage new information about the world they live in as well as being empathic individuals who are committed to take action to make their world a better place (Chang, 2015, p. 183).

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