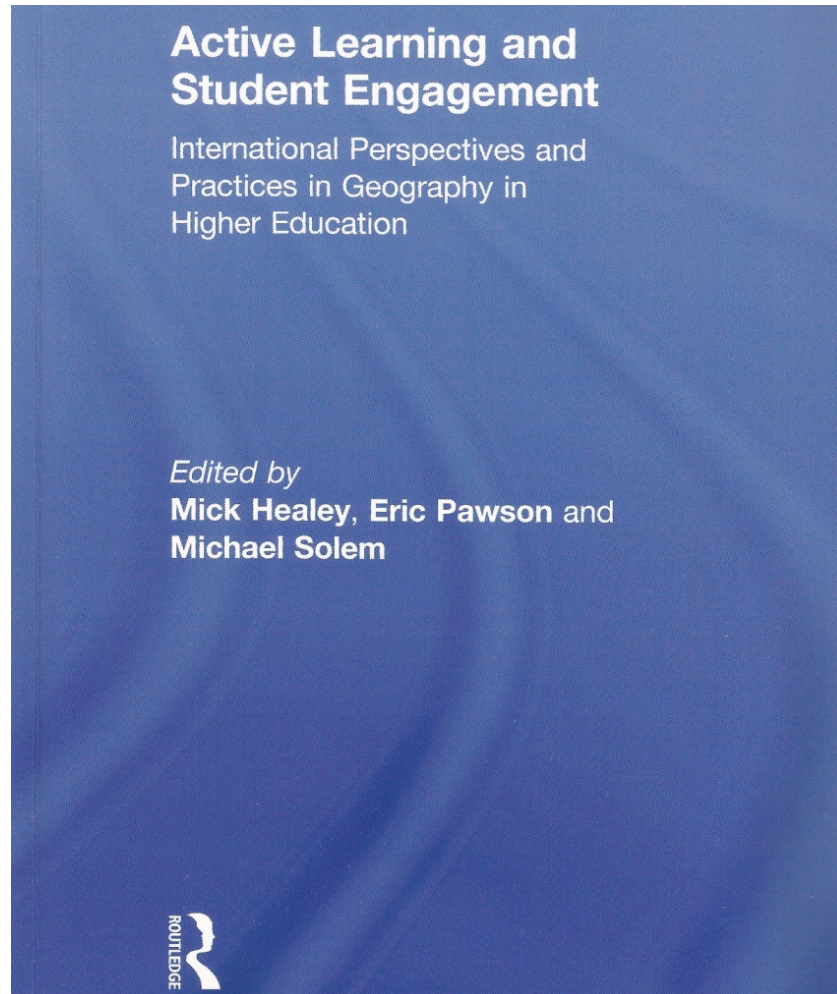


Active Learning and Student Engagement: International Perspectives and Practices in Geography in Higher Education



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(See: <http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415564922>)

Reviewer

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Publisher

Routledge

Publication Year

2010

Edition: First edition; **Pages:** 223 pages; **Price:** \$49.95

ISBN: Paperback: 978-0-415-63398-7

Aim of the book

The editors of this collection of articles, previously published in two special issues of the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, address and meet a goal of making Geographic higher education both applicable and relevant for 21st century educators and students.

Audience

Speaking largely to their geography higher education colleagues, the collection presents a focused direction for pedagogical methodologies and practices that incorporate reflection on *learning*, intentional design of active, experiential student engagement, new and diverse ‘spaces’ of learning, and by expanding learning beyond the classroom through opportunities for community service, collaboration, the workplace, and distance education models.

From the already-proven and referenced articles included in the special issues of the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* (2006: 30 (1), 77-87 and 2008; vol. 32, pp. 37-50), this collection deserves to be on every geography professor’s shelf as a source for renewal and generative thinking with examples and procedures for engaging students toward a major that puts geography ‘where it belongs:’ in the forefront of action-based learning and contribution through field work.

The book is constructed in four sections, with articles that address a wide range of perspectives and considerations of the geography educators. In their introduction, the editors present perspectives that include reflections on learning as situated in the current context, acknowledging the “globalizing forces of economic change, social technologies, and political integration” (4), incorporating the social learning theory of Vygotsky, and how, in this century, that social context has radically changed.

Section A: Re-imagining ourselves as learners

In the first section, new strategies of “co-learning” or collaboration in the broadest sense, from technology-situated co-learning to indigenous-based knowledge, all help to reflect the new workplaces of geographers. Engaging in these new relationships and situated learning contexts also raises new ethical issues facing geography and geographers. Therefore, Section A includes the following chapters:

2. Co-learning: Re-Linking Research and Teaching in Geography *Richard Le Heron, Richard Baker, Lindsey McEwen with John Bradbeer, Alan Jenkins and Gabor Mezosi* (2006).
3. 'None of Us Sets Out To Hurt People': The Ethical Geographer and Geography Curricula in Higher Education *William E. Boyd, Ruth L. Healey, Susan W. Hardwick, Martin Haigh with Phil Klein, Bruce Doran, Julie Trafford and John Bradbeer* (2008)

Section B: Engaging students in inquiry

This section's focus on inquiry through a variety of both new and traditional field work techniques is presented in four articles that defend and exemplify methods that promote active learning. The section draws "on research spanning three continents" (North America, Europe (UK), and Pacific/Oceania (Australia/New Zealand)). The first article is largely based in "blended" computer-based courseware environments that incorporate some distance education technology-based assignments, but these are reading assignments. This inclusion of courseware strays a bit from the concept of "active learning," although might have facilitated discussions of field work to best integrate "active learning," as some examples did. In article 5, the problems presented were structured scenario-type problems, but there was little evidence of this approach in practice in geography courses. In article 6, the discussion of Inquiry-based Learning (IBL) identifies essential attributes, one of which was "constructivist," which nicely integrates that concept as *essential* to IBL, also based in an essential of active learning, where the educator role is facilitative, and the inquiry is student-driven.

4. Experimenting with active learning in Geography: Dispelling the myths that Perpetuate Resistance *Regina Scheyvens, Amy L. Griffin, Christine L. Jocoy, Yan Liu and Michael Bradford* (2008).
5. Problem based learning in Geography: towards a critical assessment of its purposes, benefits and risks *Eric Pawson, Julie Trafford, Eric Fournier, Martin Haigh, Osvaldo Muniz and Susan Vajoczki* (2006).
6. Where might sand dunes be on mars? Engaging students through Inquiry-based learning in Geography *Rachel Spronken-Smith, Jo Bullard, Waverly Ray, Carolyn Roberts and Artimus Keiffer* (2008).
7. International perspectives on the Effectiveness of Geography fieldwork for learning *Ian Fuller, Sally Edmonson, Derek France, David Higgitt and Ikka Ratinen* (2006).

Section C: New spaces of learning

Article 8 introduces several international collaboration networks for geography in higher education such as the International Network for Learning and Teaching Geography in Higher Education (INLT), *HERODOT*, *SOCRATES*, and the Center for Global Geography Education (CGGE). Article 9 discusses the potential of technology for collaboration on

real problems, citing constructivist approaches and calling for new teacher professional development options shortly before webinars came into use. Article 10 discusses the transition of Masters Programs from research to vocational tracks, and the increasing diversity of global students in these programs. Differing national foci on workplace skills and ethics are compared and discussions of postgraduate tracks are discussed. Article 11 notes the persistent lack of diversity in geography higher education, and calls for a transformative pedagogy of social justice, equity and sustainability citing developments from South African, India and Pakistan.

8. Developing and Enhancing international collaborative learning *David Higgitt, Karl Donert, Mick Healey, Phil Klein, Michael Solem and Sue Vajoczki* (2006).
9. E-learning for Geography's teaching and learning spaces *Kenneth Lynch, Bob Bednarz, James Boxall, Lex Chalmers, Derek France and Julie Kesby* (2008).
10. Strength in diversity: Enhancing learning in vocationally-orientated, Master's level courses *Lindsey McEwen, Janice Monk, Iain Hay, Pauline Kneale and Helen King* (2008).
11. Teaching for and about social transformation *Jane Wellens, Andrea Berardi, Brian Chalkley, Bill Chambers, Ruth Healey, Janice Monk and Jodi Vender* (2006).

Section D: Beyond the classroom

Article 12 returns to the notion of community engagement, offering 2 case studies from the US (service learning), New Zealand (indigenous cultural learning), and the UK (a research based environmental project). Article 13 includes more international examples in its discussion of the varied social constructions of “employability” and its effects on curriculum development given the marked differences among nations’ histories, economies and educational systems and their goals. Chile, Estonia Italy, Greece and Spain are included in this article among the more often represented Anglo-centric cases. In article 14, issues of distance education-delivered geography programs such as those developed by GIS software giant, ESRI are discussed. In designing for certification, problems of ethical issues and professional values are lost among the technical aspects taught, therefore recommendations are presented. Finally, in Article 15, the editors refrain the calls for re-engaging students through active engagement and empowerment, recalling the influences of Paolo Freire and Ira Shor.

12. Community engagement for student learning in Geography *Sarah Witham Bednarz, Brian Chalkley, Stephen Fletcher, Iain Hay, Erena Le Heron, Audrey Mohan and Julie Trafford* (2008).
13. Enhancing employability in Geography *Paul Rooney, Barbara Gambini, Artimus Keiffer, Pauline Kneale, Barbara Van Drasek and Sharon Gedye* (2006).

14. Internationalising professional development in Geography through distance education *Michael Solem, Lex Chalmers, David DiBiase, Karl Donert and Susan Hardwick* (2006).

15. Reflecting on Student Engagement *Eric Pawson, Mick Healey and Michael Solem*

In the years since these articles first appeared in the two special issues of the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, some of the early projects and suggested endeavors have been implemented. Websites have proliferated offering collaborative projects, webinars and virtual campus options are now a major vehicle for professional development in geography. But the status of “international” collaboration has been in some ways supplanted by smart phone technologies; social networking has become a legitimate socio-political venue, and transitions initiated in those networks are still in transition.

This is not insignificant, because as many of the authors themselves recognize, geography higher education, while experiencing perhaps some increased diversity, predominantly remains and reflects most of the authors’ origins from the former British colonies. This collection does show evidence of some movement, yet for a truly international transition of geography in higher education, student engagement would likely have to embrace the social networking opportunities now accessible to members of the developing nations. When social movements from Kyrgyzstan to Egypt to Syria race ahead, geography higher education must not simply follow these movements, but track and analyze them as geopolitical, socio-political and socio-economic phenomena as a central application of the diffusion of innovations, if nothing else.

The roots of this approach are supported throughout the articles from the special issues and this book, and the branches of inquiry and new technologies have progressed to grow from those roots. Their pedagogical, methodological and theoretical frames presented represent a firm foundation and fertile landscape for these efforts into a rapidly changing 21st century.