



## **Teaching Secondary Geography as if the Planet Matters**

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Over the last ten years that I have been involved in geography teacher education I have become increasingly aware of a lack of willingness amongst student teachers to engage in the continued study of geography or of geographies at the teaching practice stage. Often new student teachers are more focused, unsurprisingly, on the practice of teaching because this is what worries them. Therefore we currently have an emphasis on pedagogy in terms of focusing on the processes of learning and teaching in the classroom and a 'fading' of the need to continue to engage in geographical concepts.

It is this very tenet that Morgan sets out to explore in this book. That, in recent years, the dominant forms of school geography, as promoted in curricula, has prompted unquestioned ideological understandings of society and environment. Morgan encourages us to consider ways to ensure that students become aware of how geographies are consistently made and remade and the critical engagement that this requires from both teachers and learners. In turn, Morgan argues that there is a need to develop forms of geographical knowledge that are rooted in political economy and social construction and that this could allow us to develop alternative readings of landscapes and environments. Throughout the book Morgan remains focused on this argument and develop an in-depth exploration of why this is so pertinent to geography educators today.

Rather helpfully there is synergy with the publication of this book at a time when both Standish has proposed a geography curriculum for England and the experiences and outcomes for Geography within the Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland have also been defined and are now being 'implemented' in schools. As Morgan points out it has been, to an extent, the development of curriculum guidance that has encouraged the current understandings of school geography. Morgan's premise is, that government controlled policy development removes the need for geography teachers to think as critical geographers. How might we then encourage geography teachers to reengage the geographer within? The geographer that asks critical and important questions about the interactions between landscapes and societies, and to move beyond just accepting and promoting contemporary, often western assumptions about people, places and cultures.

In reading the book we are encouraged to consider the implications of adopting broad thematic approaches in schools such as 'global citizenship'. What do these broad and unquestioned conceptual sweeps mean for geographers and how they construct the teaching of such concepts in the classroom? How does the language of policy texts shape the majority view of issues of a geographical nature? For example, how does it shape and define sustainable development – and to what end? All in all these are observant, critical and important questions to engage with.

Morgan makes a genuine link between theory, policy and practice in this book with a focus on interactions and interdependence of ideas, such as capitalist economies and the environment that are often not fully explored in geography teaching. It encourages us to engage with schemes such as 'Ecoschools' and to ask important questions. Who runs such schemes? How and why? To what end and with what impact? It encourages students to think more deeply and critically about what it is that they are teaching in the classroom. In part this is achieved through the use of further study questions and activities that are provided in the book. In places it was possible to see how these questions could be developed to, for example, explore resources such as 'apps' as well as textbooks. It is easy to see how these tasks could be used successfully with new teachers.

The book is divided into three sections. Section one focuses on contexts and was both engaging and helpful in mapping current thinking about the environment in education. Section two explores some of the key themes and questions raised in section one. It considers how these might impact upon the way in which we teach geography

through thematic approaches. There is a consideration of a shift from, say, the teaching of farming to the cultural geographies of food. Instead, the section highlights, the tensions that exist between concepts of 'urban' and 'nature', some of which require thought and action from learners rather than passive acceptance of the constructs. The third theme of this section is to consider models of economics. Helpfully the reader is left considering what future economic geographies could look like and what issues might be considered important for learners to engage with. There is an encouragement to problematize the knowledge that forms the school geography curriculum. Finally, section three of the book considers our practices with a focus on the notion of multiple readings of geography as well as a consideration that what we teach is as important as how we teach.

Thematic approaches to geography are useful but this book is a timely reminder that at the heart of geography lie the concepts of interdependence, interactions and relationships that require a critical geographical eye. This book challenges us to consider if in planning the learning and teaching of geography that learners are given the opportunities to explore these issues in order to understand their world.

A key question that the book encourages is about how we ensure that school geography does not become out of kilter with the world that learners live in. What this text points to be that certain types of knowledge and world views are always biased, prioritized and favored within the delivered curriculum. As geographers and educators our role is to critically engage in such decisions. The book was both challenging and engaging to read and I would highly recommend it to anyone involved in geography teacher education.