

## Book Review

Lambert, D., & Jones, M. (Eds.). (2013). *Debates in geography education*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge. ISBN-13: 9780415687782. 336 pages, \$42.95.

### Introduction

*Debates in Geography Education* is one of a series of books written for people with a professional interest in teaching their subject: those training to become teachers, practicing teachers and researchers. The series as a whole aims to introduce some of the debates that 'subject teachers should understand, reflect on and engage in as part of their professional development.' This book is successful in contributing to these aims. The 25 authors draw on their considerable expertise developed through their varied experiences in geographical education and from research to provide clear accounts of some key debates.

### Structure

The book is organized into three sections focusing on policy debates, 'classroom' debates, and subject debates. The three chapters in the first section discuss the ways in which national policies, particularly those related to the national curriculum and public examinations, have influenced geographical education in primary and secondary schools. It is clear, however, from the rest of the book that a wider range of policies, such as those related to accountability and to the promotion of generic skills, have also impacted geographical education. This section provides a valuable overview for understanding how we have reached the present situation in England and provides the context in which debates in the next section can be understood.

While the first section emphasizes decisions that have already been made for teachers, the much larger 'classroom' debates section shows that teachers make many choices, often implicit, about how they plan and teach the geography curriculum. This section challenges teachers to reflect on practices that might have become habitual or taken for-granted. Readers are asked to consider, for example, different approaches to incorporating skills and physical geography in the geography curriculum, the nature of geographical concepts, and how teachers might take account of what learners bring to the classroom. Two chapters discuss the potential of using rapidly changing technologies in

geography and how they might be used critically. Some chapters in this section invite readers to think more deeply about meanings: what exactly do we mean when we talk about geographical knowledge or progression in geography or sustainable development or global learning? It is important that teachers engage in these classroom debates as the choices they make and the way they conceptualize what and how they teach, influence how students understand the world and their place in it.

The short third section focuses on the academic discipline of geography, how it has changed, its key concepts, and its relation to geographical education in schools. Although these debates might seem more academic than those in the previous section, recent geography graduates might relate to these debates more easily. They would be fully aware of the gulf between academic and school geography. These chapters encourage them to consider whether that gulf matters and what they might do about it to ensure that students learn to think geographically and make progress in acquiring the key concepts of geography.

### Review

The debates in this book are located within the context of the English educational system, unsurprisingly as only two authors, Hawley and Standish, have substantial experience of working beyond this. Although the policy issues are particular to the English context, however, the issues raised in classroom and subject debates are very relevant to geographical education in other countries; geography educators everywhere are faced with similar professional judgements.

The book does not claim to address all the debates that are relevant to geography education. Apart from the first chapter and a few references to primary education elsewhere, this book is strongly focused on geography in secondary schools for students aged 11–18. Some of the debates would have been enhanced by extending their application to a wider age range. The book also emphasizes curriculum rather than pedagogy. Most of the debates are relevant to what some authors refer to as curriculum making, the process through which teachers within the limits of policy and guided by their subject knowledge, plan the curriculum. Apart from Jones' chapter on personalized learning and Taylor's chapter on concept formation, less detailed attention is given on what students do and how they learn.

These emphases do not distract from the value of this book which does what it sets out to do. It informs, it challenges, and it provokes deeper

thinking. The authors present their arguments clearly. Each chapter is well referenced and includes suggested key readings, which would enable readers to take their thinking further and to research the issues. No other book aimed at those involved in geographical education opens up so many debates, so clearly and so concisely.

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