



Book Reviews

Understanding and Teaching the Australian Curriculum: Geography for Primary Schools

A. Maude, Hawker Brownlow Education, Melbourne, 2014, 301 pp, ISBN 978 1 7600 171 0, AU\$35.95

It is not common to think about how geography is taught at primary school. Indeed, many of us are unaware if geography is taught at all in the first years of schooling. Professional geographers and educationalists will be pleased to learn that geography's position in the school curriculum is strengthening: since 2008, a committee of teachers, academics and government officials has been developing the geography curriculum from reception to the senior school years as part of a broader national approach to learning at school. In May 2013 the geography component of the Australian curriculum was endorsed by State and Territory Ministers, giving a cogency and impact that should not be overlooked.

Associate Professor Alaric Maude was the Institute of Australian Geographers representative on the geography curriculum committee, and he has now produced a guide to that curriculum that is both a resource for teachers and a fascinating insight into contemporary Australia in its own right. This book is focused on the teaching of geography at primary school because, as Maude notes, primary school teachers are responsible for teaching seven of the nine years in which the subject is compulsory. Moreover, many primary school teachers will be unsure of how to teach geography and even of what the subject should focus on, as few will have taken the subject themselves in the senior years of high school, and even fewer will have done so at University. This book aims to help teachers understand the curriculum they are being asked to teach while also demonstrating to them that it is an interesting and important subject that constitutes essential knowledge for the contemporary era.

Understanding and Teaching the Australian Curriculum: Geography for Primary Schools is not a conventional textbook. Instead, it is better thought of as a resource for teachers organised into 10 chapters. Chapters One through Three provide the conceptual underpinnings for the

book. The first chapter discusses what geography is; why it has a separate place in the curriculum; the key concepts of place, space, environment, interconnection, sustainability, scale and change; the ambitions of the curriculum; and how to use the children's own experience to enhance their learning. The second chapter examines the knowledge-and-understanding strand within the curriculum and how these are separated in pedagogy. Chapter Three considers the inquiry-and-skills strand within the curriculum and outlines how they have been built into the learning experience of students. Chapters Four through Ten then consider in sequence the teaching of geography from the foundation or reception year of primary school through to year six.

Understanding and Teaching the Australian Curriculum: Geography for Primary Schools is full of resources for teachers as they seek to achieve the best possible learning outcomes for their students. Important concepts and key techniques are clearly identified, and there are resources dotted throughout the book to help teachers in their task. The text also includes examples of teaching aids and suggestions for in-class discussion. Perhaps one of the most important things about *Understanding and Teaching the Australian Curriculum: Geography for Primary Schools* is that it makes the teaching of geography come alive. Its content is a world away (pun intended) from old-fashioned approaches that focused on lists of cities and exports or on beach formation and creation. Alaric Maude is able to show us that rather than being a discipline of colonial power, geography is a dynamic approach to understanding our world and the people within it. Its sections on Indigenous Australians and their view of the world are especially enlightening, as is the discussion of how our environment sustains us. Importantly, Maude shows us how teachers can both do their best for students and get the best out of students, resulting in better-informed learners.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the production of this book was more than a labour of love for Alaric Maude. As a former Secretary of the Institute of Australian Geographers, he both participated on the curriculum committee

and produced this book as part of his enduring commitment to the discipline. It is a work to which he has devoted his considerable talents and energies. Now that he has provided teachers with an invaluable resource to better inform their teaching, it is up to those of us working as researchers, as university teachers or in the broader community to ensure that there is an awareness of this work. Our task is to go out and proselytise. The future of geography in Australia depends upon it.

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Geographies of Alternative Education: Diverse Learning Spaces for Children and Young People

Peter Kraftl, Policy Press, University of Bristol, Bristol, UK, 2013, 304 pp, ISBN 9781447300496 (hardback), £70.00

At the most recent Institute of Australian Geographers conference in Melbourne, colleagues and I convened a number of sessions under the rubric of ‘geographies of education’. In doing so, we engaged with a nascent but growing movement in human geography to attend to the spatiality of educational systems, institutions, policies and identities. It is this movement that provides the foundation for Peter Kraftl’s *Geographies of Alternative Education*.

Following an introductory chapter, Kraftl situates his study within the literature on the geographies of education, noting that typically, work has focused on mainstream spaces. He subsequently provides a strong rationale for the importance of broadening the geographic lens, noting not only the multiplicity of spaces of alternative education, but also the interconnections between these spaces and others, such as home, community and nation. Importantly, his intent is not to evaluate alternative educational approaches, but to detail a range of case studies that bring to light new ways of doing education. This is a compelling objective in an era when neoliberal agendas have been enacted across educational sectors globally.

Having ably established the rationale for his research, Kraftl introduces the different types of alternative educational spaces of concern to the book. These include care farms, along with home, democratic/human-scale, Steiner and Montessori

schools. In the chapters following, Kraftl seeks to compare these types of schools, drawing upon a rich array of interview and participant observation data. A great strength of the book is that the five empirical chapters are not isolated case studies of particular types of alternative education. Rather, Kraftl expertly weaves data from across the case studies, concentrating on comparative analysis around themes such as temporality, movement, friendship, scale and habits. This nuanced approach has two key strengths. First, it contributes to the author’s aims of destabilising the binary between mainstream and alternative education and of demonstrating the multiscalar nature of alternative education. Second, and relatedly, it allows Kraftl to speak to other literatures, and renders the book relevant not only to those with an interest in geographies of education but equally to those concerned with other fields of human geography such as the geographies of affect, home, embodiment and materiality. There is, for example, much in *Geographies of Alternative Education* for those seeking to take up Morrison *et al.*’s call in *Progress in Human Geographies* (2013) for greater attention to the geographies of love, especially with regard to interviewees’ insistence on the importance of love and intimacy to the spaces of non-mainstream schooling and their claims that such emotions are natural aspects of children’s learning. Similarly, there are significant insights offered for those interested in the more-than-human turn in human geography as Kraftl explores the intersections between learning and nature and between children’s education and food.

In the concluding chapter of the book, Kraftl offers a perceptive and ultimately positive and hopeful summary of his findings and points out the implications in terms of policy. Autonomy, he asserts, is key to understanding the spaces of alternative education. It is not that alternative educational arenas are all or always autonomous. However, Kraftl argues, they are ‘dis/connected from multiple mainstreams, in diverse and ever-changing ways’ (237), such as in their relationship to ideologies of de-schooling, their openness to the world beyond the school, their commitment to dialogue, their engagement with regulatory frameworks and their need for funding. They are certainly distinctly different from the mainstream in their commitment to individual learning and children’s needs rather than to development models, to informal learning spaces rather than only the formal arenas of learning, and to privileging of interpersonal