

Reviews

BOOK

Geography Education's Potential and the Capability Approach: GeoCapabilities and Schools

Richard Bustin | ISBN: 978-3-030-25642-5
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Palgrave Macmillan

In this superb book, Bustin introduces the kind of framework that might be of use to geography teachers looking to theorise their own approaches to curriculum development. He draws on three broad theoretical traditions.

The first is the social realist tradition in the sociology of education, and the work of Michael Young on the importance of powerful knowledge. This is subject-specific knowledge that has a particular explanatory power, that enables young people to see, understand and explain the world in a manner that they would not have had they not been educated in a particular mode of disciplinary thought.

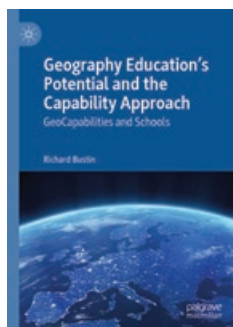
The second tradition positions teachers as curriculum-makers responsible for making choices about what to teach, how and why to teach it in ways that are of interest and utility to the young people in their classrooms. This tradition, derived from the work of David Lambert and John Morgan, argues for the role of teachers in mediating between students, subjects, and school contexts.

Finally, he draws on Amartya Sen's and Martha Nussbaum's work around a capabilities approach to social development. This argues that personal and collective development is achieved by developing the capability set of each individual. As Bustin suggests, 'a capabilities approach ... can offer a means of expressing what freedoms an education allows a person to "be" or to "do".'

These three theoretical traditions have much to offer geography teachers. By reviewing the progress of research into GeoCapabilities – an approach to curriculum-making built around the importance of powerful geographical knowledge and the contribution it can make to fostering the 'capability set' of young people – Bustin has made a major contribution to curriculum thinking in our subject. He argues that subject-specialist teachers have an important role to play in developing a curriculum, wherein 'studying geography is about learning to think like a geographer, understand how geographical knowledge is created, debated and argued over and not simply about learning geographical facts.'

Bustin's book is conceptual, but in a manner that is directly of use to practising teachers. It is to be hoped that the GeoCapabilities approach inspires further research and discussion across the geography education community.

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