



## Powerful primary geography: a toolkit for 21st century Learning

by Anne M. Dolan, London, Routledge, 2020, 268 pp., 96 B/W Illustrations, Price is £24.99 for paperback version and £22.49 for online version. ISBN 9781138226517

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## BOOK REVIEW

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In 2018 geography was removed as a core subject from the Junior Cycle in secondary school education in the Republic of Ireland. This was a controversial decision which awoke deep concern on the part of geography educators, geographers, and educational enthusiasts alike. In an open letter to the Irish Times newspaper entitled ‘Putting geography back on the map’, the heads of geography departments from Irish third-level institutions argued vehemently for the subject’s restoration as a core Junior Cycle subject, stating that

as we live in a world increasingly defined by these ‘wicked problems’ [climate change and poverty] with multiple causes and interactions, the next generation of Irish decision-makers need to be equipped with the practical and analytical skills to effectively address them – this starts in primary and secondary schools. (Carmody et al. 2019)

This decision has yet to be revoked. What is taught, how it is taught and to whom, are heavily politically and sociologically weighted considerations as well as being educational. Researchers and advocates for geography education characterise geography as being forward-thinking and essential to society for addressing key issues including sustainability, economic stability, conflict resolution and response to environmental change. Butt and Lambert (2014) called upon the geography research community to concentrate on the ways in which meaningful geography education with tangible links to the real-world and relevant issues can be delivered. This book has answered this challenge, laying out a framework through which children can be enabled to not only learn and develop geographical knowledge and skills in real-world contexts, but to apply their conceptual understandings, knowledge and skills to become more autonomous decision-makers and active citizens.

*Powerful Primary Geography* recognises and argues the significant role of geography education in developing what have come to be termed as twenty-first Century skills and competencies including problem-solving, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking. Throughout the book, Dr Anne Dolan advocates for, and outlines how, geography education should be enjoyable, creative and empowering for both children and teachers. The introductory chapter sets the scene and offers a detailed and research-informed argument as to what constitutes as powerful primary geography. The structure of the book itself is organised around the key attributes of powerful primary geography. Here, Maude’s (2016) five types of powerful geographical knowledge are merged with relevant twenty-first Century competencies and the attributes of powerful primary geography with each of these attributes being explored chronologically in detail in the proceeding chapters. Each chapter blends details current, relevant research with practical examples of creative and inspirational primary geography lessons for junior and senior classes.

Dr Anne Dolan draws from a vast array of research and scholarship in geography education and broader educational theorists to put forward the essential need for

powerful primary geography in equipping children to deal with current and future geographical problems. As such, this book is underpinned by problem-oriented, experiential learning. Place-based education, play-based education and enquiry-based education feature strongly throughout. A futures-oriented approach is applied to key local and global issues and challenges such as climate change, refugee crises and sustainable development. *Powerful Primary Geography* prioritises outdoor learning in terms of fieldwork, using the local area for enquiry-based learning and experiential learning. Connections are made between global dimensions and local, practical activities and actions that can be facilitated by teachers at all primary class levels. Children's voices and agency are to the forefront of the book. For children to participate effectively in a rapidly changing world, they must learn to investigate and understand it. *Powerful Primary Geography* recognises children as citizens and outlines a myriad of approaches for educators to help children to understand the world around them, including people, systems, places, interactions and decisions which have an impact on their lives, making abstract geographical concepts accessible for children.

*Powerful Primary Geography* is suitable for teachers, student teachers and teacher educators. It blends theory and practice and each chapter showcases an excellent array of carefully selected, exemplary and practical case studies from various primary school contexts in rural and urban and junior and senior class settings (35 in total). Furthermore, practical suggestions and examples are also outlined to extend the learning. Each chapter concludes with the provision of an extensive list of high-quality links and resources to aid and inform future practice. Reflection exercises throughout the book act as a prompt to aid educators in reflecting upon, and thinking about, their own practices, ideas and perspectives.

Chapter 1 sets the scene for the book, exploring the nature of powerful primary geography and encouraging educators to reflect on their own personal geographies and their memories of learning geography as well as their current practices. Here the nature of geography is unpacked and powerful primary geography is discussed and situated in a broader, social, political and economic global context. Chapter 2 examines the importance of geographical thinking, advocating for the doing of geography rather than the learning of geography. Facilitating geographical investigations and enquiry-based approaches is the focus here, with excellent examples and case studies presented from both junior and senior-level classes with strong curriculum links to literacy. Chapter 3 highlights the importance of place-based education and the interdependent and interconnected concepts of sense of place, place attachment and identity. Attention is also given to critical pedagogy of place which promotes social and ecological justice. Excellent practical examples are provided for outdoor learning such as trail booklets, with links to literacy, art and drama, are provided. Chapter 4 explores the concept of playful approaches to teaching geography. Interestingly, the potential for children in making games for learning rather than playing games for learning is explored here. Play-based education is examined at both junior and senior class levels, from imaginative play and den-building, to exploring complex real-world issues such as trade and intercultural misunderstanding through simulation games. Excellent examples and supports are provided for educators in the way of creating games, card sorting activities, and using artefacts in primary geography. Chapter 5 focuses on the teaching about weather and climate change. Here, educators are challenged to transcend beyond teaching and learning 'about' weather, to teaching and learning 'in' and 'with' weather. A timely analysis of climate change education, climate change denial and climate justice education is

provided. Case studies and examples from schools illustrate innovative climate change education and the use of natural disasters as a gateway into climate change education. Chapter 6 explores strategies for promoting children's graphicacy skills, mapping skills and sense of space. Strategies outlined include journey sticks, mapping through children's literature and problem-solving through maps such as conducting local transport and walkability audits. Chapter 7 emphasises the links between geography and visual arts education. Of particular note are the accounts of children's responses to local and global issues through collaborative art work, landscape boxes and architecture. Chapter 8 outlines and presents strategies for teaching global and justice issues through primary geography. The chapter specifically focuses on the Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs) and the move from a charity-based to a justice-based approach. The focus of each chapter is initially situated at a broader societal level before being carefully unpacked and exemplified by the presentation of specific and clear sample of practical geography education undertaken in an educational context.

This book stands as a ground-breaking contribution to the teaching, learning and researching of primary geography education. It aids educators to reflect critically on their own practices, current global and local issues, and how these can be addressed meaningfully in their future educational practices. It should make for essential reading for all interested in geography education, climate change education, sustainability education and in education which positions children's agency and action to the forefront more broadly. *Powerful Primary Geography* can be read as a coherent whole, or each chapter can be read as a standalone contribution, deepening educators' knowledge and understanding of key geographical concepts including place, current events, spatial awareness and skills, and citizenship education. It represents a very important and timely contribution to literature on best practice geography education.

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