

# EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP: THEORY AND TEACHING PRACTICE

## Session 7: Implementing Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE) in Geography Education

Hajisoteriou, Christina and Angelides, Panayiotis

The purpose of geography is to help us get a handle on why this world is like it is, what is our role in it, and how can we sustain or change it. Geography exists to give us insights, feelings, and understandings of the world that we live in. How then should we think about ‘geography’?

Geography can often seem an abstract term, an abstract discipline even. Useful perhaps for knowing the capital of Cyprus, but not much else. This is a misconception. One way we can challenge this misconception is through beginning with the popular cliché, borrowed from high school science classes, “*X* [in this case, ‘cultural life’] *does not take place in a vacuum*”. Things, ideas, practices, and emotions all occur in a context, in a broader world that influences, values, celebrates, regulates, criminalises, sneers or tuts at particular activities and objects. Interest in this context, and how it influences, values, celebrates etc is one thing that geography and geographers do.

So, what are the appropriate contexts for geographical study? Context can be thought about in a variety of ways. Geographical context is often thought about in terms of national or political territories, physical landscapes, or exotic places. But any space, place or area, at any scale, or in

any circumstance, could be thought about as a geographical context. For example, on a macro scale, we could think of Planet Earth as a context and how it influences and is influenced by the activities going on within it. Alternatively, we could think of a public square – and how it seems to encourage some uses and users rather than others, a field (ditto, but maybe for animals too?), a home, a wall, a coastline. What about the contexts of a classroom, a street, a pub, or a sports field? What about a theatre, a mine, a museum, a library...? What activities are accepted as normal in these spaces? What behaviours are frowned upon? How are they regulated? Do people conform to these regulations, and what happens if they don't? These are all crucial critical questions that geographers use to analyse the contexts they study.

Geography can be defined as, “the study of Earth and its natural, physical, and human environment”. Geography involves the study of human activities and their interrelationships and interactions with environments on local to global scales. It bridges the natural and social sciences, and thus deals with spatial variability, that is, that phenomena, events, and processes vary within and between places and therefore should be regarded as an essential part of the education of all citizens in all societies. The abovementioned bases of geography can be regarded as supporting sustainability education (SE). Interdisciplinary approaches which integrate three aspects—the economic, social, and physical aspects of sustainability—are not only well suited for geography, but remain the pre-conditions for understanding its multiple dimensions.

The core concepts in geography education are space, place, landscape, and sustainability. Furthermore, sustainability can be conceptualized as a core geographical concept and also as a cross-curricular theme. In SE, sustainable development (SD) exercises can generate holistic experiences around philosophical, theoretical, and practical sustainability issues. Examples of the latter are forest schools, learning outside the classroom, and a range of creative approaches to education.

Education is seen as a key strategy for achieving sustainable development. Global Education and SE can help students develop their critical thinking skills and values and help them to understand a globalized and interdependent world and their own rights and responsibilities towards each other and the planet. These are the topics in human geography which must be comprehended by learners if they are to reach these goals in geography. The environmental anxiety caused by environmental problems has increased the need for SE. For their part, decision-makers should promote citizens' commitment to the environment and 'ecological literacy'.

Ecological literacy frameworks emphasize systems thinking, which involves identifying the various biophysical and social components in a given environmental context and distinguishing their interrelations. An ecologically literate individual has a clear perception and understanding of a system's dynamics and ruptures, as well as its past and alternate future trajectories. They understand the complexity of studied objects and phenomena, thus enabling better

decision-making. Higher order thinking skills, such as systems thinking, can be developed, for example, by place-based education (PBE).

## **Social Justice**

Social justice is a concept that is difficult to define. It primarily focuses on procedural justice (e.g. freedom to pursue goals) and on distributional justice (e.g. freedom to be free from discrimination and inequality). A social justice agenda has made a comeback from the radical geography heyday of the 1960s and 1970s. It has become increasingly central to the geographical issues championed by geographers who focus on issues such as socio-economic divides, environmental ethics, power relations, and discrimination entrenched in society. The geographical concept of place lends itself naturally to analyses of processes and phenomena that both empower and disempower the lives of people.

The fluency in the way geographical terminology can be applied to researching these issues thus points to the responsibility imbued in learners of the discipline in uncovering and addressing issues identified. The increased focus on ethics in geography parallels a growing awareness amongst geographers for a need for concrete action to bring about a “compassionate geography”. Geographers, therefore, are “responsible for who we are, how we live and the social effects we have others” and have a duty to share what we know.

These arguments have profound implications for geography education in terms of its learning outcomes, skills taught and core content. Teachers have the responsibility to “revive” the teaching of social justice as part of the tradition of geography. The implication of this, when distilled to a curriculum and pedagogical level, is that geography teachers need to have an ethical commitment to make a difference to our community and to achieve positive change in society. When realized, this will reframe the Geography curriculum in terms of its explicit and implicit learning outcomes. This endeavor remains a difficult one because of a “chasm” that has developed between developments in geography taught in the university and the time warp that school geography seem to be trapped in. There is, in addition, no mechanism to mediate the transition and change thus resulting in continuous battles over ‘what’, ‘why’ and ‘how’ of geography being taught in schools.

### **Citizenship education**

For how is ‘citizenship’ constructed, embodied, experienced, performed and understood other than certain spaces, at certain scales, or in specific contexts? Is citizenship about helping out your neighbour? Is it about supporting the unknown ‘other’ in your local area? Is it having a connection and shared understanding with people across your nation? Or is it about feeling a sense of humanism and attachment to communities across the globe? Whatever it is, it is unrelentingly geographical.

Citizenship in its material (including economic) and political sense is extremely important. Holding the ‘right’ kind of passport is crucial at a time of hyper-mobility linked with hyper-anxiety about who crosses international borders and with what kind of intentions. Different passports and different citizenships hold very different sets of rights, meanings and status. Holders of British passports, for example, appear to enjoy greater freedoms to travel and gain visas than someone from Sudan or Mongolia.

Citizenship in a particular country can be learned, examined and awarded immigrants can do courses and be tested on their ‘citizenship’ knowledge. Hence, being a citizen of one place is not a fixed political identity because with movement and re-settlement it can be changed; some people are allowed to hold dual citizenship.

Citizenship in its social and cultural sense is often much more intangible. For many people it can remain dormant, seldom thought about. It might only seem to matter at times of particular events (whether or not one’s nation will go to war) or in particular places when proof of who you are can determine whether or not you can get ‘home’ (such as people affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004 who lost all sources of their identity).

Only geography as a discipline is uniquely placed to work through what citizenship may mean at a wide diversity of levels – and therefore has a crucial role to play in citizenship education. For geographers explore the ways in which space and place both constitute and are constituted by the

political, social, cultural and economic spheres that are caught up in processes of inclusion/exclusion of people as citizens, from the very local ‘sense of belonging in a neighbourhood’ through to who is involved in global decision making – or decision making that impacts us all at a global scale. Geography is inherent within and intrinsic to all the critical issues around citizenship concerning society today:

- Debates surrounding immigration, whether regarding the ‘placing’ (dispersal) and/or ‘integration’ of refugees and asylum seekers in the EU, or the role, rights and responsibilities of economic migrants, involve examining the geographies of people’s movement, settlement and relationships with new (aka ‘host’) societies.
- An increasing focus on crime/fear of crime, the rise of ‘asbos’ and a new disenchanting/disengaged (predominantly youth) underclass, is caught up with the ways in which citizenship is constructed in and by spaces of deprivation – a geographical perspective is required to analyse how communities/individuals become socially marginalised through economic, political and cultural processes, or to understand how geographical isolation in particular affects senses of citizenship.
- Discussion about recent political devolution and fragmentation (at a range of scales) includes exploring the construction of identity and sense of belonging in different places,

and the complex (re)negotiations of citizenship happening across and within different parts of the globe today.

- The growing salience of issues around climate change and environmental sustainability draw upon and at the same time question notions of citizenship and our responsibilities to unknown others, crucially across space (from local to global) as well as across time (future generations).
- More informal, everyday conversations regarding access to and provision of health, education, other public services and public spaces are rooted in the relations we have with each other and the places we inhabit together –and the feelings/emotions underpinning how citizenship is felt in place