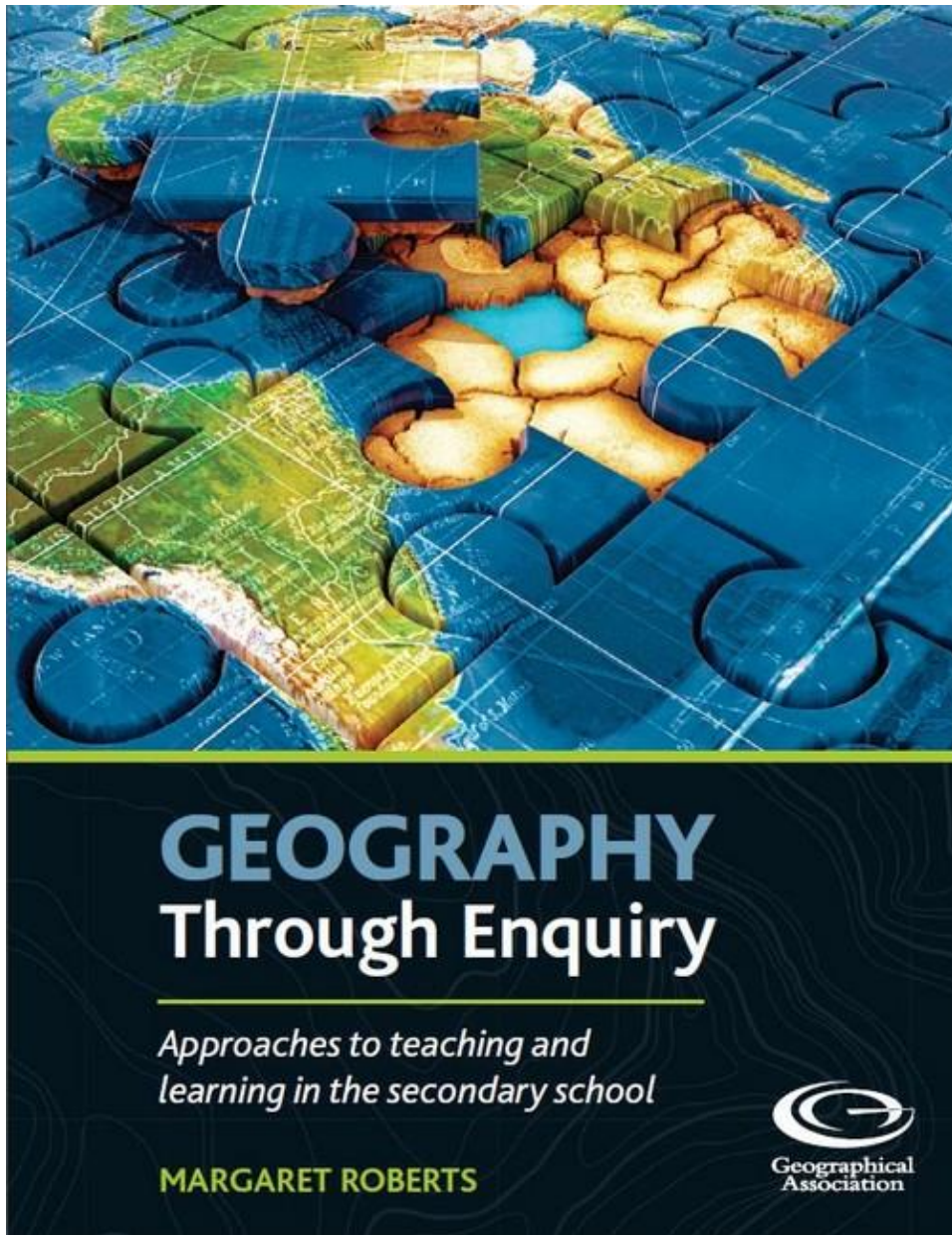


Geography Through Enquiry: Approaches To Teaching And Learning In The Secondary School



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Margaret Roberts' new book takes her exploration of aspects of enquiry learning through geography education significantly beyond her initial offering, *Learning Through Enquiry*. Writing in an accessible and readable style, she has succeeded in presenting a comprehensive commentary on the role and function of enquiry learning in geography – with particular reference to those teachers involved in providing geography education for 11 to 18 year old students. Although the intended audience of mainstream geography teachers is clear, there is much here for the beginning teacher in initial teacher education or the practitioner-researcher working towards a higher degree in education. Indeed, mindful of the axiom that 'teaching is essentially a research-based profession' Roberts helpfully offers one or two 'Suggestions for research' (with selected references) at the end of each of her 21 chapters.

Enquiry-based learning is popular among many, but by no means all, educators working in schools, colleges and universities. It has numerous advocates, but has rather eschewed accurate definition and description – there are clearly many forms of enquiry-based learning, all valid in their own ways but each offering different things for both students and teachers. Roberts correctly asserts that there is nothing uniquely 'geographical' about enquiry but acknowledges the debt that geography education and educators owe to enquiry-based teaching and learning, particularly where the focus is on gaining geographical subject knowledge. Enquiry learning is reportedly promoted in many countries, across a range of subjects and at all levels of education - from early years to university-level – but comes in many forms (from genuine student-led enquiry, to that which is closely planned, delivered and mediated by the teacher). It is evident that Roberts tends to favour the former, advocating constructivist approaches to education, but she can also find merit in enquiry activities that are more teacher-directed.

The coverage of content in the chapters is impressive. Roberts divides the book into two, roughly even, sections – the first twelve chapters are broadly theoretical (addressing questions and issues such as 'Why adopt an enquiry approach?', 'The role of the teacher in an enquiry approach', 'Making sense of geography through reasoning and argumentation'

and ‘Controversial issues in geography’); chapters 13 to 21 are more practical (including, for example, sections on ‘Mind maps’, ‘Public meeting role play’, ‘Directed activities related to text’ and ‘Using the World Wide Web: web enquiries’). Her interest in the use of language, discussion and dialogic approaches to learning are apparent, with sensible observations being made about the links between language and conceptual understanding developed through enquiry approaches. The scope of this book is therefore extensive and has much to offer a wide readership. Importantly, the contribution of enquiry learning to those involved in teaching and learning during the ‘examination years’ is also taken into account – an important consideration given the tendency of educators often to avoid such approaches in this phase of learning. Throughout the text there is reference to students learning how to reason and how to argue, and the necessity for them to ‘understand how geographical knowledge claims are related to explanation and evidence’ (p.78).

Geography through Enquiry draws substantially on evidence gathered from geography teaching in English secondary schools, however Roberts also has experience of geography education in other jurisdictions (most notably Singapore) which is drawn upon successfully. Indeed, this book will provide support and guidance for geography teachers in many countries that fall within the broad remit of Euro-American geography and geography education traditions. Its contents reflect professional development activities successfully trialed with practicing teachers; these have been taught, evaluated and developed in the light of feedback from practitioners. It is also significant that Roberts’ professional background and wide ranging experience, as a teacher educator and as an active member of the geography education research community, is brought to bear in the writing of this book.

Roberts’ book is informative without being evangelical and helpfully combines aspects of both theory and practice (indeed, she states that for her the division between the two is artificial as all teaching is built on assumptions, ideas and theories – which are often implicit – about how students learn best). The importance of creating a culture of enquiry learning in classrooms, rather than occasionally ‘bolting on’ one or two enquiry activities, is emphasized. (Finally, any book that makes reference to extracts from Monty Python’s ‘Argument Clinic sketch’ (p.71) – in the context of a chapter on making sense of geography through reasoning and argumentation – has much to commend it!)

As a publication of the Geographical Association this book can be downloaded as an eBook, or as individual chapters, from the Association’s website shop, which may be an attractive option for some readers.