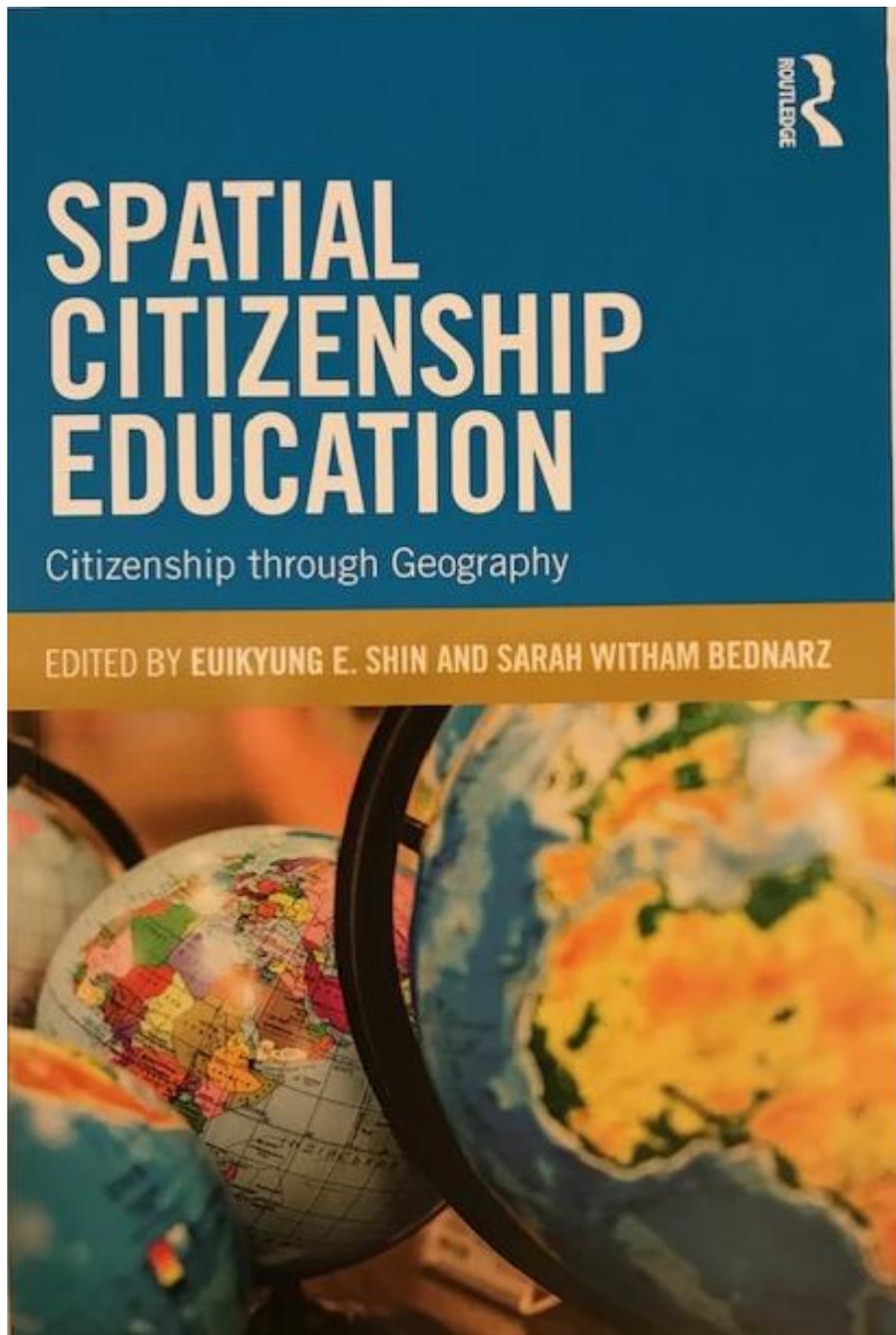


## **Spatial Citizenship Education: Citizenship through Geography**



### **Editors**

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**Reviewer**

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Spatial Citizenship Education sets out to explore ways to engage with and promote citizenship through a deeper understanding of spatial and geographic perspectives. In doing this, the book has to define concepts concerning spatial citizenship and geography and explain how they are mutually supportive and relevant, before setting out some of the issues and barriers that constrain practice; identifying possible reasons for a deficiency in this regard; drawing on successful case studies of practice to illustrate what could be done, and make recommendations about ways forward. This is a lot for one book to tackle and this highly regarded set of authors have taken the task seriously.

The theoretical background and arguments for high quality geography work very well in tandem with and through citizenship, particularly when considered spatially, as do the case studies and examples of practice, though one could wish for more of these. One strong premise of the book is that geography and citizenship share a common goal and much of this book's chapters' synergy arises from the theme that 'powerful disciplinary knowledge in geography provides a means to understand the world and its dynamic social and physical systems' (p.xv).

The book contains eleven chapters by prominent geographers, and from across the age range from early years education to the secondary phases, or, to use the language of the book from kindergarten, elementary and secondary school, as this book is predominantly shaped by, and for, a North American context. However, something that quickly becomes apparent to a reader from a UK education context is a commonality of underpinning thinking around high quality geography, as a subject with clearly defined knowledge and rigor. That geography is taught as part of social studies within the curriculum in the USA has its own particular challenges. Problems identified by various authors that particularly resonate are teachers' insufficient subject knowledge; poor perceptions of geography as a subject of worth, and a lack of understanding generally about the use of and engagement with, geospatial technologies.

Thornton (Chapter two) suggests that geography frequently holds a weak connection to citizenship objectives, even when the curriculum appears to direct such thinking. He suggests that some of the fault lies with teacher training practices, suggesting that what happens in practice tends to be sporadic and asks questions about the conditions necessary to enable it to happen more broadly. This book asks many questions, and does not always have the answers, pointing to the need for more research and thinking about ways forward.

For Thornton, getting students to ask questions about end products and their provenance and geographical background, rather than having a blind acceptance is desirable; he suggests students should learn to think scientifically and experimentally rather than vicariously and links this to aspects of a critical geographical pedagogy. The issues and responses suggested by Thornton make sense but beg further details of examples in action.

Shin and Bednarz (Chapter 1) set out a conceptual approach to the idea of spatial citizenship, stressing the idea of a new form of citizenry who has enhanced understanding of the world through a deeper grasp of geography's key concepts: space, place, power, scale and human-environment relationships. They explain that since all actions take place within space, and are dynamic and constantly changing, the geographer is better placed to understand the significance of the spatial. Shin (Chapter 11) reflects on this to conclude the book. The expression of citizenship throughout this book is one that relates to conceptual interpretations rather than operational or procedural ones, Shin and Bednarz explain, and hence is not fixed and can be critically examined. This approach enables different aspects of citizenship to be explored throughout the book.

As geospatial technologies have changed our world and revolutionized the spread of ideas through social media and other processes that operate within and without earth space, we are simultaneously able to communicate globally and locally, something that Stables (1998) argued would create a tension between proximity and distance and deplete values developed through close association with, and attention to, place. The rapid growth of spatially savvy technologies has accelerated in recent years, posing many questions about the role of attachment to place and citizenship. Thus, this book is a timely reflection on the role of spatial technologies in changing the way we view and communicate with others as well as how they can be used to enhance learning.

In both recognizing the vital and necessary potential of geography to inform a conceptualization and enactment of 'citizenship' this book delivers a range of tinted geographic lens through which to view how this might be so. Whilst some chapters hint at the politics behind the rationale, constraints and enablers of citizenship in its broadest terms, others are more forthright in their identification of particular contexts. Schmidt (Chapter 4), for example, gives examples deeply rooted in current issues, by posing questions about entwined problems of race, geographical location and access to voting.

Lambert (Chapter 3) explores the contribution of school geography to citizenship, which he explains acts as a bridge between the ideas of geography and spatial citizenship. He defines the latter clearly at the outset as a term that 'captures the importance of using spatial representations to develop competence with Geographical Information (GI) technologies' (p.23). Lambert is also clear at the outset about the significance of geography education in developing global understanding as a matter of human survival and asks big questions about the role of geography in the current curriculum and political climate in the light of pressing environmental issues and threats. Whilst this reminds us that there is much at stake, it is reassuring stuff in the sense that it cements the significance of geography and raises the bar for the importance of the matters being discussed.

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Lambert goes on to stress the role of powerful knowledge and in this case, powerful geographical knowledge, imbued with the capacity to think and make sense of and apply it. He makes the case for high quality geography teaching of powerful knowledge in the context of powerful pedagogies as enabling dynamic and critical thought. Through these arguments, he delivers a persuasive and sensible theoretical framework for purposing powerful geographical knowledge as part of a worthwhile curriculum. A useful reminder from Lambert, chiming with definitions of sustainability in which ‘uncertainty’ is seen as a virtue, is his comment that knowledge is not fixed and immutable and requires critical analysis and reshaping. Lambert asserts that ‘...better knowledge, is always in a state of becoming’ (p.33).

Schmidt (Chapter 4) offers an alternative approach to the subject matter in hand, using stories of people whose civic attachments and rights are vulnerable because of civic practices. ‘The spatiality of citizenship attends to the boundaries that construct and regulate who is a citizen’ (p.51). There is a challenge for educators she concludes, as well as policymakers, in renegotiating space, which has great potential. The stark reality that cannot be denied is that people’s quality of life is affected by and through, their connections - or as in some of these examples, the denial of connections to, relevant services, goods and facilities. In understanding yet more of the complexities of space-related constraints that govern different factions of society we begin to grasp the very real need for comprehensive change in current political and education systems, both of which are interrelated of course.

As if to consolidate this growing sense of urgency within the book, Bednarz and Bednarz (Chapter 5) propose a redesign of civic education in the United States. This is especially relevant, they suggest, because of the rise in geospatial technologies and the way in which people engage with social media and as citizens. We are, they say, drawn into a world in which our way of thinking, relationships and emotional responses are shared on a scale not before experienced. These authors acknowledge that whilst citizenship is a worthy endeavor, it is not clearly defined. They consequently examine models of citizenship and what these might look like, using research from 2004 to 2016. This is a useful extension of earlier work at the start of the book and part of an ongoing dialogue about different forms of citizenship throughout the chapters. These discussions and historical reviews of citizenship leave the reader free to interpret what is needed to some degree but also ducks questions about what it means to be a global citizen, although Lambert tackles this briefly by using arguments by Standish to refute the concept without taking an opposing stance.

Bednarz and Bednarz use a simple example, drawing on research from Mitchell and Elwood (2013), to discuss the powerful and emancipatory role geography can make in preparing children for active citizenship and how, for example, simple exploratory mapping exercises with children can help them articulate themselves within the context of a wider world. This latter research finding highlighted by Bednarz and Bednarz echoes with early findings from the Meaningful Map Project ([www.meaningfulmaps.org](http://www.meaningfulmaps.org)) and work by Owens, Scoffham and Vujakovic (2018) who have found similar results in their early analysis of more than 500 maps drawn by young children. A social portrait of everyday life through the

eyes and voices of children can indeed hold much power and it is timely in the book that we start to consider implications and impacts on and for students.

What if, Kenreich (Chapter 6) postulates, the unique power of geography was harnessed within the curriculum to advance social justice aims? He goes on to explain the context for this claim and how neighborhood mapping techniques can be used towards such an end. Students can, he contends, develop a critical understanding of themselves in such a context, using enquiry and real-world learning in the field to express themselves through enquiry and community maps. There follows a case study of fourth grade students and participatory mapping based on careful enquiry about alcohol related problems in their neighborhood. Kenreich explains how a resultant storymap was presented to adults and student voice used to convey thoughts from those involved.

After some deft theoretical and historical and contextual underpinning, this chapter by Kenreich comes at a point in the book where we clamor for examples of geography and citizenship in detailed action. There are recommendations about how to develop this kind of fieldwork and mapping approach based on real issues. For me this chapter resonated with its practical blend of theory and practice. Tempered with careful reflection, these stories from the classroom brought a sharper focus on some of the issues of contemporary citizenship and how to approach them.

More than that, the idea of participatory citizenship has enormous value when used as part of a critical thinking sequence that is firmly orientated in and through geography. Here is a subject that provides skills and knowledge to make sense of jumbled information that can synergize disparate viewpoints and approaches and offer participatory engagement through informed choice and decision-making. This latter point might be something manifest in students' direct choices and actions. It may also guide better informed choices through the ballot box in later life.

Active and informed decision-making is a vital part of spatial citizenship. Schlemper and Stewart (Chapter 7) espouse the virtues of a 'Think global, act local' approach. In doing so, they stress the need for an understanding of spatial tools and thinking and how vital the underpinning literacies and knowledge of symmetry, orientation, scale, distance and related concepts are. The chapter by Baker, Curtis and Millsaps (Chapter 8) is devoted to a practical consideration of carefully selected geotechnologies and how they can help develop and improve critical elements of spatial decision-making.

A very valid point is that a spatial perspective helps to make connections between scales of enquiry. Schlemper and Stewart describe the success of a series of structured enquiry-led approaches into the neighborhood through participative mapping and geospatial technologies. From this, they develop a curriculum framework that utilizes the approach of an experiential model. They conclude that from the research carried out students reported how, through enquiry and engagement, they learnt more about the complexities of their local area and as a result became more prepared to be active citizens.

What I especially liked about the book is that it makes a great case for high quality geography and spatial citizenship across all age phases and is not exclusive in its delivery. Hinde (Chapter 9) argues that not only is geography vital for the development of an informed citizenry but that it needs to start in the early years of schooling. She counteracts the view held by some that young children are incapable of grasping geographical concepts and sets out a compelling case that as young children come to school with funds of geographical knowledge, even before other literacies are developed, there is plenty on which teachers can build. Her sensible chapter then does exactly that by building on this premise of children as capable young geographers to describe some ways in which this might be attempted in the classroom. Hinde sets out what some of the barriers might be to the development of young geographers and how to circumnavigate them. She also refers to some teachers' lack of subject knowledge as a barrier to successful geography teaching and learning. Hinde strikes a chord too when she argues that it is a misguided belief that cutting geography and other social studies will increase the time available for an activity with a perceived higher value, such as reading. The exact opposite is likely to happen she explains as research has shown that children with rich experiences in these content rich subjects such as geography do indeed become better readers.

We move from kindergarten to secondary and Jo (Chapter 10) identifies further relevant challenges. One is the lack of understanding about spatial citizenship and its relationship to geography education. This, suggests Jo, is one reason why challenges are encountered when trying to effect implementation in the classroom. Another barrier is insufficient research on appropriate pedagogies. Civic engagement is vital as an activity that adults engage with and in this sense, schools do have a good deal to offer in terms of empowerment, ensuring students realize that at the very least, an inclusive and specialized vocabulary allows meaningful access into dialogues that might otherwise degrade to sound bites and fake news.

Overall, the book tackles many of the pertinent issues around the theme of geography education citizenship. It raises many questions in doing so, whilst offering few answers. It is an extremely useful reference book for contemporary thinking and theoretical frameworks, as you would expect given the credentials of the editors and authors. The case studies will be of use to the thoughtful classroom teacher or student and those seeking higher level qualifications. There is much in this book to think about.

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