

What is  
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# What is geography's contribution to making citizens?

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(based on contributions from Jon Anderson, Kye Askins, Ian Cook, Luke Desforges, James Evans, Maria Fannin, Duncan Fuller, Helen Griffiths, David Lambert, Roger Lee, Julie MacLeavy, Lucy Mayblin, John Morgan, Becky Payne, Jessica Pykett, David Roberts and Tracey Skelton.)

This article is the result of some of the early work of the Geographical Association's Citizenship Working Group which was established in September 2006 to support the development of the citizenship dimension of geography education. The group invited a number of geographers to write short 'viewpoint' essays responding to the question: What is geography's contribution to making citizens? (The original versions are posted on the CWG website.) This article draws out some of the themes of these articles through a question and answer format which addresses what we mean by 'citizenship', how it is 'geographical', how it is changing, what's new about 'citizenship education' in the UK, what this means for school pupils and their teachers, and what we therefore believe geography's contribution to making citizens might be. Though the question and answer format may seem to imply that there are clear answers to these questions, we hope that the article will prompt argument and discussion about geography's relationship to citizenship.

**Q. What do we mean by 'citizenship'?**

**A.** Citizenship is a complex and contested term. The implications of citizenship for geography teaching in part depend on the specific meanings attached to it. 'Citizenship' is a word that describes people's collective political identities, and how society organises the involvement of individuals in decision making at a collective level. Citizens share sets of political, civil and social rights (Marshall, 1992) and these rights are produced and sustained through practices of governance. Citizenship has traditionally been conceived as organised through the modern nation-state, and a standard narrative of the emergence of modern citizenship is one in which the nation-state gradually extends political, economic and social rights to wider sections of the population (see Urry, 2000). However, recent work has argued that the central role of the nation-state is being transformed, and that citizenship is increasingly organised through a variety of non-state as well as state institutions. This extends citizenship in the cultural sphere, to describe people's senses of belonging in relation to places and people, near and far; senses of responsibility for the ways in which these relations are shaped; and a sense of how individual and collective action helps to shape the world in which we live (Maxey, 1999). 'Citizenship' is about helping your neighbour; supporting known and unknown 'others' in your local area; having a connection and shared understanding with people across your nation; feeling a sense of humanism and attachment to communities across the globe. For many people it can remain dormant, seldom thought about. It might 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). In summary, citizenship is about relations between people, the ways in which we are governed and govern others, and the values and dispositions that bring 'us' together and stand 'us' apart.

**Q. How is 'citizenship' geographical?**

**A.** Geography is centrally concerned with the formative significance of space and relations in and across space. It allows us to identify patterns, examine causes, offer explanations, make connections,

interrogate meanings, see processes in context, and to analyse and critique. It brings together social, economic, cultural, political, environmental and other scholarship to enrich, complicate and trouble our understandings of the world. The complexity of this account of geography's concerns means that geographers understand citizenship in a variety of ways. However, in general, geographers approach 'citizenship' as constructed, embodied, experienced, performed and understood in certain spaces and contexts, and at certain scales. Geographers study the making of citizens across multiple locales, political units and scales of governance. Geography therefore enables critical insight into ongoing processes of social, political and economic restructuring and their impacts on the relationships between individuals, states and societies. It is fundamentally concerned with the construction of individuals *qua* citizens at the local, national and global scales. It helps us better to understand the rights and responsibilities of 'citizens', and better to make sense of the frequently unequal distribution of opportunities and constraints this creates. It empowers us to reflect critically on the conditions in which 'we' are made citizens. It enables us to rethink that which we take for granted, to unpack concepts and geographical 'facts', and to question the way in which the world operates. These approaches stress how geographical thinking may promote the development of radically self-aware and arguably more democratic citizens.

#### Q. How is 'citizenship' changing?

A. As noted above, many geographers argue that the standard story of citizenship's relationship to the nation-state is no longer sufficient. Times have changed and our understandings of citizenship must change with them. Spatial and economic relations within the UK, for instance, were radically transformed in the last quarter of the twentieth century by the inter-related processes of de-industrialisation (accompanied by the decline of working-class communities), international migration, and globalisation. Under these circumstances, senses of national identity inevitably changed. Colls (2002), for example, argues that towards the end of the twentieth century, "Englishness" could no longer be seen as quite so natural, fixed, or absolute. Older senses of "island races", "garden hearts", "industrial landscapes", "ecclesiastical villages", "northern grit", "southern charm", "ordered relationships", "rural redemption", and "rule Britannia" were on their way out. They have been replaced by an "Englishness" defined, in part, by an "extraordinary openness to the cultures of other peoples" (ibid, p. 380). Though this sentence focuses on 'Englishness', it is increasingly common to recognise the importance of specific national identities – a 'Four nations' approach to citizenship.



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In addition, issues like global warming, the deregulation of capital markets, international security, and international human rights have become impossible for any nation-state to deal with single-handedly (Jelin, 2000; Soysal, 1995). State-organised citizenship has become 'denationalised' (Sassen, 2002) as more decisions about these big issues now have to be made collectively via 'communities of states' like the European Union, World Trade Organisation, NATO and World Bank. Citizenship is also enacted at these scales via the rapidly growing Non-Governmental Organisation sector – including organisations such as Greenpeace, Oxfam and ActionAid – who increasingly organise political participation in global issues (Anheier *et al*, 2002). Understandings of citizenship are therefore changing, within and beyond academia, and there is now a widespread appreciation that: a) our actions are funnelled through not only the nation-state but also a wide variety of institutions, including the corporate and voluntary sectors; b) what we do 'here' has enormous consequences for collective life at a global scale; and c) global connections are complex and ever-changing, so understanding the consequences of our actions requires knowledge-intensive expertise.

**Q. What's new about citizenship education?**

**A.** Though citizenship is sometimes seen to be a 'new' subject on the school curriculum, there is a sense in which geography has long been concerned with the 'making of citizens'. For example, at the end of the nineteenth century, concerns about the loss of political and economic power to Germany led to calls for a programme of physical, mental and social improvement among the population, which involved setting up a series of 'English' subjects including English Literature, history and geography. Supported by ideas of environmental determinism, one of geography's roles during this period was to 'educate' students about the 'superiority' of the 'British race'. During the interwar and post Second World War eras, it has been suggested that geography was enlisted to help promote and protect the valued qualities of the 'English landscape' that were threatened by urban and suburban encroachment (Matless, 1998). The post-war period saw a dramatic rise in outdoor leisure pursuits such as rambling and camping, as well as the establishment of the Field Studies Council. To some extent, geography fieldtrips were predicated on the idea that taking urban (usually) and working-class children out into the countryside would enable them to appreciate, and foster a sense of belonging with/to, the landscape of the nation.

This suggests that geography has long been a means by which certain kinds of citizens – and certain ideas

about citizenship – have been promoted through the school system. The latest moves to develop citizenship education may be interpreted as responses to another set of pressing national concerns. Concerns about citizenship have been at the heart of the New Labour project: for example, in David Blunkett's Civil Renewal agenda, Tony Blair's disdain for 'job culture' and his promotion of the idea of 'no rights without responsibilities', and Gordon Brown's call (at the Labour Party conference in 2006) for the establishment of common British values – what he describes as 'habits of citizenship around which we can and must unite'. Educating pupils about citizenship was also considered essential because low turnouts at election time and (young) people's apparent apathy towards, or disengagement from, the formal political process threatened seriously to damage the legitimacy of 'democratically elected' governments.

The citizenship programme introduced in 2002 was based on three main strands: political literacy, community involvement, and social and moral responsibility. The informed citizen was a person who could think about their rights and duties and the power of the State. So, not only would pupils learn appropriate new topics – about legal and electoral systems and employment rights, for instance – they would also learn about them in such a way that 'empower(s) them to participate effectively as informed, critical, responsible citizens' (QCA, 1998, p. 9). What was 'new' about this citizenship education, then, was that it made explicit practices of citizenship, and aimed to empower pupils to question the circumstances of their own schooling, its bodies of knowledge and practices, and their 'identities' as citizens.

**Q. What does this mean for geography pupils?**

**A.** The different ways in which citizenship is defined and the different ways in which geographers study it suggest that young people cannot simply be treated as citizens in the waiting. The challenge for teachers is to recognise, and work with, the ways in which citizenship is part of young people's everyday lives in multiple ways: from feeling that they 'belong' to the school community, to feeling safe on the streets when walking home at night, to feeling empathy towards geographically and socially distant 'others'. To do this, we must also recognise that teachers and students are 'geographers' both in disciplinary *and* everyday-life senses. Interconnectedness, difference and diversity, international trade, migration, urban regeneration, changing senses of place and belonging, and social responsibility are 'geographical' themes that can be both experienced *and* studied. Immigration, asylum,

placement, the rights of economic migrants, crime, ASBOs, the 'underclass', social marginalisation, political devolution, the provision of and access to public services and spaces, where the goods that we buy are made, climate change, our responsibilities to others near and far, elsewhere and in the future, are all 'geographical' topics with which teachers and students have personal connections. None are problems that only 'other' people experience.

These themes can be illustrated through the example of immigration. Geography makes citizens in the sense that geography is about mapping borders that contain nation-states. These legislative spaces are spaces of citizenship. But states can give and take away citizenship. This is a live issue even in classrooms where no first generation migrants to the UK are present. And it is regularly discussed in the news. A recent example is the story of British athlete Christine Ohuruogu, who won gold in the 400m at the 2007 athletics world championship in Osaka but, threatened with a ban from the British team for missing drug tests, was considering running for Nigeria at the 2012 Olympics in London (Phillips, 2007). This example raises lots of questions that could be explored with students. For example, who they would like to play for, and who they *could* play for, in the sport or pastime that they like the most? Why might Ohuruogu, for example, *like* to run for Nigeria? If it's part of her family history, what could she learn about her family's experiences of gaining British citizenship? What would she have to do to change her 'nationality'? How is that organised? Who makes the decision about who belongs where? And what criteria do they use – e.g. family history, colonial history, work skills and qualifications, wealth? Is it easier for some to change citizenship than others? Is it more difficult to become citizens of some states than others? Who benefits and who does not from the privileges of citizenship? Who is posited as an 'ideal citizen'? Is it possible to change your citizenship and national identity, be a citizen of more than one nation, have some kind of split citizenship and national identity, and/or have no citizenship or national identity? How can pupils find out the rules and procedures?

This example illustrates the complexities of citizenship. 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 kinds of intentions. Different passports and different citizenships hold very different sets of rights, meaning and status. Holders of British passports appear to enjoy greater freedoms to travel and gain visas than people from Sudan or Mongolia. Citizenship of a particular country can be learned, examined and awarded – immigrants can do courses and be tested on 'citizenship' knowledge. Examining these issues with students will help them to understand how being

a citizen of one nation-state is not a fixed identity, how citizenship is a powerful means of social/spatial exclusion as well as inclusion, and therefore how discussions of citizenship are inevitably discussions about social justice.

This kind of questioning can raise uncomfortable issues, not least because it opens up geography classrooms to political discussion. However, it also promotes the skills of reflection, communication, negotiation and other forms of participation in decision making that are often claimed as central to geographical learning. It requires classrooms to be characterised by a 'culture of argument' or 'education for conversation' in which students are encouraged to ask questions, feel comfortable with scepticism and adopting a cautious approach to complexity, but feel enabled to make judgements of merit. This has been called a condition of 'confident uncertainty', and geography education can develop students skills for understanding and dealing with an uncertain world.



### Q. What does this mean for geography teachers?

A. Geography plays a distinctive role in citizenship education through performing 'geographical imaginations' enabling young people to locate themselves in relation to other people and places. Teachers need to approach these imaginations in a critical and self-conscious way, in order to teach in a 'morally careful' manner, and especially because there is a problem with the prevailing 'geographical imagination' which underpins a national curriculum which remains embedded in the era *before* de-industrialisation, international migration and globalisation. Here, geographies move 'out' from the local to 'the full range of scales'<sup>1</sup>, which implies that

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places and environments are a) territorial b) the unproblematic object of 'geographical enquiry and skills', and c) where pupils are located, i.e. centred within territories which are in turn centred within others ... and so on, out. The notion of the 'bounded territory' is central to all levels of the national curriculum – right 'up' to what is referred to as 'exceptional performance' beyond level 8. Certainly there are references to 'knowledge and understanding of patterns and processes', but these are very much 'placed' within and between bounded territories – 'places' or 'localities', as the level descriptions have it.

An appreciation of twenty-first century 'denationalised' citizenship geographies requires teachers to adopt and work with an alternative 'geographical imagination'. Roger Lee illustrates this in his 'viewpoint' essay (see also Cook *et al.*, 2007). Here, he describes the typical sense of place and belonging he experiences at the start of his day:

*'This morning I showered in water supplied from the aquifer beneath this locality and supplied by a French-owned water company and dried myself on a towel made in Portugal from a UK department store. I then dressed in clothes all bought in the UK: underwear made in Egypt and supplied by an icon of the British High Street recently recovered from severe financial underperformance; tee-shirt supplied by a UK-owned retailer and made in Mauritius with cotton from who knows where; jeans from an Italian clothing firm and made, remarkably enough, in Italy; sweatshirt made in Pakistan and branded by a well-known US sports-wear supplier – recently the target of protests about the appalling labour conditions found along its supply-chain. For my breakfast, I ate muesli packaged by a Dorset food processor and containing fruit from a wide range of climatic zones as well as cereals produced in Dorset; locally-made bread supplied by a national supermarket group; olive oil spread – from the same supermarket but made in Italy; home-made marmalade from oranges grown in Spain and sugar, via a UK-based multinational company, in Mauritius; coffee from Java but supplied through a UK retail chain and made on an Italian coffee machine.'*

This example suggests how Lee and the place he inhabits – like us and the places we inhabit – are thoroughly *de-centred*. Self and place are understood as infinitesimally tiny parts of a highly complex and infinite number of networks held together by purposive social action and combining in diverse ways to create the variable geographies of places. Here, the sense of belonging with others and to places and spaces is defined not merely by the territory in which you happen to have been born or to which you can lay some other increasingly restrictive legal claim to belong. People

are formative nodes of dynamic and non-territorial geographies that stretch across space and literally constitute – but, via the geographies of preceding networks, are also shaped by – particular places. Territories are therefore social and environmental constructions and are always in process of making, destruction, transformation and remaking. They are – like the networks that constitute them – forever temporary. Such complex interconnections across the world inform citizenship issues and need to be reflected within geography teaching.

**Q. So - what is geography's contribution to making citizens?**

**A.** Places are stabilised through a variety of devices (e.g. the nation-state) wielded by the powerful and modified through struggles of various kinds by the less than powerful. But if space is understood merely as territory, it is hardly surprising that political identities are assumed to spring naturally from such places – especially when they are bedecked in all sorts of symbols of presumed significance – a currency, for example, a flag, a monarch, a football team, a nation, a people, a 'cricket test'. And neither is it surprising that this politics is narrowly focused on such territories, on the identity of an individual with those territories, and on the identity of territories and people beyond as 'other'. In a world of ever-increasing network intensity, neither is it surprising that all sorts of disastrous consequences follow from such a static and limited sense of political identity. And yet, the alternative geographical imagination outlined above can enable students to realise that their 'place in the world' is *decentred* along a multitude of networks rather than (at least partially and temporarily) *centred* in a set of territories themselves centred in each other. This alternative geographical imagination elucidates a notion of citizenship as relationally and globally formed. It recognises the open-ended nature of relations in geographical space. But this is quite different from the narrow absolutist notion of citizenship based on national-state territories practised in political relations and in the national curriculum for geography and for citizenship.

Geography as a discipline, then, cannot make citizens, but it can create the language and intellectual space for explorations of the meaning, spatiality and contextualisation of what citizenship is, where it plays a role and what future citizenship rights might or might not entail. It can allow us to think about the politics and contexts of events, analysing and critiquing the spaces, places and scales of citizenship. It can help us consider the issue of rights and responsibilities of citizenship, the meanings of 'belonging' and connectedness with places and spaces, and the injustices of citizenship and non-citizenship. It can



help us to understand our common world more effectively. It can help us to appreciate how we all take and make places through our everyday ideas and actions. Citizenship becomes meaningful when it is understood and contextualised, so teachers and pupils can interpret what makes them citizens and what they might choose to do with such an identity. The logic of geography points to an inescapable feature of human existence – that of ‘self’ and ‘other’, ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘here’ and ‘there’ are one and the same; contributions to the networks that make ‘here’ and ‘there’ what they are. In this sense, geography is fundamentally and inherently subversive. It necessarily redefines the notions of identity essential to the presumption of a territorial politics which is both outdated and has only ever been of partial relevance. The development of critical, creative, alternative ‘geographical imaginations’ for twenty-first century citizenship is central to this process.

But it is not only a matter of getting pupils to understand this ‘imagination’. School geography is often learned in an abstract and distanced way. There are patterns and laws and people affected by them. Students often report learning their textbook’s two-page spread about, say, the banana trade. Developing a ‘culture of argument’ or ‘education for conversation’ for citizenship (and other) geographies should equip them with an ‘adaptive expertise’ so that they are able to recognise important new connections as and when they arise during their lifetime in ways which will undoubtedly be unexpected from today’s perspective. This expertise will need to focus on pupils’ current and future potentials as a) citizens of nation-states (e.g. how nation-states impact upon global issues via, for example, the UN or Kyoto-type agreements), b) as

employees and consumers, aware of corporate citizenship and responsibility (e.g. how organisations recognise the threat climate changes poses to their operations and profitability), and c) as producers and/or consumers of expert knowledges shaping understandings and actions for and/or from these institutions. Thus, geography’s contribution to citizenship is as much about education for life as it is about education for gaining qualifications.

#### Note

1. See [www.ncaction.org.uk/subjects/geog/levels.htm/](http://www.ncaction.org.uk/subjects/geog/levels.htm/) (last accessed 13 January 2007).

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