

What is Geography's contribution to making citizens?

Quick reference guide

This summary has been produced by the Geographical Association's Citizenship Working Group (CWG) in order to provide teachers with a quick reference guide to connections between citizenship and geography. Readers are recommended to read it alongside the original articles written by a range of academic geographers in 2006¹.

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

- Citizenship describes people's **collective political identities**. It brings 'us' together and stands 'us' apart, and indicates people's senses of **attachment and belonging** in relation to people and places
- Citizenship relates to how society organises the involvement of individuals in decision making at a collective level. It refers to the ways in which we are governed and govern others, including **rights and responsibilities**
- Citizenship points to the central role of the nation-state, but increasingly to non-state institutions (for example voluntary organisations, NGOs, corporations, the EU)

2. *How is 'citizenship' geographical?*

- Space and relations in and across space contribute to social, economic, cultural, political, environmental and other formations
- Geography can enrich, complicate and trouble our understandings of the world and help us to consider the conditions in which 'we' are made citizens
- Geography is concerned with the making of individuals as citizens at the local, national and global scales
- Geography helps us to make better sense of the frequently **unequal distribution** of citizen rights and responsibilities and the of the opportunities and constraints this creates

3. *How is 'citizenship' changing?*

- Understandings of citizenship are changing with our evolving geographies
- Our actions are funnelled through not only the **nation-state** but also a wide variety of institutions, including the corporate, international and voluntary sectors
- What we do 'here' has enormous consequences for collective life at a global scale
- Global connections are complex and ever-changing, so understanding the consequences of our actions requires knowledge-intensive expertise

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

- Geography has long been a means by which certain kinds of citizens – and certain ideas about citizenship – have been promoted through the school system
- In the 19th Century, one of geography's role as a subject was to 'educate' students about the 'superiority' of the 'British race'
- During the interwar and post-World War Two eras, geography promoted the value of the 'English landscape' that was threatened by urban and suburban encroachment
- The recent introduction of citizenship education promotes a certain vision of citizens. It is part of an agenda for '**civil renewal**', for common British values and against 'yob culture' and voter apathy
- What is particularly 'new' about citizenship education today is the way in which it makes explicit the practices of citizen-formation, and aims to empower pupils to question the circumstances or conditions of their own citizenship – or their geographies

5. *What does this mean for Geography pupils?*

- Pupils are 'geographers' both in disciplinary and everyday life senses and thereby encounter a wide range of experiences, topics and issues, including interconnectedness, difference and diversity, international trade, migration,

- regeneration, sense of place, belonging, social responsibility, immigration, asylum, placement, crime, ASBOs, devolution, public spaces, climate change, consumption
- Geography can help pupils to 'pick apart' such issues. Immigration, for example. 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.
 - Geography can help pupils to understand how citizenship changes over time and space. Citizenship is not a fixed identity but instead can be a powerful means of social/spatial exclusion. Pupils could consider who makes the decision about who belongs where, who is posited as an ideal citizen, how do people find out the rules and procedures for becoming citizens, what counts as citizenship knowledge, how does this relate to the idea of a national 'authentic' culture, do citizens of different countries have different sets of rights, meaning and status?
 - Learning citizenship through geography can therefore give students the critical skills to develop more inclusive notions of citizenship, by confronting new forms of exclusion. Pupils can learn skills of reflection, reconsideration, forms of communication, participation and decision-making.
 - This kind of education needs to be cautious and informed, promote a **culture of argument**, and allow for confident uncertainty amongst pupils

6. *What does this mean for Geography teachers?*

- A 'geographical imagination' enables young people to locate themselves in relation to other people and places
- Teachers, too, should consider the 'geographical imagination' which underpins the National Curriculum for geography and citizenship – which, it could be argued, assume that places and environments are territorial, the unproblematic object of 'geographical enquiry and skills', and are where pupils are located. Places are seen as fixed and bounded territories which 'move outwards' from a stable centre.
- Geography teachers can help to develop an alternative geographical imagination involving a sense of 21st century 'de-nationalised' citizenship which is de-centred and appreciates how places are networks held together by temporary spatial and social relations.
- These **non-territorial geographies** can change peoples' sense of belonging, legal claims and material circumstances.

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

- Political identities are often assumed to spring naturally from territorially bounded places, but nation-states are **spatial devices** resulting from and constantly modified by political struggles – placing people beyond their boundaries as 'other'
- An **alternative geographical imagination** can better demonstrate how citizenship is relationally and globally formed through increasingly de-centred networks
- Geography can create a language and intellectual space for exploring the meaning, spatiality and contextualisation of what citizenship is, the creation of belonging and connectedness, the injustices of citizenship and non-citizenship
- Geography can challenge the notions of identity based on the presumption of territorial politics by pointing out how 'self' and 'other', 'us' and 'them', 'here' and 'there' are both the same and different.
- A geographical imagination of citizenship can be developed through a culture of argument and an **education for conversation**. This should equip pupils with an 'adaptive expertise' which will help them to recognise and better understand important new connections in the future.

¹ The original article was published in *Geography Vol 93 Part 1* and the unedited articles are available at the CWG website: www.geocitizen.org.uk. The authors were: 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.