

Editorial

John Morgan for the Editorial Collective

It is an exciting time to be a geographer. Geographers, of course, have always regarded geographical knowledge as central to understanding the modern world. There is currently a boom in spatial data required for Geographical Information Systems, and increased opportunities for travel have intensified demand for maps and place knowledge. The insights offered by the subject are important to understanding and dealing with the environmental issues that confront us on a range of scales. Beyond this, there has been a much-touted 'spatial turn' in the social sciences, and geographers stress the importance of spatial thinking in making sense of environmental and geopolitical shifts. On a number of levels, then, it is being argued that 'geography matters'.

The titles of two recent texts from the geography team at the Open University give a sense of the contribution geography can make to our understanding. *A World in the Making* (Clark *et al.*, 2006) suggests that geography is actively being constructed by a range of actors at a variety of scales. Much of the excitement of the subject is about the possibility that we can understand these processes and, if necessary, re-make them otherwise. At the same time, these acts of 'world-making' mean that we live in *A Demanding World* (Robinson *et al.*, 2006), one where our knowledge of the consequences of our actions on people and places (both near and far, in the past, present, and future) gives us a responsibility to think about the effects of the geographies we create.

If it is an exciting time to be a geographer, then why is it reported each summer that the number of students taking GCSE and Advanced Level qualifications in geography is in decline, and why, as David Lambert reports, were there 85 schools in England where last year not a single student sat GCSE geography? This has knock-on effects for teachers: in England the number of geography graduates who train to become teachers has fallen year on year since 2000. To add to the gloom, the government's inspectorate, Ofsted, has

raised concerns about the quality of geography teaching in schools.

This is the context in which the new *Geography* is being launched. The Editorial Collective reflects the work of university geography departments as well as in-depth experience of school geography. We hope that this combination will enable us to hold conversations and make connections across the often-mentioned 'university-school' divide.

To achieve this we are commissioning high quality articles that explore the nature of geography as a discipline. These articles will be both 'scholarly' and accessible, offering perspectives that are sometimes found only in specialist journals. We are concerned not simply to showcase the high-quality research that takes place in universities, but to highlight its relevance to understanding the contemporary world.

The journal is concerned with education in its widest sense, which means that we see geography as a way to enlighten – to offer a wide range of perspectives about the world. Contemporary geography is characterised by its variety of approaches which, from the outside, can look like fragmentation. Our instinct is to welcome this diversity, and we hope to publish articles that reflect it. At the same time, it is often asserted that the content of school geography is relatively static, and in need of renewal. We certainly do not see school geography as in any way less rigorous than in universities. Indeed, the question of curriculum construction (what is to be planned and taught in schools) is a complex and intellectually demanding task. While we do not think that school geography should slavishly follow the fashions of the university subject, we argue that it will be intellectually poorer if ideas and perspectives from the 'cutting edge' are not read about and discussed.

We also hope that future issues of *Geography* will allow for lively argument and debate. Given that the phenomena and processes we study are complex, and that we seldom reach agreement about them, it would be odd if a journal concerned with geography education was *not* characterised by argument and debate. Our aim is to publish articles that provoke thought and discussion, and we should make it clear that we do not follow a particular 'line' in terms of



Photo: Dan Crosbie.

geographical thought, but welcome a variety of perspectives.

This issue of the journal starts with a section devoted to perhaps the most pressing contemporary concern.

Stuart Lane introduces a series of climate change articles, the first of which, by **Roland Gehrels and Antony Long**, deals with the assessment of sea-level data. As they argue, this type of data is of crucial importance in making predictions about the effects of future climate change.

John Morgan's article provides an historical account of curriculum development in geography since the 1970s. It concludes with an assessment of the potential of 'cultural' geography perspectives for re-invigorating curriculum development. **Louise Crewe's** article on the politics of the global fashion industry provides an excellent example of how cultural geographers approach the study of everyday life, highlighting the complex and multiple ways in which the consumers of clothes are enmeshed in networks of social and economic relations that span the 'local' and the 'global'. Crewe's article provides a model of the type of cultural geography that could inform curriculum planning in schools.

An article by **Ian Cook et al.**, focuses on the contribution of geography to citizenship is an ambitious attempt to bring together geographers working in universities and schools. It originated from the Geographical Association's Working Group on

Citizenship Education which invited a variety of geographers to write short pieces about geography and citizenship. Cook has extracted a number of perspectives to represent the range of thinking about citizenship and geography.

In This Changing World, **Bob Digby** provides a detailed overview of the plans for the 2012 London Olympic Games, giving us a 'tour' of the main sites and raising questions about the likely environmental, economic and social impacts of the 're-generation games'.

The final two articles in this issue return to themes raised in the main articles. The first, by **David Lambert**, focuses on the controversy surrounding the decision of the UK government to send a copy of Al Gore's film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, to all schools. Lambert uses this example to explore the thorny issue of teaching 'good causes' in geography. The second, by **Sasha Matthewman**, takes the form of a review essay of Jonathon Porritt's book *Capitalism as if the World Matters* (2005). Though sympathetic to the general direction of Porritt's argument, Matthewman suggests that the book might usefully be read alongside other geographical perspectives that deal with the theme of power, politics and environmental change.

References

- Clark, N., Massey, D. and Sarre, P. (eds) (2006) *A World in the Making*. Milton Keynes: Open University.
- Porritt, J. (2005) *Capitalism as if the World Matters*. London: Earthscan.
- Robinson, J., Rose, G. and Barnett, C. (eds) (2006) *A Demanding World*. Milton Keynes: Open University.