
Educating with physical geography: shifting the approach towards a curriculum of engagement for living in the Anthropocene.

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Abstract

Physical geography can be a problematic venture for teachers such that their teaching becomes unbalanced from varied combinations of heavy content, light substance and mis-directed emphasis. Consequently students could be in danger of experiencing the physical world as a ‘one size fits all’ model, with a superficial grasp of its systematic nature and an inadequate sense of how to evaluate knowledge claims about it beyond emotional response and opinion to interactions with the ‘natural’ world. To address the significance of a physical geography education in the Anthropocene epoch of this day and age requires reconsideration of what it should look like in a future curriculum. A curriculum of engagement eschews knowledge as merely a catalogue of facts or geography as simply a vehicle for the development of generic competences. Rather, it engage teachers in deeper thinking about the powerful disciplinary knowledge of subject-specific concepts and how to draw out significant meanings that can be interpreted from physical environments. It is argued that teaching through a GeoCapabilities approach provides for a release from the ‘tyranny of models’, enables the exploration of ideas concerning the epistemic ascent of knowledge and promotes pedagogies of relational thinking and inferentialism rather than simple representation. The aim is to achieve a more balanced and purposeful approach to teaching about physical environments and for students’ thinking about our role within them.

Keywords: education, physical geography, curriculum, teaching, anthropocene, knowledge, concepts, GeoCapabilities

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