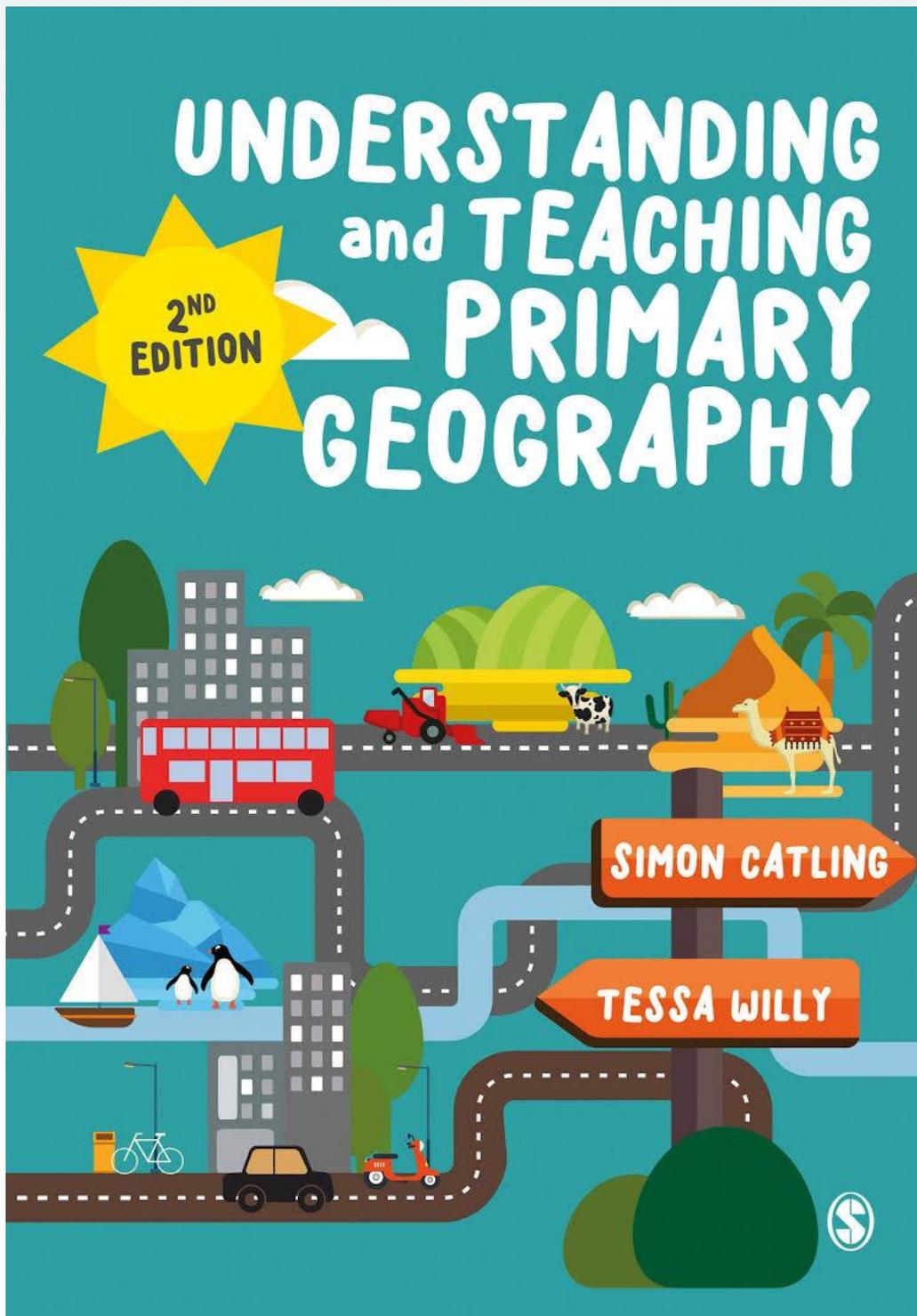


Understanding and Teaching Primary Geography



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Reviewer**Prof. Dr. Inga GRYL***Institute of Geography, Faculty for Humanities, University of Duisburg-Essen, Essen,
GERMANY***Publisher:** Sage Publications Ltd**Publication Year:** 2018, **Edition:** Second Edition **Pages:** 581 + XIV**Price:** £25.99, **ISBN:** 978-1-5264-0838-9**General Contextualization**

Simon Catling's and Tessa Willy's book "Understanding and Teaching Primary Geography" is a strong and dedicated advocacy for early and elementary geography education – and at the same time a very convenient, helpful, and inspiring course book. Addressing the praxis at school – teachers on the job and prospective teachers at the same time – it is now available in the second edition, after the first one had been published in 2009. Both authors of this monograph are highly experienced in the field: Simon Catling is a prominent person in primary geography education and former GA (Geographical Association, UK) president. Given this background, the fascination for the subject within this book reminds us of the "Manifesto for Geography" of the GA (2009). Tessa Willy is a professional with similar experience that she gained in various and leading positions in the field of primary education and primary geography teacher training.

The book provides an always-applied combination of subject content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge – a compendium for professionalization – and thus helps the reader to get a comprehensive, but efficient overview, to develop themselves as professionals, to keep up with the subject and its didactics and to look up forgotten things. The chapters are short and highly structured, so that reading and interrupting reading (when assuming the limited time resources of active teachers for further training) becomes easy and flexible.

Overview of the Content

The book is written from a UK perspective but nevertheless is internationally compatible. It picks up most of the current and urgent discourses in geography and geography education such as climate change, sustainability, and digitalization. Theoretical references that underpin the content are sometimes used sparingly, some (e.g. more complex spatial theory) are missing, but in most cases, they are clearly named.

The book is structured in two parts: "Understanding Primary Geography" and "Exploring Geography Teaching and Curriculum". At first sight, the logic of the chapter headings and their order is not very clear, but while reading, it becomes visible that each chapter follows an agenda and sets a strong own focus so that they can be read separately. The partly literally headings invite readers to explore the content (e.g. "Valuing geography").

Furthermore, the chapters are also linked with each other, often implicitly. In the first part, the value of the subject is discussed, followed by insights into children's geographies, exploration of geographical inquiry, a discussion of the key terms place and space, an introduction to the different fields of geography including environmental geography, explanations on sustainability, citizenship education, and, finally, an outlook on media for geography education and fieldwork. In the second part, another reflection on geography learning in primary school is presented, followed by impressions on the school as field of geographical learning, and different scales of learning geography, widened to global dimensions. Planning and assessment issues are discussed afterwards, concluded by strategies to support the children's geographical learning.

Thus, this outline of the content shows that book tries to be comprehensive (as 581 pages illustrate impressively), meaning, that many topics must be discussed briefly. Despite this fact, the book often reaches astonishing depths and balanced argumentation. One side-effect might be that sub-chapters are not always clearly linked to each other (e.g. a jump from participation to ideas about geography, pp. 94-97).

Geographical and Geography Education Discourses

Pedagogical knowledge

Concerning pedagogical knowledge, the book is marked throughout by a reflexive attitude, encouraging teachers to be reflexive concerning their lesson planning, teaching, and diagnosis. For instance, the students' previous knowledge is considered (pp.154, 416). This aspect could have played an even bigger role within the book as it is highly influential for the success of teaching, particularly in an everyday linked subject such as geography, where pre-knowledge is frequently constructed.

Another important issue is that students should be enabled to reflect with impact on their future learning, with the help of the teachers' feedback and feedforward (pp.470ff). Related skills such as critical and creative thinking concerning the content are regarded as well (p.27), and geographical enquiry, open ended questions and philosophising are named (among others) as methods to support such competences (p.468). Fundamental and differentiated criticality is taught concerning the power of images in the example of unequal development. This point is extremely important and difficult to teach – it could have been made even more precise to help the practitioners (p.267). Another good point is the reference to future orientation which is essential in an everchanging world geography is dedicated to (p.215).

Only differentiation in heterogenous classes comes up a bit short and is very schematic when applied (p.452) instead of trying to find out what the students really need.

Content knowledge

Concerning content knowledge, the concept of powerful knowledge is applied (p.21). It is to say that the book itself is also a reference book for selected fields of geography

knowledge – of course not for all. So, the geological time scale is recapitulated (p. 152) and current topics such as plastic in the ocean are outlined (p.183).

There is only very few of the exemplar content that might be enriched with specification/clarification: For instance, sustainability has a focus on ecology while the current UN concept of sustainable development goals is much wider (p. 199). However, other aspects (e.g. fair trade) are named in other topics. Another point mentions the romantic role model of indigenous people living in harmony with nature (p. 203). Despite the fact that the variety of indigenous group worldwide is enormous, indeed not all of them have preserved nature carefully (e.g. Maori communities, McWethy et al. 2014) or do so. Furthermore, the dinosaur example is surely motivating (p.155) but does not question the misconception of the universal usage of the name dinosaur – which is to be distinguished from the also regularly displayed pterosaurs and ichthyosaurs, for instance.

A more interesting point to discuss is the role of human geography and citizenship education within the book. To state in advance, this field has an important role within the book, but when reading the first pages, one might ask where human geography is. Thankfully, this deficit is wiped away soon. Firstly, a strong focus remains on the culture term (p.35), then, human geography is described more completely, but it is hardly problem oriented (pp.176ff), but at least examples such as fair trade (aiming at unequal global living conditions) and sustainability (aiming at global problems such as the anthropogenic climate change, and general pollution) are mentioned soon afterwards. The depth of insight in this issue increases during the book: Social washing in fair trade is firstly not mentioned (p.231), but later power relations in globalization are named (pp.392, 396). However, the linkages of these abstract conditions to practical examples could be made clearer, as teachers might fear the controversy and ethical challenges of such topics. It also takes a while until migration issues are brought in (p.227). In sum, it is important that these significant geographical problems are discussed in the book but their linkages – so that human geography as introduced is closely linked to such a political education – might be made more visible from the beginning onwards.

Concerning human geography and political education the book is differentiated but sometimes remains on the level of suggestions. Commendable is the very watchful orientation concerning stereotypes (p.13). Particularly primary education is vulnerable concerning stereotypes, for instance on the case of migration (pp.81, 82, 85, 387). Furthermore, the authors make clear that tokenistic participation is to be avoided (p.96). However, the participation suggested is relatively often based on compensatory personal responsibility (Jäger, 2015) that does not address the roots of a problem (p.48). Providing children with activist tools that might bring responsibility, social justice and their own interests in a balance, as other discourses of political geography education such as Spatial Citizenship would (Shin & Bednarz, 2019) might have been brought in, are not in the book's focus. "Creating an impact on the school site" (p.321) is probably a first step in this direction. Particularly in the sustainability field, a certain feasibility is expressed (p.412) – which is a common problem of approaching education for sustainability. On the other

hand, it is desirable that children formulate visions and develop attitudes towards a desirable and fair future.

There are highly valuable thoughts on exclusion (unfortunately limited to people with disabilities) and the power relations of supervised spaces (pp.63, 75) but these are not followed up more deeply. One alternative solution the authors at least bring in is to declare the positive effects of diversity, to “understand that we are impoverished without it” (p.206), and to value difference (p.387). This is important but a closer focus on power relations might be valuable because children are overpowered on a daily basis. There are highly important thoughts, e.g. the problem of “children as market” (p.89), and more practical applications would help teachers to approach such complex topics child-orientated.

Pedagogical content knowledge

As said, many current discourses of geography education are referred to in the book. Concerning education using spatial theory, the constructions of regions is at least mentioned (p.363) (which is appreciated), but not brought in accordance with the massive everyday effects spatial constructions have. Theories such as Lefebvre’s (1993) model on concepts of spatial and spatial construction would help to structure this approach. Instead, perception geography (e.g. pp.68ff) dominates because it helps to reflect on the children’s perspective on space and to enable them to take their own meta-perspective on their spatial impressions. This is helpful but more recent discourses should also be considered.

Digitalisation and digital media education appears initially rarely (p.92) and then relatively late in the book, but is equipped with detailed methodologies for digital enriched excursions (pp.253, 259). This develops this traditional field as the involvement of students in excursion planning does, too (p.261). However, digitalization will become more important in geography education than yet displayed in this book.

Structure and Orientation

Each chapter starts with a list of objectives and ends with a list of key points and hints how to move on with the topic. Within the chapters there are boxes with detailed citations and direct quotes, outlines of original studies in brief, practical ideas and best practice for the classroom, and reflexive as well as practical tasks. Chapters are concluded by a list with references for further reading and a list of useful websites.

All these tools are potent to support orientation within the chapters. The objectives provide insight into the chapters’ content and are thus a very helpful orientation. Reflexive tasks highlight the importance of reflexivity as a significant approach throughout the whole book. Practical tasks lead to teachers’ own planning and link directly into their own classroom. Examples from praxis function as mostly fully convincing role models. The key points at the end help to sum up the chapter but remain a bit too general as the chapters provide much more. The further reading section seems

particularly helpful, but the websites mentioned are often not specific enough: The GA website is a great resource, but just providing the home page does not offer the orientation needed. It might be the case that the authors tried to avoid overlong addresses (QR codes might have helped) or the danger of changing addresses in a printed book. Altogether, the boxes are not completely consistent in their naming (e.g. one is called “e-news time”, p.32), so a really consequent categorisation system might have worked even better for the readers’ orientation. Seldomly, there are redundancies between text and boxes (p.412) or boxes and figures (p.427).

Apart from the boxes, the text is structured itself, using bullet points, and contains extensive quotations and reflexive stimuli (e.g. p.445). As a consequence, the box system as separated and highlighted information is not completely logical, but on the other hand, the text becomes also rich in variety, and, yes, entertaining. A particularly strong idea is the usage of literary and original texts (pp.128, 129) to illustrate the everyday linkages of geography.

Mission of the Book

The book comes with a positive attitude not only to the subject but also to the world around. Thus, teaching and learning is not always problem oriented, but also refers to the Singapore’s curriculum key point of “developing a positive attitude towards the world around” (p.299). One reason for this focus might be that the authors clearly address emotional aspects of learning and seek to evoke positive emotions: “Enjoyment is the birth right of every child” (DfES, 2003, 3, cit. on p. 16), “Learning can be of high quality and enjoyed” (p.3). The authors transport the spirit of geography, intending to enable the children to feel wonder and curiosity. In the course of the book, more controversial issues gain space which is important as beyond the love for the subject and objects of learning children are highly aware of everyday and world problems. That this subject might be key in their lives is obvious when topics such as sustainability and normative orientations/responsibility are brought in.

Altogether, it can be said that the book contains traces to safeguard children from too negative images of the world without completely ignoring existing global and local problems. Probably, this is a point where the teacher can decide upon what to expect from her/his particular children in the class. It might highly differ which discourses they bring along and what they want to know themselves. Particularly in primary school, it seems to be an important task of differentiation to identify the limits these children can bear and find adequate words for, undoubted partly frightening, problems without overwhelming the learners and to keep a balance that lets them keep their fascination and curiosity. This book seems to be a valuable, authentic and professional foundation to base geography teaching upon.

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