education review // reseñas educativas
a multi-lingual journal of book reviews

editors: gustavo e. fischman / melissa cast-brede / gene v glass

Supported by the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University

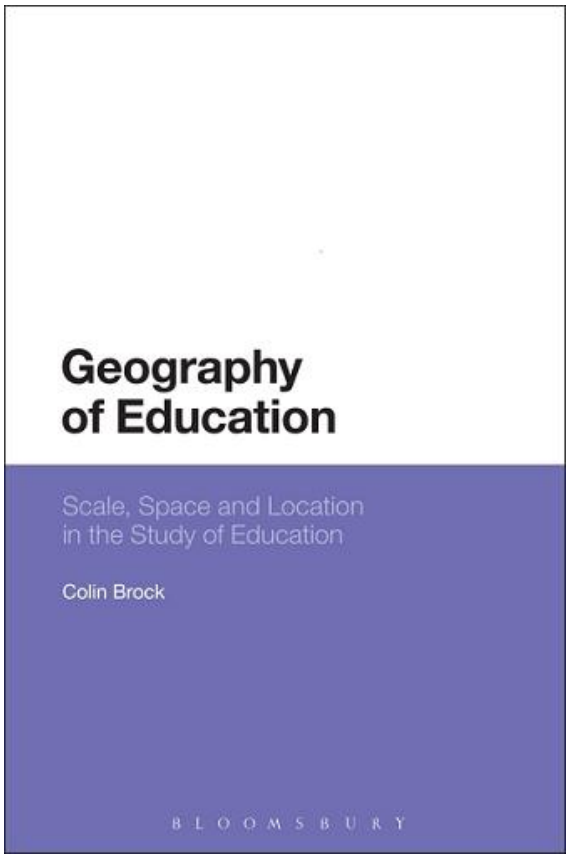
November 1, 2017 ISSN 1094-5296

Brock, C. (2016). *Geography of education: Scale, space and location in the study of education*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Pp. 222 ISBN: 978-1-4742-2324-9

Reviewed by Sarah Witham Bednarz
Emerita, Texas A&M University
United States

A Manifesto for a Geography of Education



In the introduction to the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Centennial Issue (April 2017), McCarty, Mancevice, Lemire, and O'Neill ask the question, "Does history matter in education research?" They proceed to answer as yes and to provide a brief summary of the articles selected for this special issue focusing on, "…cutting-edge, visionary research on critical education issues that substantively moves the field…into the next 100 years" (p. 6S). As a geographer, when I read these articles and accompanying commentaries, I thought that actually, *geography* matters as well. McCarty et al. cluster the submissions into four categories based on themes. The first "suite" of articles examines race, ethnicity and schooling experiences, all of which have distinct spatial patterns. The second group explores school segregation, school access, and geographic-based inequalities in urban, suburban, and

Bednarz, S. W. (2017, November 1). A Manifesto for a Geography of Education [Review of *Geography of education: Scale, space and location in the study of education,* by C. Brock]. *Education Review*, *24*. http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/er.v24.2287

rural contexts—obviously geographic. The third set of articles researches language learning and instruction, a highly spatialized issue, while the fourth series of articles focuses on culturally responsive education, particularly Indigenous education. Overall, what strikes the reader is that, as McCarty et al. write, "…as we collectively look toward the future, we cannot ignore the current social, political, and historical context in which we live and work…" (p. 20S). Nor, I would argue, can we ignore geographic context.

In his carefully written book *Geography of Education,* Colin Brock argues that geography should be included in this mix of approaches to education research in explicit and clear ways. This field is distinct from geography education, which researches how individuals learn to think geographically, and most closely aligns intellectually with the learning sciences and cognitive psychology. Brock notes his book is intended for students of educational studies to inspire new forms of research; it is his attempt to link education research with geographic concepts and principles and to inspire the application of geography to education studies. He acknowledges that his task is not easy; academics are highly tribal. But as evidenced by the topics contained in the AERA Centennial Issue, there is growing interest among educationists with space, place, location, scale, nodes, and other essential concepts of geography. Nonetheless, Brock's work is helpful in forging a closer relationship that could enhance both areas of study.

Brock, a British professor of both geography and education, begins his book with a brief history of the geography of education sub-discipline, followed by a detailed explanation of the variations of geographers. Through an examination of articles published in four geography journals in the last 50 years, Brock identifies substantial interest in education on the part of geographers, particularly in considerations at a systems level of the role space plays in the production and consumption of education. He then reviews the contributions of various "branches" of geography to education research. Geography is a highly specialized discipline with individuals identifying not so much as "geographer" but rather as an "adjectival" geographer, for example, a physical geographer, a biogeographer, or a human geographer, with specialties such as cultural or economic or political geography. In this section of the book, Brock also provides valuable examples of how geography can provide context to educational issues. Writing in a simple and direct manner he builds his case:

> Education is culturally based and in its formal and non-formal modes, politically delivered. Cultural geography is arguably the main home of the geography of education. Sociology is the study of human groups and their interaction at all levels from individual to global, with social geography providing its spatial and locational dimension…Whether formal or informal, differential access to languages, or forms of a language, is a significant component of the geography of education (Brock, 2016, pp. 24-25)

He moves through political geography, population geography, behavioral and humanistic geography, historical geography, applied geography, and fieldwork, citing work done and issues needing research, to link educational issues with these geographic sub-disciplines and to build an initial bibliography for the geography of education. In one particularly interesting example, Brock presents a rich review of articles linking population structure, distance, gender, and access to education. He cites several studies examining the uneven distribution of institutions of higher education in the developed world and the impact on students who must migrate within countries (as well as internationally) to attend university. The changing geography of primary and secondary schools is another example of how population structure influences access to education. Distance traveled in the UK to attend school has increased, according to National Travel

Survey data, since the 1940s but it remains relatively short, 2.3 kilometers for students under 11 years. In both urban and rural contexts, research related to time, distance, gender, and access to education conducted largely by geographers has raised important questions about equity and inclusivity.

As he proceeds to build his case for the geography of education, Brock next explains three different conceptualizations of the nature of "modern" geography to aid novices in understanding the discipline's key perspectives and concepts, especially scale, space, and place. He takes great care to show how each interpretation of geography, including Jan Broek (1965), Peter Haggett (1972), and Rex Walford (1973), holds value and application potential for a geography of education. He also introduces the lay reader to the idea of core/periphery and node/networks, useful constructs to understand patterns of inequalities and the processes that produce them. Brock applies these concepts at a range of scales to illustrate the idea that location—and geography—matters. Classic English schools were arranged around a core area that provided the head teacher the ability to monitor students and manage them effectively. On a larger scale, core/periphery is a useful way to think about the distribution of educational resources: there are more schools to choose in core (central) locations than in rural, peripheral places.

Following this theoretical approach, Brock takes a turn at establishing a geography of education *systems*, with a national focus and historical approach. By examining the origins and development of systems of education, he teases out the key roles location and space play in producing "educational landscapes." His approach here strikes this reviewer as overly broad and very Western-centric, a march through European history, then U.S. colonial history, that is not particularly convincing or useful. He notably largely ignores race and segregation—two significant geographical themes—in the American context. And I question why Brock would assert the following comment on U.S. liberal arts colleges: "Most are for female students though coeducation is increasing" (p. 92). I have to assume that his detailed examination of the development of the education systems in the UK is more accurate.

Brock also addresses the internationalization of education and flows of students at different scales, a topic that has seen some interest by geographers but little by educational researchers. However, some of the names I expected to see in this section were absent, including an English geographer, Martin Haigh, who has written extensively on the subject. Following this, Brock explores the geographies of informal and non-formal education. From a U.S. perspective, his exploration of the topic seems anemic with no discussion of social learning networks such as the Scouts, 4H, Boys and Girls Clubs or new endeavors such as academic camps for young people focused on topics such as coding and mathematics. However, Brock's accounts of education in what he terms "situations and locations of constraint and concern" such as refugee camps, high poverty areas, and among urban homeless is interesting. He continues this thread with a chapter examining the effect of the Internet on the geographies of education in terms of environmental sustainability, taking a sanguine view of the roles that knowledge, power, and economic competition play in curricular decision-making and citizenship formation at a range of scales. Brock concludes with the interesting proposition that schools and universities work together to create "relevant geographies of curricula" that "…draw on the existing subjects and disciplines that humankind has assembled in order to understand its life and world, but they would also be integrated as necessary for the challenging of the existential threats of the coming decades as these affect each community and locality" (p. 182).

Overall, Colin Brock set as his goal to promote the profile of the geography of

education and this book, as a *de facto* manifesto*,* accomplishes it. Throughout the book, Brock reiterates his support for a subdiscipline of the geography of education, noting that both disciplines are composites, that interdisciplinarity is growing, and that academic tribalism is declining. He suggests additional topics in need of examination, including the geographies of exam results (where there are clear spatial patterns) and calls again to problematize education systems, especially those where inequalities are evident. His ideas are strongly generative, but he needs a champion in the United States to point out to educational researchers that they are thinking geographically without knowing it or to convince them that applying key perspectives of geography to educational research would be useful.

References

Brock, C. (2016). *Geography of education: Scale, space and location in the study of education*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Broek, J. O. M. (1965). *Geography: Its scope and spirit*. New York: Charles E. Merrill.

Haggett, P. (1972). *Geography: A modern synthesis*. London: Harper and Row.

McCarty, T. L., Mancevice, N., Lemire, S., & O'Neill, H. F. (2017). Introduction, Education research for a new century: A renewed vision of interdisciplinarity. *American Educational Research Journal*, 54(1S), 5S-22S.

Walford, R. (Ed.) (1973). *New directions in geography teaching*. London: Longman.

About the Reviewer

Sarah Witham Bednarz is Professor Emerita at the Department of Geography at Texas A&M University.

education review // reseñas educativas
a multi-lingual journal of book reviews

editors: gustavo e. fischman / melissa cast-brede / gene v glass

Supported by the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University

Connect with *Education Review* on Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/pages/Education-Review/178358222192644) and on Twitter @EducReview