Geographies of Education: A Journey

Kraftl, P., Andrews, W., Beech, S. E., Ceresa, G., Holloway, S., Johnson, V., & White, C. (2022). Geographies of Education: A Journey. *AREA*, *54*(1), 15-23. https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12698

Link to publication record in Ulster University Research Portal

Published in:
AREA

Publication Status:
Published (in print/issue): 14/02/2022

DOI:
10.1111/area.12698

Document Version
Author Accepted version

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Download date: 24/09/2024

Geographies of Education: A Journey (TBC)

Prof Peter Kraftl, School of Geography, University of Birmingham
Dr William Andrews, University of Central Lancashire
Dr Suzanne Beech, Ulster University
Giulia Ceresa, University of Birmingham
Prof Sarah L. Holloway, Loughborough University
Dr Vicky Johnson, University of the Highlands and Islands
Dr Catherine White, Northumbria University

This is the accepted manuscript version of the article which is forthcoming in Area (DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12698).

Complementing the other papers in this Special Section, this paper provides an overview of scholarship on the geographies of education. In focusing on the 'geographies of education' it offers one particular journey through geographical research about education spaces (such as the design of school buildings) and processes (such as the mobilities of students who move internationally to study), as distinct from scholarship, critical reflection and practice on geography education (see the other papers in this Special Section). Although written by a diverse group of scholars, each working from different conceptual, methodological and geographical contexts, the paper aims to provide an overview of some of the key developments in the field. Whether 'the field' is constituted as such – or as a distinct subdiscipline – is an ongoing point of contention, not least since there are points of connection with other more familiar subdisciplines (such as children's geographies and social geographies). However, given the rise of a distinct yet diverse set of papers by geographers that focus on education spaces and processes, this paper seeks to provide a sense of some common narratives in the field whilst celebrating the sheer diversity and vibrancy of geographical scholarship on education. Whilst not policing disciplinary boundaries, or claiming that only 'geographers' can study education 'spaces', it recognises that geographers have made a distinct contribution to studying the spatialities of education through key geographical tropes such as space, place and scale: from a focus on spatial science and quantitative approaches to mapping school access or segregation, to an examination of identities and processes played out education spaces.

In the above light, the first part of the paper examines some of the key roots, routes and traditions underpinning that scholarship, noting particularly the importance of different linguistic traditions. Here and throughout, we set diverse subdisciplinary perspectives alongside a call to question, decentre and decolonise those dominant perspectives, particularly, but not only, through an attention to research in and from the Global South. The second part of the paper asks why geographies of education have been burgeoning in the past couple of decades, offering a critical examination of the global political, economic and social shifts that drive and are driven by education spaces. Third, the paper briefly explores some more established and some more emergent themes within geographical research on education, before offering (as provocations rather than agendas) some potential avenues for future scholarship.

Roots, routes and traditions, in and through geographies of education

Contemporary research on geographies of education has its roots in three, sometimes intersecting, language traditions (Kučerová et al., 2020). German-language *Bildungsgeographie* developed first in the mid-1960s: given the strength of spatial science at the time, it emphasised equitable access through the spatial planning of public education systems. Francophone research into *la géographie de l'education* emerged a few years later: driven by educationalists with geographic training, it foregrounded the comparative evaluation of different education systems. Anglophone research into the geography of education too was stimulated at this point by Hones & Rbya's (1972) paper "Why not a geography of education?". After this initial flurry of interest, *Bildungsgeographie* quickly became established as a sub-discipline in German-language Geography, before taking hold in other language traditions. Nevertheless, by the turn of twenty-first century interest in the geography of education spread across the European continent, with Eastern European nations exploring the spatial provision and use of schooling and its consequences for regional development, while interdisciplinary Scandinavian work shone a spotlight on educational inequality in remote areas (Kučerová et al., 2020). Paradigm shifts within the discipline too wrought greater diversity in research foci and methods. Today there are growing interconnections between these language traditions, but some differences and disconnections remain. For example, Germanic Geography places greater emphasis on politically-pertinent new spatial constellations of formal and nonformal education in urban and rural contexts, whereas Anglophone researchers have been more concerned with the neoliberalisation of education, and its role in reproducing inequalities, alongside the growth of supplementary and

alternative forms of provision (Kučerová et al., 2020). This enduring interest in the national education systems of countries in the Global North is now complemented by the growing attention to the Global South (key advances from that work are woven throughout this paper). However, much of what is written is authored by academics located in the Global North, and as part of growing calls to decolonise geography – and educational research – there must be serious and honest reflection on ways to account for, promote and publish research by academics from the Global South.

Moving from linguistic roots to the subdisciplinary underpinnings of geographical scholarship on education, debate continues about whether the geographical study of education can be seen as a (sub)discipline in its own right. Substantively, there are important connections with research in a range of other (sub-)disciplines, which means that geographers have taken diverse and sometimes discrete routes through research on education. One of the best-established is with geographical research on children, youth and families – particularly around children's experiences of diverse educational environments and their aspirations for (and beyond) them (e.g. Holloway et al., 2010; Kraftl, 2015; Holt et al., 2017). Relatedly – but also inspired by political-economic analyses of particularly neoliberal educational systems – a key concern has been the relationship between education spaces and their 'outsides' (family, community, state; e.g. Hanson Thiem, 2009; Orford, 2018). Indeed, the role of the state and other institutional actors in fostering forms of social reproduction and marginalisation has been a chief point of articulation for many debates about the geographies of education (e.g. MacLeavy, 2011; Gough, Langevang, Yankson and Owusu, 2019). In part as a result, the importance of how educational spaces articulate and enable intergenerational relationships of all kinds - whether problematic or generative – has been emphasised in social-geographic discussions of power, surveillance, resistance and the inter-personal relationships entailed in learning (e.g. Pini et al., 2017; Nash et al., 2019). Also in common with scholarship elsewhere has been a focus on mobilities, and particularly of international students, whilst the experiences of students more generally (whether on campus or at 'home') have been a further key strand of scholarship (e.g. Madge et al., 2015; Waters, 2017). Finally, inspired by cultural-geographic approaches, there has been critical attention to diverse education spaces (such as alternative, informal or nonformal learning) and their relationships with the 'mainstream(s)' (e.g. Mills, 2016; Pimlott-Wilson and Coates, 2019). Whilst there is always scope for further diversity, there is a need for greater critical reflection upon how these different (conceptual, methodological, political) traditions do or do not speak to one

another, as the conclusion to this paper argues. The third section of the paper outlines in more depth some of these key themes, citing examples from a range of geographical contexts.

As the previous paragraphs imply, geographers have also embarked on different journeys when it comes to the kinds of education spaces, educators and learners with whom they work. The literature encompasses understandings of pre-school educational settings to post-primary and higher educational experiences, recognising the importance of the school years (in their broadest sense) in the development of personal and social space. Educational spaces range from the formalised, to the alternative (see Kraftl 2013, 2015) and the informal (Hickman Dunne 2019; Dunkley and Smith 2019; Morris 2019) to the supplementary (Holloway and Kirby, 2020). There is also interesting work on the overlaps between these settings (Mills 2016; Pimlott-Wilson and Coates, 2019). For instance, in Italy there have been attempts to in-formalise the state-school through their Open School, No Backpack and Montessori Networks that seek to subvert staff-student hierarchies through the classroom design and the banning of the teacher's desk (Batini, 2013). Looking to older learners, as outlined in the next section, there has been a focus upon how spaces of education are places of learning, teaching and knowledge exchange, but can be highly neoliberalised, particularly in tertiary education. This creates tensions, transforming students into consumers (Brooks 2018); consider, for example, the growing awareness of migration industries directing international student mobilities (Beech 2018, 2019).

Why have geographies of education expanded? Global shifts, conceptual shifts

Geographies of education have been burgeoning in the twenty-first century (Holloway & Jöns 2012; Nguyen et al., 2017; Waters, 2017), and it is timely to consider what underpins this growth. Global political, economic and social shifts are undoubtedly an important influence. In the Global North, education has risen up the political agenda as education has become crucial to national competitiveness in global knowledge economies (Vingaard Johansen et al., 2017; Mitchell, 2018). For individual workers, educational qualifications are increasingly important in securing entry across the labour market, and the expansion of higher education has seen a growth in credentialism (Cheng, 2015). This labour-market entry matters to increasing numbers of citizens as neoliberalisation broke the post-War social contract, designating women (alongside men) as 'adult workers' who ought to be 'economically active', and reducing the welfare entitlements of those with little value to the capitalist

system (MacLeavy, 2011). In the Global South, policy priorities set through Millennium Development Goal 2 (to 'achieve universal primary education'), and more recently reinforced through Sustainable Development Goal 4 (to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'), have also focused attention on education. These policies are not simply transformative: Drèze and Sen's (2013) seminal text *Uncertain Glory* explains India's failure to invest in education as a consequence of the focus on economic growth not human development. Nevertheless, education is being given greater, if not sufficient, priority, and many young people regard it as a key tool in their (not always successful) efforts to negotiate transitions to adulthood (Deuchar, 2019). Meanwhile, and although this paper is about geographies *of* education rather than geography *curricula*, it must be noted that across these fields of study efforts to decolonise geographical knowledges must be acknowledged and acted upon (e.g. Esson et al., 2017). As well as foregrounding scholarship and knowledge about education spaces from outside the Minority Global North, there must be efforts to critically reflect on how scholarship on the geographies of education reproduces and intersects with racism and other forms of structural inequality. As the next section of the paper explains, many of these shifts are underpinned by or expressed through geographical processes: from the production of educational policies at or for different geographical scales, to the mobilities and materialities entailed in educational experiences.

Changes in the geographical agenda are not only shaped by the world we study but are also influenced by philosophical shifts within the discipline (and the positionality and aspirations of the people who embody it). The foundation of geographies of education was shaped by spatial science, which dominated in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Subsequent shifts have broadened the research focus of geographies of education, in the process enlarging the field. Three examples illustrate this trend. Firstly, the growth of feminist research from the 1980s onwards – which reflected both the strength of feminist theory and the feminisation of the academy – added new threads, including those on pre-school provision, schools' role in social reproduction, and the reproduction of gender and sexual identities in schools (Ansell 2002; Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2019; Nash & Browne, 2019). Secondly, broader post-structural work developed greater influence from the 1990s, spurring interest in: the relational production of diverse subjectivities; the materialities of education; network relations; and mobilities (Jöns 2018; Kraftl, 2018; Waters 2017). Thirdly, post-colonial perspectives have gained greater traction (not least as small numbers of BAME geographers in the Global North, though fewer voices from the Global South, claimed a space in the discipline).

Centrally, this work has focused attention on young people's experiences of education and its intersection with work, wealth and poverty in post-colonial contexts (Madge et al. 2015; Johnson and West forthcoming 2020). Problematically, the discipline remains dominated by White voices from the Global North (Desai, 2017) and recent research-funding initiatives centred on Global Challenges risk recolonising knowledge production (Noxolo, 2017). Taken together, these three examples demonstrate that the vibrancy of geographies of education depends on an eclectic mix of authors from different philosophical (and political) backgrounds.

(Some) key themes in geographies of education research

This section offers a brief overview of some key areas of scholarship in the geographies of education that exemplify some of the routes, roots, traditions and shifts outlined above. It is neither intended to be authoritative nor programmatic; rather, it is indicative of the diversity of the field, focussing upon: social geographies;wider political, socioeconomic and cultural contextual influences; questions on agency and vulnerability; structural inequalities and power relations; the student experience; materialities in education, and educational mobilities.

The literatures surrounding *social reproduction, educational aspiration and social and cultural capital accumulation* are indicative of social-geographical scholarship on (especially young) learners' experiences of and identities within education spaces. A special issue of *Children's Geographies* (2011) outlined some key facets of education and aspiration. It highlighted that government agendas often focused on raising aspirations (Brown 2011) but noted that social mobility is hampered by emotional connections to place which impact upon the kinds of opportunities available (Hinton 2011). Moreover, quantitative and qualitative research demonstrates that spatial disparities in the delivery of education, alongside parental choice of schools, can exacerbate social in/exclusion (Butler and Hamnett 2011; Bernelius & Vilkama 2019; Ramos Lobato & Groos 2019). Donnelly and Gamsu (2019) have identified and reflected upon so called 'geometries of power' which shape and reinforce uneven spatial mobilities and social reproduction amongst young people. This suggests that pathways to education, particularly higher education, are mandated by expectations, patterned by class, gender and particularly race, especially when reflecting on the whiteness of many university campuses (Gamsu et al 2019). Other work shows how elite mobilities and networks shape and frame educational opportunities. This ranges from the impact of school catchment areas on house prices, outpricing families from certain state schools (Butler and Hamnett 2011; Orford 2018); through to showing how circuits of social and cultural capital perpetuate

networks of elite, (future) highly-skilled migrants in the form of international higher education students (Brooks and Waters 2011; Beech 2019; see also below).

As the previous paragraphs indicate, the role of education in society is often far from neutral, spawning a range of critical-geographical perspectives on the multiple, dynamic and recursive *relationships between education 'spaces' and their 'outsides'* – from migratory policies and processes to housing markets and urban segregation (Thiem, 2009; Pini et al., 2017). The allocation of social resources and social capital are key as are the tensions between school and work, particularly for the most marginalised young people located in the global South. Rather than simply imposing the norms of childhood and schooling into different contexts, the complexities of children's and families' everyday lives need to be understood. Importantly, there are still gaps in understanding how education can reach the most marginalised children and youth in the global South and North. Many of the most marginalised children have competing demands on their time, particularly in fragile environments and conflict-affected areas. Here the concept of 'border crossings' is relevant in how children encounter and negotiate conflicting cultural, traditional and religious beliefs in and outside school, for instance in sub-Saharan African contexts. Hence, geographers (and others) have attempted to tease out the complexities of children's everyday realities, such as those case studies depicted by the *Young Lives* longitudinal research carried out in Ethiopia, India, Vietnam and Peru (for example, Boyden et al. 2019). It is also important to remember that as in any context, children's experiences of and beyond education vary according to their age, gender, ethnicity/caste, race, class and so on, as Gough, Langevang, Yankson and Owusu's (2019) (2019) show in their theorisation of informal education from a Ghanaian perspective.

Relatedly, child- and youth-centred processes within education across contexts are embedded in and surrounded by social norms, *structural inequalities and power dynamics* in the places and spaces in which children inhabit, learn and grow up. In assessing these inequalities and dynamics, various theories of power that have been particularly prevalent in (predominantly social) geographies of education, such as Actor-Network and Foucauldian approaches. For instance, several studies have focussed on how government policies have affected the education of marginalised or excluded groups: from Vanderbeck's (2005) focus on traveller children to Gaskell's (2008) assessment of the impact of UK educational policies on marginalised (especially black, male) young people.

Those geographers more involved in international education and development have also tended to draw on Luke's dimensions of power and Freirean approaches to empowerment and literacy/education (for example see Johnson 2015). Freirean perspectives on power and the pedagogy of the oppressed offer a strong foundation for much work on informal education and literacy in international development and the geographies of education world-wide, (Archer and Costello 2009). Whilst in formal education the norm is often what Freire termed 'banking education', there is an argument in the geographies of education to bring in more emancipatory approaches and spaces to build on formal curricula that may reproduce existing hierarchies, while some dimensions may be more emancipatory.

In addressing some of the above questions – and also in taking them elsewhere – an enduring concern of social and cultural geographies of education has been with the *experiences* of learners. From a mainstream schooling perspective this includes children's experiences of their journeys to school (Ross 2007) and their discontent at adult intrusions on in-school leisure times (Daniel and Gustafsson 2010). Meanwhile Kraftl's (2015) work on 'alter-childhoods' demonstrates the implications of alternative education spaces (such as Forest Schools, Care Farms and homeschooling sites) for student experience, suggesting these spaces can empower children, and even impact on their physical and mental health, by challenging normative educational practices. Holt et al's (2017) research on special educational needs children also discusses the constraints of mainstream education for these learners, and suggests that mobility to find an ideal learning environment risks impacting negatively upon robust peer support networks and a fulfilling student experience. This focus on peer support also extends to work on international university students. For instance, geographers have shown that friendships tend to be homophilious (culturally or experientially) so whilst relationships form with other international students (Prazeres et al 2017), host-to-international student friendships are infrequent (Andersson et al 2012). More broadly, research on family learning demonstrates that parents too are the subject of state efforts to shaped learners' subjectivities (Wainright et al., 2011)

Although questioning notions of (individuated) experience, refracting (broadly) cultural-geographic perspectives, a myriad of related work over the last decade has explored *materialities* through approaches ranging from discourse analysis to Actor Network Theories (Bauer, 2015; Mills & Kraftl, 2016). Working with homeschoolers, Kraftl (2013b: 438) has spoken of ways in which participants approached the immanent materiality within informal education settings, arguing that, "the banal materialities and disorderly mess of everyday

environments are suffused with learning potential". Similarly, Clarke and Mcphie (2014: 198) talk about immanent materialities in learning as part of their experiences of teaching outdoor environmental education, intertwining a discussion of materiality and mobility within a semi-fictionalised narrative. Within formal education settings Kalthoff and Roehl (2011: 451) found that material objects were often, "transformed into knowledge objects by speech acts…and constitute a point of reference for…lessons", further highlighting the relationship between materiality and learning potential. Beyond material objects in the classroom, geographers have also engaged with the materiality of educational spaces and the architecture of school buildings (see Brooks and Waters, 2017: 34).

Finally, and again within and beyond approaches designed to access learners' experiences, with the development and integration of *mobilities* studies within human geography and cognate disciplines over the last two decades, the value of mobility as a lens on education has emerged. This can be understood across different scales, from the migrating mobility of international students (Holloway & Jöns, 2012: 485), to mobilities within particular learning environments; "the physical flows of bodies and objects that learning produces" (King and Raghuram 2013; Brooks and Waters, 2017: 63). Collins (2012: 296) presents international student mobility as of interest to geographers because of the intersection between "education, migration and globalisation". At a more localised scale, mobility of the body has important ramifications on geography education. For instance, Rink (2019) explores the connections between the studied content (i.e. 'geography'), the "doing" and the encountering, through autoethnographic reflections by undergraduate human geography students about their everyday mobilities.

Future directions for the geographies of education?

This article has sought to provide an overview to some of the main roots, traditions, approaches and concerns of the burgeoning but diverse field of geographies of education. Rather than repeat those here, this conclusion draws out (in a non-programmatic but hopefully generative way) some key, potential future directions as this scholarship journeys on.

Firstly, there could be even greater consideration of the possible points of connection between the different subdisciplines involved in geographies of education, and between *geographers* of education and the many academics working on education in other disciplines. Whilst there has been an ongoing discussion about a 'spatial turn' in education studies, to a

certain extent more cross-fertilisation between geography and education theories could continue to help extend the geographies of education. Relevant here may be trajectories as diverse as Vygotskian thought and consequent socio- and cultural-ecological approaches to child development and education, and critical realist approaches that encapsulate context and relationships to mechanisms for transforming action into outcomes may be a future area of consideration. These kinds of conversations may help address some of the fractures that (sometimes) exist between different (sub)disciplinary as well as different linguistic traditions in scholarship on geographies of education.

Secondly, and notwithstanding burgeoning work on informal, alternative and non-formal contexts, and on institutions beyond schools (such as Universities), there are still other spaces and processes that geographers could engage with. Most noteworthy would be what in the UK are termed 'Further Education' Colleges: often more vocationally-focused learning spaces that are attended by school leavers and those returning to education, either instead of or in advance of study in Higher Education. Similarly, and with vocational learning in mind, greater attention to apprenticeships, and the ways in which they are governed and experienced in different contexts, would offer rich opportunities for geographical analyses – as Gough, Langevang, Yankson and Owusu's (2019) ground-breaking work on the relationships between informal learning and apprenticeships in Ghana shows.

Thirdly – and Gough et al.'s paper is also very clear on this point – there is, however, a need to challenge both the Anglocentrism and Minority Global North dominance of research in this area. As this paper has shown, there is plenty of excellent work taking place in (and, increasingly, from) non-Anglophone and/or Global South contexts. Yet, there is a need to consider what equitable, inclusive scholarship in geographies of education might look like, and to find ways to decolonise that scholarship in ways that decentre those approaches that currently predominate. This could happen through the development more comparative studies involving multidisciplinary and international teams (for instance in relation to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, and especially SDGs 2 and 4). However, it could also happen by ensuring that there are equitable opportunities for academics working from different contexts, with situated concerns, working with theoretical perspectives that emerge *from* those concerns, to engage meaningfully in the development of scholarship in the geographies of education. In a field as diverse in its origins and conceptual underpinnings as the geographies of education, such a goal is surely both desirable and achievable.

Finally (although it was beyond the remit of this paper to consider this issue in any depth), connecting with the other papers in this Special Section, there is significant greater potential – not least with the establishment of the newly rebranded RGS-IBG *Geography and Education Research Group* – to critically consider the relationships between scholarship and practice in geography education and that on the geographies of education. They can act as two light beams on the same prism, refracting an entire spectrum of themes and theoretical approaches placing educational spaces and processes, as a socio-spatial phenomena, at their centre. Significantly, the updated version of International Charter on Geographical Education 2016[1] lays out a number of principles and practices, and points out the need for geography teachers in primary and secondary schools to be supported more adequately by the know-how developed in university Education research departments. This is a clear call for research that affords critical and self-reflexive involvement of teaching practices. Some of its main principles would be: education policy-makers and those in charge of curricula should develop processes that give teachers access to international developments in geography education, directly in their own language and in their schools; encouraging teachers to consider quality research in the field of geography education as an integral part of their own training; and, the fostering of international research workgroups that would be able to offer researchers resources, skills and competences that might not be available locally.

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