

CIDER: An Acronym for Understanding the Educational Possibilities for Bioregionalism

Nathan Hensley, Ed.D.
Auburn University

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Abstract: This article provides an overview of the primary themes embedded within bioregionalism. The framework for the paper is built around the CIDER acronym—compiled by the author—and includes: Connecting to our “life place,” inquiring into the interplay of cultural and ecological landscapes within the bioregion, decentralizing, emphasizing natural boundaries, reinhabiting as a culminating concept and practice. The CIDER acronym is then discussed in the context of applying bioregional thinking and practice to the broad field of education.

Dr. Nathan Hensley is an experiential educator with a research interest in bioregional and place-based education. Nathan continues to develop experiential knowledge of his bioregion by canoeing local waterways and hiking front country and back country trails with his friends and family. He is the author of Curriculum studies gone wild: Bioregional Education and the scholarship of sustainability and other articles related to sustainability. Currently he teaches Introduction to Sustainability courses as a Post-doctoral Teaching Fellow with the Honors College at Auburn University.

What does it mean to have a sense of place in today's consumer-driven, affluence-oriented, and industrial-minded landscape? How can we advance the education and scholarship necessary to promote ecological awareness and social solidarity? At a time when we face environmental disconnectedness, exponential human population growth and the inextricable increase in greenhouse gas emissions, it is becoming even more crucial to purposefully integrate place consciousness into education (Gruenewald, 2003; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Hensley, 2011; Hutchison, 2004; Orr, 2005). From a sustainability standpoint, we have arrived at the proverbial fork in the road where we must soon choose a path of, what seems to be, less resistance or a path of cohesive action aimed at building an interconnected global network of ecologically literate, place-conscious, and action-oriented citizens. In this paper I will explore the origins and theoretical underpinnings of the bioregionalism movement while addressing the opportunity for integrating bioregional thinking into educational theory and practice. The aim of this paper is to deepen the reader's understanding of bioregionalism and how it has influenced the sustainability movement while discussing the CIDER acronym, an educational framework for promoting bioregional student engagement.

Understanding Bioregionalism

Over thirty years ago an ecologically-grounded and place-sensitive movement began that urged people to live more connected lives (Aberley, 1999). It was a push for humans to turn simultaneously outward and inward in the effort to oppose the forces of globalization and industrially-based "progress." The process of turning "outward" involved learning about one's surroundings, both ecologically and socially—while participating in the pragmatic restoration of these communities. The process of turning "inward" precipitated a movement towards developing a more refined sense of self in relation to "coming home" to our place(s) (Berg & Dasmann, 2003). Berg and Dasmann (2003) posited that it was a movement intimately tied to both a geographical terrain and a terrain of consciousness (p. 232). The connection between a sense of place and sense of self is generally recognized as inextricable within the movement aimed at helping people to live more connected lives (Aberley, 1999; Berg & Dasmann, 2003; Hensley, 2011; Parsons, 1985; Lynch, Glotfelty, & Armbruster, 2012; Sale, 1980; Snyder, 1993). For example, Paul Shephard (2003) heralded that "[k]nowing who you are is impossible without knowing where you are" (p. 75). This place-based approach, associated with re-connecting to the land, each other, and oneself was catalyzed in the mid-seventies by Peter Berg and Raymond Dasmann. Referred to as *bioregionalism*, this movement involved a re-conceptualization of the human-earth relationship and a re-formulation of what it means to live well in our places—our life places, the places in which we live, play, and work.

Grounded in awareness of one's surrounding landscapes—including ecological, social, cultural, and autobiographical landscapes—bioregionalism is a framework that blends thought and action towards the intent of living lastingly and lovingly on this planet. Etymologically, the word bioregionalism is from the Greek word *bios* (meaning life) and the French word *region* (more generally thought of as place). Admittedly, as Jim Dodge (1981) points out, defining bioregionalism is no easy matter, as it is place-specific, non-prescriptive, non-standardized, and pragmatic. The range of applicability for bioregionalism necessitates a discursive approach. Bioregionalism is interdisciplinary, covering a wide field of subjects. In order to more fully

participate in place-oriented scholarship and practice it is important to better understand the broad scope of bioregionalism.

Negotiating the conceptual landscape of bioregionalism is somewhat complicated because of its widespread applicability and the required amount of reflection necessary to develop the ecological literacy inherent to *reinhabitation*. As I explain later in this paper *reinhabitation*—learning to live well in a place—is at the core of the bioregional movement. When one “lives well” in a place, according to David Orr (2005), he or she is an “inhabitant” which involves uncoupling from the predominate industrial-consumption-based form of human interaction with the earth. Thus, inhabitation promotes a mutually beneficial human-earth relationship while refuting the prevailing “extractive economy” (Jackson, 1994, p. 5) embedded in contemporary forms of hyper-consumerism. James Jones (2005) explains that Jackson’s notion of the “extractive economy has to do with the process of taking resources out of the earth, but not putting back; abusing, not using, spend-spend, not conserve” (p. 49). In contrast, as the founders of the bioregional movement, Berg and Dasmann point out, *reinhabitation* involves applying for membership in a biotic community and ceasing to be its “exploiter” (In Smith & Williams, 1999, pp. 214-215). The notion of being an inhabitant resounds well with David Orr’s approach to developing a sense of place.

According to Orr (2005), an inhabitant “dwells in an intimate, organic, and mutually nourishing relationship with place” (p. 92). In other words, an inhabitant develops a deep form of relatedness with one’s surroundings and thus is better able to contribute to the well-being of his or her locale. Orr adds that “good inhabitation is an art requiring detailed knowledge of a place, the capacity for observation and a sense of care and rootedness” (p. 92). It is the combination of having a sense of care and rootedness in a place that illustrates the orientation of bioregionalism.

In an effort to address its broad applicability, Gary Snyder unpacks the uniqueness associated with bioregionalism. He states that,

Bioregionalism goes beyond simple geography or biology by its cultural concern, its human concern. It is to know not only the plants and animals of a place, but also the cultural information of how people live there—the ones who know how to do it.

Knowing the deeper, mythic, spiritual, archetypal implications of a fir, or a coyote, or a blue jay might be to know from both inside and outside what the total implications of a place are. So it becomes a study not only of place, but a study of psyche in place. That’s what makes it so interesting. (In Loeffler, 2010, p. 51)

For me the term bioregionalism conjures up a vision of pragmatic re-connection to the land while embracing the nuances and subtleties of the unique social, ecological, cultural, historical, and ethereal considerations of one’s life place. These are components of communal thinking which are inherent to bioregionalism. The development of a sense of community is enmeshed within the vision of facilitating an even greater sense of connectedness to one’s land base and its associated human community. Accordingly, at its very essence, the bioregional movement is grounded in cultivating a deeper and more significant sense of place at individual and collective levels both ecologically, economically, and socially. Bioregionalism is also a mode of thought and action oriented toward reversing the homogenizing tendencies, both biologically and culturally, associated with globalization (Greenwood, 2009).

In 1981, Jim Dodge pointed out that bioregionalism was an idea that was still in “loose and amorphous formulation” (p. 6). I argue that “loose and amorphous” is an appropriate state for bioregionalism to be. Although, it is important to note that more specific applications of

bioregional thinking have emerged since Dodge's assessment (Evanoff, 2011; Lynch, Glotfelty, & Armbruster, 2012). One specific example of a form of bioregional thinking and action is found in the idea and practice of eating locally, within one's foodshed (Kloppenburger, Hendrickson, & Stevenson, 1996). Yet, as Dodge suggested, instead of having a dogmatic and rigid definition associated with bioregionalism, it seems that, at its very essence, the idea and practice of bioregionalism needs to have the room to dynamically adapt and adjust to the ever changing needs associated with a variety of communities. In other words, it is important to leave room for emergence and the spontaneous self-organization associated with living systems (Capra, 1996). Leaving room for emergence [Capra (1996), refers to systems oriented emergence as autopoiesis—self-making] allows us to recognize that the natural world continues to dynamically adapt to consequences associated with anthropogenic impacts on the earth. Bioregionalism pushes us to pay attention to where we are and to become more mindful about our interactions with the local human community and local environment. Recognizing that the term bioregion literally means “life place” makes the concept more tangible. Accordingly, the term bioregion (not bioregionalism) is quite concrete (MacGregor, 2005). Articulating the overarching principles that permeate bioregional thinking helps to move the concept and practice forward and gives us a chance to think about the associated educational implications.

Principles of Bioregional Thinking

What will nature help us to do here?

Wendell Berry

At the very core of bioregional thinking is identifying how we, as humanoids on planet Earth, can localize our endeavors to better fit the needs of the bioregions within which we live. Paradoxically, when we live rooted lives in our particular places, we are also contributing to a larger form of ecological stewardship (Evanoff, 2011). Bioregional stewardship has global impacts when we recognize how the different earth-systems (ie. the water cycle, carbon cycle, and nitrogen cycle) are all interconnected. Therefore, even the smallest effort of ecological stewardship can have a larger impact. In a graduation speech, delivered to students at the College of the Atlantic, Wendell Berry (1991) posited that globalized thinking is not possible, because it is not within the human capacity to think at that scale. He wisely urged us to:

[U]nderstand that no amount of education can overcome the innate limits of human intelligence and responsibility. We are not smart enough or conscious enough or alert enough to work responsibly on a gigantic scale. In making things always bigger and more centralized, we make them both more vulnerable in themselves and more dangerous to everything else...Learn, therefore, to prefer small-scale elegance and generosity to large-scale greed, crudity, and glamour. (p. 156)

Berry's cogent statement helps to situate bioregionalism within the sustainability movement. Bioregional thinking is crucial, and involves reflecting upon and conceptualizing how we can live well within our places. Living well within our places includes recognizing the inherent interconnectivity and interdependence within the eco-social relationships that sustain us. Living well within our places echoes Wendell Berry's quest to find out “what nature can help us do” in

a particular place (In Kloppenburg, Hendrickson, & Stevenson, 1996). In essence, it involves being able to let nature become our mentor while attempting to solve challenging problems. In other words, it is important to contextualize the challenges that we face within the particular surroundings in which they occur. Place-based action and reflection addresses this effort to localize our environmentally-grounded work within a bioregional model of praxis.

In an effort to outline the overarching principles of bioregionalism, I have developed the CIDER acronym. This acronym emerges from the research efforts in the process of writing my first book (Hensley, 2011). The acronym is an attempt to make bioregionalism more accessible and more broadly applicable while enabling us to think more generally about the associated educational implications. CIDER sets out a framework for better understanding bioregionalism for educators, educational theorists, and anyone else interested in formulating a more inspired and informed perspective on the topic. Here are the components of CIDER:

- Connecting to our “life place”
- Inquiring into the interplay of cultural and ecological landscapes within the bioregion
- Decentralizing
- Emphasizing natural boundaries
- Reinhabiting as a culminating concept and practice

Connecting to our life place

Connecting to our life place involves generating and deepening our sense of place. A sense of place involves the development of an integrated and experientially-based presence with our surrounding ecological and social community (Hensley, 2011). Connecting to our life place also necessitates an understanding of one’s *ecological address* (our particular location within the greater biosphere). To know our ecological address requires us to build knowledge regarding our whereabouts within the natural world. In essence, connecting to our life place involves situating ourselves within our locale and learning to care for our bioregion. To better orient our efforts in caring for our bioregion Wendell Berry suggests that,

The question that must be addressed is not how to care for the planet but how to care for each of the planet’s millions of human and natural neighborhoods, each of its small pieces and parcels of land, each one of which is in some precious way different from all the others.

(Berry, 1991, p. 153)

Emphasizing a localized re-connection to our surrounding human and natural neighborhoods is at the very foundation of bioregionalism. Connecting with one’s surrounding bioregion and the nuances of local neighborhood(s) also involves appreciating the interplay of cultural and ecological landscapes.

Inquiring into the interplay of cultural and ecological landscapes within the bioregion

The idea of appreciating—and inquiring into—the interplay of cultural and ecological landscapes within the bioregion is grounded in cultivating a deeper understanding about our position as humans in the greater eco-social community which falls within our life place (Miller, Vandome, & McBrewster, 2010). In other words, understanding the link within and between one’s surrounding social and ecological communities necessitates learning how the inhabitants—

those who live well in their life place—are interacting with one another and with their land base. Appreciating this interconnection evokes an ethic of care and protection grounded in the social and environmental nuances of a place. Bioregional thinking recognizes the need to both recognize and encourage social and ecological diversity.

In the socially-grounded perspective, diversity of thinking is embraced and encouraged by community members. Affirming the diversity of thought and action within a bioregion is closely related to the eco-justice-based (Mueller, 2009) effort of ending the industrialized nations' exploitation and cultural colonization of third-world nations. Bioregional thought and action necessitates the identification and reversal of the colonizing juggernaut associated with industrialized standardization. Instead of promoting standardized conformity and a *monoculture of mind* (Shiva, 1993), fostering diversity of thought and action advances pluralistic perspectives and offers an opportunity for counter hegemony. Accordingly, a diversity of cultural traditions, language, and even accents are cultivated and advanced within a bioregional framework for advancing multiculturalism within a particular bioregion. It is important to recognize how there is *unity in diversity* in that a broad range of perspectives need to actively be engaged within virtually any healthy (and participative) community (Shiva, 2012). When a broad range of perspectives are engaged and appreciated, there is a more complex form of eco-social unity that becomes available, grounded in the understanding that difference enriches human-human and human-non-human interactions (Gallopín & Raskin, 2002, pp. 112-113).

Similarly, from the perspective of promoting the interplay of ecological landscapes, biodiversity is encouraged within bioregionalism. In bioregionalism there is recognition of the inherent interconnectivity between how humans cultivate cultural diversity and how humans can promote biodiversity (Berg & Dasmann, 2003; Hensley, 2011; Parsons, 1985; Lynch, Glotfelty, & Armbruster, 2012; Snyder, 1993). The push to advance greater biologically-grounded scholarship and action aligns with Vandana Shiva's (2005) notion of Earth Democracy, which advocates for the inherent right of nature to flourish rather than be contingent upon the demands of humans. Accordingly, bioregionalism recognizes the importance of developing a sense of place within the context of sustaining our surrounding ecological communities. A sense of place becomes even more crucial when considering the way that our immediate surroundings affect the way with which we view the world. Orr (1992) puts it this way, "knowledge of a place—where you are and where you come from—is intertwined with knowledge of who you are. Landscape, in other words, shapes mindscape" (p. 130). Similarly, it is important to note that the inverse is also true (our mindscape can shape the landscape); how we view nature is directly tied to how we treat it. Aldo Leopold (1949) explained that "we abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect" (p. viii). When we have more respect for the natural world we are more likely to build our individual awareness of how we can impact it. When we recognize how our mindscape can impact the landscape, we can better appreciate the fact that there is a participatory nature within ecological stewardship and promoting biodiversity. To encourage participatory community structures, it is important to think about opportunities for decentralization.

Decentralizing

Decentralization involves emphasizing “bottom up” decision making. It is the process of shifting the scale from a distant and homogenous body of national decision makers to a more local decision making approach. Within bioregional thinking, decentralization helps to put the power in locally determined, participatory, democratic, ecologically-responsive and engaging modes of interactive leadership. A decentralized mode of interactive leadership embraces diversity which is inextricably associated with resilience. This is because diversity ensures that there is redundancy in a system which subsequently builds resilience. Supporting this concept, Capra (2011) tells us that diversity assures resilience and that this is fundamental fact of life. From the perspective of promoting bottom-up, grassroots style governance, decentralization enables a more localized emphasis to be placed on promoting the nuanced modes of leadership and stewardship necessary to promote localized diversity. One approach to bioregional decentralization is to shift from large-scale politically defined boundaries to smaller-scale naturally defined boundaries.

Emphasizing natural boundaries

Within the bioregional perspective natural boundaries are emphasized over the human-determined political boundaries that exist today. The thinking here is that utilizing natural boundaries and not human-delineated boundaries is a more adequate and appropriate way to precipitate a kind of stewardship that is grounded in local action. Alexander (1996) adds that in bioregionalism the focus is on “*natural* [boundaries], as opposed to political or administrative [boundaries]” (p. 2). He also observes that these “naturally-defined regions [become] organizing units for human activity” (p. 2).

When political boundaries are aligned with ecological boundaries, a stronger sense of ownership and identification can occur for members of the community. This ownership and place-oriented identification can occur because one is able to better realize how political decisions impact one’s own backyard. This becomes an issue of scale and quality. Naturally determined political boundaries enable the occurrence of decentralized forms of political action associated with scaling down (see Schumacher, 1973; Sale, 1980). By scaling down, regional decision-makers have more input politically, and are able to see the impacts in a more direct sense than decision makers from a distant, more centralized, governing body. Accordingly, scaling down allows inhabitants to more optimally dwell within their bioregion by enabling them to become more consciously enmeshed within their local systems. By becoming more enmeshed in one’s local systems, an inhabitant can be better attuned to the functional feedback loops that make up their bioregion (Capra, n.d.). Capra (n.d.) states that, in feedback loops, when “an influence travels around a loop and comes back, you can have self-regulation; and not only self-regulation but self-organization.” He adds that when “you have a [feedback loop-oriented] network—for instance, a community—it can regulate itself.” Self-regulation includes economic, social, and political systems and permits a form of decision making that is more pragmatic and appropriate for a given bioregion. Thus, in scaling down, there is more opportunity for higher quality, more appropriate, and more mindful forms of environmental action that are associated with aligning political boundaries with ecological boundaries. The shift from a centralized

political system to a decentralized political system is one that helps to cultivate a reinhabitation-grounded relationship with our bioregion.

Reinhabiting as a Culminating Practice and Concept

When one synthesizes and acts upon the first four components of the CIDER acronym then she is most likely undergoing the practice of reinhabitation. From connecting to one's life place and inquiring into the interplay of cultural and ecological landscapes, to decentralizing and emphasizing natural boundaries, reinhabitation integrates all of the other CIDER principles. According to the founders of the bioregionalism movement, Berg and Dasmann, reinhabiting means

[L]earning to live-in-place in an area that has been disrupted and injured through past exploitation. It involves becoming native to a place through becoming aware of the particular ecological relationships that operate within and around it. It means understanding activities and evolving social behavior that will enrich the life of that place....Simply stated it involves applying for membership in a biotic community and ceasing to be its exploiter. (In Smith & Williams, 1999, pp. 214-215)

The concept of reinhabitation is at the very essence of bioregionalism. Gruenewald states that "[r]einhabitation roughly equates with the deeper agenda of many environmental educators" to "learn how to live well together in a place without doing damage to others, human and nonhuman" (In Gruenewald & Smith, 2008, p. 149). In essence, reinhabitation involves living with others, both human and non-human, while cultivating mutually beneficial relationships. It is a summons to return to one's roots that encourages people to "become native to their places" (Jackson, 1994).

When people are able to become native to their places, they embrace a more earth-friendly lifestyle, which is characterized by understanding the interconnectedness between one's consumption habits, waste production, and ecological stewardship approaches. Instead of blindly accepting the tenets of globalization, they craft a more indigenous and attuned way of interacting with their places exemplified by the inhabitant-based characteristics mentioned earlier in this paper. Reinhabiting one's place facilitates a counter narrative to the exploitive, consumption- and production-based agenda of the market. Formulating a more accurate story, or narrative, than the predominate industrial-scientific mechanistic narrative (Hensley, 2011) is an important aspect of crafting a more ecologically appropriate human-earth relationship. This is the case because, as previously mentioned, mindscape has a direct impact on landscape. The way that an individual or a community thinks is inextricable to the way that the landscape is altered by humans. Therefore, an effective bioregional counter narrative is informed by the nuances of place and governed by a pragmatic and pluralistic ecocentric worldview which promotes a mutually beneficial human-earth relationship. Reinhabitation is a form of thinking and action that facilitates reconnection with place and community. Accordingly, it rejects the dominant industrial paradigm. Conversely when we subscribe to the industrial paradigm we advance rootlessness and disconnectedness (Zencey, 1996). In summary, reinhabitation integrates each component of the CIDER acronym and calls for the dynamic ability to shift from a mechanistic world view to an ecological world view.

Applying the CIDER Model to Education

There is an abundance of opportunities to apply the CIDER bioregional framework to curriculum and pedagogy. When the unique and plentiful educational possibilities embedded in the social and ecological communities (the bioregion), that surround the school, are recognized and appreciated, there is a potential to transform how educators draw out student passion for learning, curiosity, and stewardship. A bioregionally informed curriculum and pedagogy has applicability in virtually all educational settings, informal and formal, institutional and organic. The CIDER acronym provides a basic framework to help educators initiate the process of intentionally infusing bioregional thinking, action, and understanding into the curriculum.

Educators and students alike are able to start from the very simple premise of connecting to one's life place. Instead of learning from a text book created across the country, educators can cultivate bioregional connection by infusing direct, localized experiences in the outdoors and in the community. One example of this is bringing students to the local river and allowing observations to be made about human impact on water quality. It is a call to action when students experientially understand that the local river is being impacted by the actions of the surrounding community. It follows that devising and implementing a river cleanup plan offers important opportunities for students to apply their passion and integrate their understanding of human impact upon the river. These types of student projects can be aligned with the efforts of the local community in restoring an impaired waterway, which helps students to feel more civically engaged and subsequently more connected as active citizens (Smith & Sobel, 2010; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Hensley, 2011).

The immediate outdoor and surrounding community can serve as an integrating context for students to examine issues pertaining to sustainability. Furthermore, in a place-based form of education students have the opportunity to engage in interdisciplinary inquiry because they are immersed in their surrounding bioregion. It is inquiring into the interplay of cultural and ecological landscapes that can serve as the curricular bedrock enabling students to build upon, in a multidimensional way, their understanding of complex issues (such as watershed management). Since we all live in a watershed, defined as an area of land that drains into a common body of water, watershed management has applicability in most educational settings. For example, grade school students can do simple macroinvertebrate testing which enables them to experience the natural world first hand. Conversations with students about watersheds can include discussion about who is responsible for managing watershed quality and enforcing various policies. When students spend time exploring their surrounding cultural and ecological landscapes they are better positioned, epistemologically, to understand the way that systems interact within their bioregion. This knowledge enables students to understand and appreciate the interdependent and interconnected quality of living systems and promotes the kind of thinking that recognizes nature as a teacher as opposed to something that should be objectified and commodified. As Thomas Berry stated, the "universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects" (In Jensen, 2009, p. 39). When students participate and engage in the process of inquiring into the interplay and ecological landscapes they are more likely to view the universe as a communion of subjects and not a collection of objects.

Incorporating the concept of decentralization into curriculum and pedagogy requires a level of awareness and appreciation that enables students to recognize the potentiality of joining with a group of dedicated and thoughtful citizens. These citizens are typically community members, within the surrounding bioregion in which the school is located, committed to

ecological integrity, social solidarity, and economic stability. Paul Hawken (2007), reports that citizens throughout the world are taking part in the largest movement ever known on this planet, the sustainability movement. So, these dedicated and thoughtful, forward thinking, citizens can be found in virtually every bioregion throughout the planet. These are the kind of citizens that align with the characteristics of an inhabitant previously discussed. To appreciate the impact of collective and participatory action is at the foundation of a democratic society. Thus, when there is a certain level of decision making capacity given to students there is also an increase in ownership and responsibility. Students can quickly grasp the notion of decentralizing when there is a more horizontal decision-making framework, within their own classroom, than when there is a vertical decision-making culture [see Dewey (1915) for examples of a school-oriented democratic and participatory framework]. This understanding can be transferred from the classroom scale to broader arenas such as city, county, and state sovereignty in political contexts.

Emphasizing natural boundaries enables students to think geographically and geologically about the space in which they live. For students to understand the implications of emphasizing human constructed boundaries over naturally existing boundaries, it is important to start with the immediate surroundings of the schoolyard or, in some cases, the surroundings of the urbanized or built environment. When it comes to watershed management, it doesn't matter if one dumps oil in the schoolyard or in the neighbor's yard—the oil still is entering the watershed and creating a cascade of negative effects. Starting with a more localized context, such as the school yard (or the surrounding urban built-environment), enables students to better embrace the broad notion of listening to and protecting the parliament of all living beings (Seed, 1988). Accordingly, all life forms gain value within a bioregional framework, and starting in the schoolyard is something that makes the education more tangible to students.

Lastly, encouraging students to understand what it means to reinhabit a place is the common thread woven throughout the CIDER acronym for bioregional student engagement. When students become more familiar with each of the other CIDER components they begin to better comprehend what it means to be “native” to their place. This is when the “great work” (Berry, 1999) of developing a mutually nourishing relationship between humans and the Earth is initiated and recognized as something in which each one of us can choose to participate. Ultimately, the CIDER educational framework for bioregional engagement can enable the student to develop a heuristic for studying and addressing environmental and social challenges wherever they call home.

Bioregional Autobiographical Inquiry

One effective way to introduce students to bioregionalism is to ask them to reflect upon, process, and work towards understanding how their autobiographical experiences in their unique bioregions have shaped their perspective towards nature. This is an exercise that enables the student to start with a relevant and meaningful connection to the material being explored. There are several layers that can be added to this exercise including mapping out ecological features such as the nearby waterways and watershed. For an example see Peter Berg's (2005) exercise pertaining to mapping one's bioregion entitled “Finding Your Own Bioregion.”

For me, as a native Kansan who has lived in several states, I now better understand the importance of developing and maintaining a sense of place. Also, as a curriculum theorist I recognize the possibility of what I refer to as bioregional inquiry to advance the scholarship of

sustainability. Bioregional inquiry involves studying what it means to be an inhabitant in the millions of ecological and social communities throughout the planet. Bioregional inquiry seeks to better understand the relationship between advancing a sense of place and advancing stewardship and ecological attunement. Also, bioregional inquiry explores the interplay of cultural and ecological landscapes while encouraging pluralistic and discursive forms of negotiating the wide range of social and environmental “neighborhoods” that comprise this planet.

Conclusion

...find [y]our place and dig in.
Gary Snyder

Recognizing the significant impact that a sense of place can have upon stewardship patterns pushes us, as educators and educational theorists, to find our places and dig in (Snyder, 1991). Bioregional thinking is an effective way to frame our thinking and action pertaining to advancing communities that are more sustainable and attuned to the nuances of place. When formulating an educational response to the ecological crisis and the social injustices that currently exist, it becomes even more crucial to localize our efforts and enable students to reconnect with their immediate surroundings. A number of opportunities exist for educators to infuse bioregional and place-based thinking into their curriculum and pedagogy. Opportunities to provide direct learning experiences in the ecological and social communities that surround the school are abundant. Place-based education possibilities are rich in virtually any setting—the big challenge is to find ways to help students reconnect to their bioregion and to cultivate an inherent love for the land base (Wilson, 1984).

By utilizing the foundational principles outlined in the CIDER acronym there are a number of possibilities for educators to more purposefully infuse bioregionalism into their day-to-day practice. Through bioregional inquiry, educators can deepen their own sense of place while encouraging students to do the same. The process of deepening one’s sense of place is ongoing and it provides a great deal of motivation for building place consciousness and thoughtful modes of stewardship.

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