

Considerations of place in sustainability education policy: How local contexts inform the engagement of sustainability in education policy enactment and practice

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Abstract: The goal of this paper is to characterize the current state of literature that explores the importance of local contexts in the uptake of sustainability in education policy enactment and practice, with a particular focus on land and place in relation to education policy. Place has been studied by various fields in distinctive ways, and each discipline tends to privilege a certain aspect of place based upon their disciplinary frameworks. As opposed to exploring place through a disciplinary lens, I am seeking to understand place as a holistic, multidimensional concept. Place has historically been conceptualized as static, never changing, and everlasting. In contrast, a more contemporary view describes place as always in process, always becoming; places are never complete, bounded, or finished. This transmutes place into a more subjective concept, something that is rich in imagery, memories, and history but blurred when it comes to limits, power, and hierarchy. Thus, places operate through reiterative and continual practice but can be disrupted through social change and movements, political shifts, and differing ideologies. This protean characteristic of place is significant when reviewing the policy enactments literature, which underscores the fact that schools are always specific, and they are dynamic and shift both internally and externally. This paper seeks to address the question: *How can or should considerations of place (e.g., location, local-global, land as historical, contested, impacted by dominant culture) inform the engagement of sustainability in education policy enactment and practice?*

Keywords: Place; Land; Policy Enactment; Sustainability Education; Justice

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Background

My research is situated within a larger project that consists of Canadian researchers and partner organizations that are committed to advancing sustainability in education policy and practice. The Sustainability and Education Policy Network (SEPN) was formed in response to the lack of coordinated analysis of sustainability and environmental education at the Kindergarten through Grade 12 (K-12) and Post-Secondary Education (PSE) levels in Canada. In particular, my doctoral research explores to what extent local influences (e.g., local cultural considerations, place/land, other locally existing policies) affect the enactment and development of sustainability in education policy and practice at the K-12 level. Place is the focal point for this paper, and I begin with a personal reflection on place and how shifting conceptions have impacted my identity, educational opportunities, and perceived status in society.

Pontificating Place

“No one comes from the earth like grass. We come like trees. We all have roots.”
-Maya Angelou

As an African-American woman pursuing a doctoral degree in Canada, the concept of place and rootedness are often foremost in my thoughts. One aspect of place that has been particularly interesting to me is the impact that it has had on my identity. I was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan, a place steeped in the history of civil rights and still suffering repercussions from decades of discrimination, unemployment, and racism. My mother, Dorothy Ann Morris, worked as a seamstress for the Chrysler Corporation which made it possible for me to attend Catholic private schools from Kindergarten through Grade 12. My elementary school, the site for my first lesson on place and identity, was located in the affluent and predominantly Caucasian suburb of Grosse Pointe Farms. As one of the few minority students in class, and possibly the only child being raised by a single mother, I found myself modifying the way that I spoke and behaved based upon my target audience. I created a new person, one that I thought fit into the “place” where the children of neurologists and judges attended elementary school. This performance has continued through university and into my adult life, but it has been disrupted since I uprooted my family (spouse and two young children) to pursue doctoral studies in Canada.

In the United States, I was unmistakably recognized as black (i.e., a descendent of slaves), and even though the industriousness of my mother allowed me to attend affluent schools and garner three university degrees, I still experienced the realities of being a black woman living in America. I was weary of the police and judicial system, I was watched suspiciously while shopping in department stores, and I was frequently ignored in class or during business meetings because my voice/perspective was discredited and/or devalued. These experiences, which shaped my identity and flavoured the way that I view and interact with the world, were washed away when I relocated to Canada and unwittingly became a voluntary immigrant.

In this place, I am once again a different person, a person that is considered privileged, a person with numerous opportunities and the freedom to admonish the systemic racism that plagued me in the United States. However, with this newfound freedom came a sense of rootlessness that I had not anticipated, and I have noticed a patina of discrimination in this place of possibilities. This patina has followed me throughout my travels between various places around the world, and although the narratives surrounding my place in society may change, I am and

will always be an “other”, always located outside of the center/core, and always left yearning for a place to call my own.

Introduction

In this paper, I will conduct a critical literature review that explores the importance of local contexts in the uptake of sustainability in education policy and practice, with a particular focus on land and place in relation to education policy enactment. This review will look beyond existing policy research to draw in other literatures on place and land. The paper will address the question: *How can or should considerations of place (e.g., location, local-global, land as historical, contested, impacted by dominant culture) inform the engagement of sustainability in education policy enactment and practice?*

I am using the term “place” primarily at its most elemental level, which is space that is “invested with meaning in the context of power” (Cresswell, 2004, p. 12). Analogously, I am also utilizing Gieryn’s (2000) definition of place as having these necessary features: 1) geographic location, 2) material form, and 3) investment with meaning and value. It is important to note that these three features of place must remain bundled, no one is lesser or greater in significance than the others (Gieryn, 2000). I am taking up the term “sustainability” to reflect the classic goals of sustainable development in the Brundtland Report (1987), along with the definition by the Board on Sustainable Development of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, which takes into account the relationship and time constraints between what needs to be sustained (i.e., nature, life support systems, community) and what should be developed (i.e., people, economy, society) (Kates, Parris & Leiserowitz, 2011).

The structure of this paper is as follows: I begin with a section on place, with subsections that review 1) the history of place, 2) neoliberalism, power and place, 3) a sense of place in educational frameworks, and 4) emplaced learning. Next, I include a section on education policy enactment, including subsections on contextual dimensions of policy enactment and policy mobility. Lastly, I include a section on the engagement of sustainability and place in education practice, with subsections that review 1) places of pedagogy and 2) praxis in practice.

Section 1: Place

Place is both a “common sense” word and an elusive one. Most people conceptualize place as being static, never changing, and everlasting. However, Cresswell (2004) has described place as always in process, always becoming; places are never complete, bounded, or finished. This transmutes place into a more subjective concept, something that is rich in imagery, memories, and history but blurred when it comes to limits, power, and hierarchy. Thus, places operate through reiterative and continual practice (Cresswell, 2004; Semken & Brandt, 2010) but can be disrupted through social change and movements, political shifts, and differing ideologies.

Three of the most common levels at which place is theorized includes descriptive, social constructionist, and phenomenological approaches to place (Cresswell, 2004). Descriptive, or ideographic approaches are concerned with the uniqueness and particularity of places, while a social constructionist approach is interested in the underlying social processes (e.g., capitalism, patriarchy, heteronormativity) that shape places (Cresswell, 2004). A phenomenological approach to place “seeks to define the essence of human existence as one that is necessarily and

importantly ‘in-place’ [sic]” (Cresswell, 2004, p. 51). These three levels should not be considered discrete, as they often overlap and reflect depth as opposed to distinct subsets (Cresswell, 2004). Moreover, it is important to note that Indigenous understandings of place, often referred to as land, exists “outside, alongside, against, and within the domain of the Western philosophical tradition” (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 11). Thus, while descriptive, social constructionist, and phenomenological approaches to place are useful, place has been imagined beyond these levels by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars (Deloria, 2001; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). Before unpacking the many conceptualizations of place, I would like to provide a brief overview that traces the history of place from the discipline of geography into environmental/sustainability education.

A Brief History of Place

Historically, place has been conceived in many different ways by numerous academics, researchers, and philosophers (Ardoin, 2006; Castree, 2004; Deloria, 2001). However, human geography has traditionally focused on place as one of its central objects of study. Geographers have long “argued that the study of geography has a crucial role to play in making a better world... and should promote international peacemaking and social and environmental justice” (Israel, 2012, p. 76). It is significant to note that the words “space” and “landscape” are sometimes used as a substitute for the word “place”. Space is determined in relation to places, and is understood as the product of interrelations (McKenzie, 2012). I will return to issues surrounding space and spatial justice later in this text. Landscape refers to the physical shape, materiality, and topography of a segment of land (Cresswell, 2004). To compound the varying conceptions of place by academics, some Western scholars and Indigenous peoples have conceived place/land quite differently. For example, the Dene Nations of Canada word for land is translated to mean land (material), people and animals, rocks and trees, rivers and lakes, and so on (Coulthard, 2010).

Many scholars attribute the phenomenological geographers Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph with the early development of place studies in the mid 1970s (Trentelman, 2009). Two canonical works that have framed how Western scholars and researchers engage with place are *Place and Placelessness* by Relph (1976) and *Space and Place* by Tuan (1977). While explaining the relationship between space and place, Tuan (1975) equated space to movement, and paralleled place to pauses. He emphasized the importance of experience to knowing and understanding a place, and stated that “[e]xperience constructs place at different scales” (Tuan, 1975, p. 153). This construction is based primarily on personal experiences, how an individual understands and relates to their home, school, neighbourhood, city, and nation. It is interesting to note that Tuan (1975) described the relationship with place and time as follows:

If it takes time to know a place, the passage of time itself does not guarantee a sense of place. If experience takes time, the passage of time itself does not ensure experience. One person may know a place intimately after a five-year sojourn; another has lived there all his life and it is to him as unreal as the unread books on his shelf. The contrast is not between abstract knowledge and a personal knowledge that cannot be expressed, for it is possible to live and yet not be alive, so that the years melt away with no impress on either mind or sensibility (p. 164).

Along with Tuan, Relph (1976) contributed to this initial place scholarship by emphasizing the role that place plays on human identity. He advanced that “to be human is to have and to know *your* [sic] place” (Relph, 1976, 1). A decade later, John Agnew (1987) outlined three meaningful aspects of place: 1) locale (structured microsociological content of place), 2) location (representation in local social exchanges of practices and ideas resulting from relationships between places), and 3) sense of place (subjective and emotional attachment people have to place). I will review sense of place later in this article, but it is important to note that limitations surrounding locale and location have been critically debated throughout the literature.

The place literature is teeming with both polite and sometimes critical debate surrounding the limitations and/or unboundedness of place (Trentelman, 2009). To illustrate a few tensions that have arisen surrounding place, Castree (2004) speaks to the messiness of place projects and stresses that “[t]his messiness often cannot be fitted into the diagnostic and evaluative boxes otherwise well-intentioned critics are wont to use in examining it” (p.138). In evaluating the conceptions of place set forth by three influential critical geographers, Castree (2004) simplifies the following:

Watts focuses primarily on place identity, Massey on the nature of place difference and interconnection, and Harvey on the geographical scope of agency, loyalties and justice. Together, their works theorise the ‘subjective’ dimensions of place, the ‘objective’ dimensions of place, and the wider geographical scales at which active efforts to defend/enhance/alter places should be organized. (p. 140).

Conceptions of Place

As opposed to exploring place through a disciplinary lens, I am seeking to understand place as a holistic, multidimensional concept. As mentioned previously, place has been studied by various fields (e.g., anthropology, environmental education, geography, sociology, psychology) in distinctive ways, and each discipline tends to privilege a certain aspect of place based upon their disciplinary frameworks (Ardoin, 2006; Semken & Brandt, 2010; Trentelman, 2009). I would like to unpack the concept of place as a geographical term, and touch upon theoretical literatures outside and around geography that inform the relevance of place in environmental education policy.

In contrast to viewing place as something set apart by boundaries or limits, Massey (1993) described places as “best thought of as nets for social relations” (p. 148). She stresses the uniqueness of place, and the relationships between the history and future of a place along with the construction of uneven development (Massey, 1993). I will review issues surrounding spatial justice and uneven development in a later section, but I highlight that place, at it’s most elemental level, has been described as space that is “invested with meaning in the context of power” (Cresswell, 2004, p. 12). This power is expressed in many different forms, ranging from the delimitation of borders (e.g., dividing cities, territories, neighbourhoods) to the redlining of certain sections of town. Massey (1993) argues that:

places are the product of the intersection of social relations (most of which will

have a broader geography than the place itself), then part of the uniqueness of each place derives from the fact that nowhere else has quite this particular intersection (p. 148).

I believe that a meaningful conceptualization of place that directly relates to environmental and sustainability education is illustrated by Gieryn (2000) to describe the connections between places and experiences. Gieryn (2000) states that “[p]lace saturates social life: it is one medium (along with historical time) through which social life happens” (p. 467). In this way, place is seen as the backdrop for which all social life occurs. Moreover, place is described as “*remarkable* [sic], and what makes it so is an unwindable spiral of material form and interpretative understandings or experiences” (Gieryn, 2000, p. 471). This connection with place and associated experiences that happen in these places is what makes them meaningful to people and communities.

Place can also be conceived as a way of seeing, knowing, and understanding the land/world. This is illustrated in common language such as “he put me in my place” and “she needs to learn her place in the world”. Such language uses place as a way to situate people in a family, in a relationship, or in society in general. Place can be used to illustrate attachments, meaning, and experience. Unfortunately, sometimes “seeing the world through the lens of place leads to reactionary and exclusionary xenophobia, racism and bigotry. ‘Our place’ [sic] is threatened and others have to be excluded” (Cresswell, 2004, p. 11). This underscores the delimiting nature of place-making, the physical and conceptual separation of an inside/center/core versus an outside, an outside that is commonly viewed as dangerous and hostile when compared to the inner core. This aspect of place leads me into a discussion of seeking justice in various spaces/places, and how the spatial turn has come to inform educational policy initiatives.

Spatial Justice

The spatial turn marked a renewed interest in space across diverse disciplines; resulting in a new spatial consciousness (Soja, 2010; Withers, 2009). Scholars began to explore how identity is dependant upon places and contexts, and how this situatedness involves cultural and social norms along with spatial contexts that shape everyday life (McKenzie, 2014). Seeking spatial justice as multiscaler (i.e., operating at the local, regional, and national level) and consists of many different social contexts. In elaborating on the spatial turn, Soja (2010) states that:

This perspective and the new spatial consciousness that is arising from it strive to rebalance the spatial, the social, and the historical dimensions of reality, making the three dynamically interactive and equivalent in inherent explanatory power (p. 18).

Achieving greater spatial justice does not endeavour to realize full equality, but emphasizes inclusion as opposed to exclusion when seeking political mobilization (e.g., building coalitions between social movements). In this way, spatial justice is intimately tied to the concept of environmental justice, which refers to the ‘fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws’ (Bass, 1998 cited by

Ikeme, 2003, p. 197). At its core, environmental justice calls for equity and aims to alleviate existing or impending injustice in the distribution of environmental benefits and costs, and to eradicate unjust and inequitable conditions and decisions (Ikeme, 2003). The goal of pursuing spatial justice is to disrupt the unequal power distributions locally and across the globe (Soja, 2010), but in order to do so we must understand the factors that contribute to spatial injustices.

Distributional inequalities are the most basic form of spatial injustice, and this is evidenced by the allocation of doctors, hospitals, and clinics in an area usually catering to wealthy communities (Soja, 2010). Many of these distributional decisions can be endorsed as strictly economic, and I would like to share a relevant story from my time working in Northeast Ohio as a public health educator. In 2011, Huron Hospital (operated by the multi-national Cleveland Clinic) was shut down due to changes in health care coverage that was happening across the United States. This was the only hospital located in East Cleveland, which is one of the poorest communities in Ohio and has infant mortality rates that rival those of the most resource depleted developing nations. This closure caused residents, many who do not own vehicles and are dependant on public transit, to seek emergency medical care two or three communities away from their homes. Regrettably, this sort of distributional inequality extends to vital services such as education, housing, adequate/quality foods, and employment.

Our current laws and policies surrounding public space versus private property are steeped in the history of spatial injustice (Soja, 2010). The property blanket represents a notion of bounded spaces that powerfully shapes our everyday lives, drastically limiting the influx and exodus of individuals into various spaces. Neoliberal policies erode public spaces through deregulation and other mechanisms. However, our public spaces should be defended against commodification, privatization, and state interference (Soja, 2010). Fortunately, some Indigenous groups have successfully defended their communal land against powerful corporate and national forces that wanted to privatise it (van Dijk & van Dijk, 2012). Social movements, such as Idle No More, promote solidarity and incite change in sustainability and environmental education policy by demanding Indigenous sovereignty over territorial lands, waters, and natural resources (Wilson, 2014). Idle No More plays a role in seeking spatial justice by addressing the long history of neglect, abuse, misrepresentation, and miscommunication between First Nations communities and the Canadian and provincial governments. Next I discuss the relationship between neoliberalism, power and land, and how places have been transformed into sites of commodification and contestation through capitalist endeavours.

Neoliberalism, Power and Place

There are many connections between capital and place, and places are in competition with other places for highly mobile resources (Cresswell, 2004). Capitalism is dependent on its spatial fixes, and it “builds and rebuilds a geography in its own image” (Harvey, 2000, p. 54). The tension between capital and place is accentuated by neoliberal policies and discourses, many of which seek to commodify places and re-story histories to align with trends in extraction and consumption. The term neoliberalism is used to describe the currently dominant system of global governance that promotes free market conditions that “prioritize corporations and economic growth over considerations of social equity or environmental protection” (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 3). In today’s society, regrettably, commodifying everything and subjecting almost all transactions to a cost-benefit analysis is the dominant way of thinking (Harvey, 2000). Moreover,

“[n]eoliberalism builds on a western trajectory of cultural norms and practices” (McKenzie, 2012, p. 165), while neo-liberal policy agendas have brought to light differentiating spatial effects of unequal provision (Gulson & Symes, 2007).

An example of how power influences place can be witnessed amongst Native American and First Nations students living in the United States and Canada, whereby the scientific method/Western worldview oftentimes coexists with Native spirituality along with a deep connection with the land and animals. In this vein, power represents “the living energy that inhabits and/or composes the universe, and place being the relationship of things to each other” (Deloria, 2001, p. 23). The connections that Indigenous people have to places are undeniably some of the strongest in the world. As such, “Indigenous people represent a culture emergent from a place, and they actively draw on the power of that place, physically and spiritually” (Wildcat, 2001a, p. 32). Furthermore, tribal persons “find meaning in the world and recognize through experience that they are of a people and place” (Wildcat, 2001b, p. 145). This enduring sense of place within Indigenous communities is not static, instead place serves as a location for “contemporary Indigenous knowledge and language practices to comingle with others, change, and yet persist” (Hornberger & McCarty, 2012, p. 6).

Many Indigenous epistemologies view the world as a dynamic and living place, but many of these perspectives have been challenged and/or supplanted by dominant European/Western worldviews (Lucas, 2013). Indigenous communities use place/land as central reference point; in contrast, Western communities use time as the narrative of central importance (Coulthard, 2010). Through the processes of colonialism, Europeans worldview became known as The World History, displacing all other experiences and cultural histories around the globe (Deloria, 2001; Simpson, 2002). This has had a devastating impact on how we view and interact with places, since most times the Western worldview is unable to understand any other history, as it is the “truth” and superior to all others (Deloria, 2001; Lucas, 2013). “Until relatively recently in human history, the social activities through which distinctive forms of knowledge are produced have for the most part been localized” (Gough, 2002, p. 1223). Unfortunately, colonization has allowed Western thought to travel around the world, appearing to be devoid of any one cultural fingerprint; an undeniable universal truth and rational way of thinking (Gough, 2002).

While this Western conception of place, rooted in the power of colonialism and resource extraction, narrows the possibilities of how humans interact in and with places; the history of colonization and cultural oppression creates a context for shared experiences that tie identity to place (Kana’iaupuni & Malone, 2010). Wildcat (2001b) posits that “[p]lace is not merely the relationship of things, resources or objects, it is the site where dynamic processes of interaction occur -where processes between other living beings or other-than-human persons occur” (p. 144). Thus, “[e]ducation space is therefore revealed as fluid, interconnected and constructed through power relations” (Cook & Hemming, 2011, p. 6).

Coulthard (2010) states that “[p]lace is a way of knowing, experiencing, and relating with the world – and these ways of knowing often guide forms of resistance to power relations that threaten to erase or destroy our senses of place” (p. 79). This resistance to power is articulated by arguing against the contemporary pathological drive for expansion, growth, and accumulation (colonial-capitalist ideologies). Coulthard (2010) stresses the importance of sharing,

egalitarianism, respect for one another and the land, and autonomy, thus nurturing a sense of place. Sense of place research considers how people connect with places and how those connections influence their sentiments and behaviours towards the environment, which may have significant implications for sustainability education (Ardoin, Schuch & Gould, 2012).

A Sense of Place in Educational Frameworks

Sense of place is a complex concept often characterized as protean, subjective, and elusive. This is attributed to the fact that the relationship between an individual and a place often transcends the physical reality, representing a living force and spirit imbued with value (Ardoin, 2006). Sense of place, and its two main components place attachment and place meaning, is considered a critical element to creating an environmentally conscious and responsive citizenry. “Place attachment reflects how strongly people are attracted towards places, while place meaning describes the reasons for this attraction” (Kudryavtsev, Stedman & Krasney, 2012, p. 233). Moreover, place attachment refers to (but is not limited to) emotional ties that people develop with various places (Lewicka, 2011; Trentelman, 2009) and is moulded through oral traditions (Semken & Brandt, 2010). “Place attachments result from accumulated biographical experiences: we associate places with the fulfilling, terrifying, traumatic, triumphant, secret events that happened to us personally there (Gieryn, 2000, p. 481).

As a phenomenon, sense of place is “situational, historical, cultural, political, environmental, personal, and social” (Ardoin, 2006, p. 113). This is significant because contested places, such as unceded territories throughout Canada, are the “loci of past, ongoing, and potential future conflicts and displacements” (Semken & Brandt, 2010, p. 287). Thus, place-based education can offer a range of unique benefits for troubled communities in contested places (Semken & Brandt, 2010), and engendering a sense of place can disrupt dominant discourses surrounding local spaces. As opposed to something that can be fragmented and examined in isolation, a sense of place encompasses “psychological being, social community, cultural symbols, bio-physical territory, and political and economic systems” (Ardoin, 2006, p. 121). Ardoin, Schuh and Gould (2012) conceptualize sense of place as encompassing four distinct but interconnected dimensions: biophysical, sociocultural, political-economic, and psychological. By acknowledging these interconnected dimensions, sustainability and environmental educators and researchers can recognize the multifaceted and integrated concepts associated with sense of place (Ardoin, 2006).

An educational framework rooted in the creation of nurturing a sense of place in students can relate these concepts with real world, community-focused issues surrounding environmental learning, involvement, and action (Ardoin, 2006). Ardoin, Schuh and Gould (2012) suggest that:

The complexities of the human–nature relationship, the urgency of environmental threats, and the increasing prominence of place-based education call for a better understanding of how people value, use, and work to protect their places. (p. 584).

This shift towards a sense of place in educational frameworks allows students to connect curricular content with community issues and concerns, creating opportunities to learn about both the built and natural environments. In discussing the aims of place-based education, Sobel

(2013) emphasizes that the “history, folk culture, social problems, economics, and aesthetics of the community are all on the agenda. In fact, one of the core objectives is to look at how landscape, community infrastructure, watersheds, and cultural traditions all interact and shape each other” (p. 13).

Sustainability and environmental education programs that acknowledge and integrate the psychological, sociocultural, biophysical, and political-economic sense-of-place dimensions in developing programs may more closely reflect the human relationship with places (Ardoin, Schuh & Gould, 2012). This takes into account the processes that develop the depth and attachments of place connections, as well as those experiences that infuse places with significance (Ardoin, Schuh & Gould, 2012). Ardoin (2006) illustrates this connection between the dimensions of sense of place and modern lifestyles, including but not limited to the frameworks of education:

So long as modern lifestyles divorce people from biophysical places—the source of natural resources, such as food, water, and clean air—it is nearly impossible to fathom the intricate connections with the natural world in general, or individual places in particular—whether those connections be physical, cultural, social, or political. (p. 120).

Emplaced Learning

As ecological devastation increases, children are less likely to attach to the land. Place-based education reconnects people to the land, helps them become rooted, and promotes the conservation of natural places/resources (Ardoin, 2006). Children must reap the psychological and spiritual benefits from nature in order to experience a long-term connection and commitment to a place, and in turn the environment more generally (Louv, 2005; Semken & Brandt, 2010). Connecting with a place can ignite creativity, wonder, and appreciation for the world (Louv, 2005). This attachment can bind people to a place and give them meaning and a sense of belonging, and an attachment to land is good for the person and good for the land (Louv, 2005).

In order to move towards a more emplaced concept of education, there are numerous examples that can be learned from Indigenous worldviews, perspectives, and frameworks. Education is extremely significant in political and economic life, especially in capitalist societies that pair education with the production of knowledge economies (Cook & Hemming, 2011). As opposed to using a process of indoctrination, which is routinely used in the capitalist/Western society, education in the traditional setting occurred by example. Children learned by hunting, trapping, building, fishing, canoeing, foraging, and spending substantial amounts of time with parents, elders, and other children on the land.

Indigenous practice and theory understands “land as encompassing all of the earth, including the urban, and as much more than just the material” (Tuck, McKenzie & McCoy, 2014, p. 8). Thus, connecting students to the land can serve as a catalyst to disrupt dominant discourses surrounding Indigenous sovereignty and settler narratives surrounding land and property. Land education offers an opportunity for educators and students to “question educational practices and theories that justify settler occupation of stolen land” (Tuck, McKenzie & McCoy, 2014, p. 8). Tuck, McKenzie and McCoy (2014) argue:

Land education puts Indigenous epistemological and ontological accounts of land at the center, including Indigenous understandings of land, Indigenous language in relation to land, and Indigenous critiques of settler colonialism. It attends to constructions and storying of land and repatriation by Indigenous peoples, documenting and advancing Indigenous agency and land rights (p. 13).

Whether referred to as land education or place-based education, the need to indigenize school curriculum appears to be an imperative component of the process.

Reyes-Garcia et al. (2010) state that a “major challenge lies in re-shaping the school curriculum so it includes not only the content but also the teaching methods (i.e., field trips, observation, and informal instruction) that societies have put in place for the transmission of local environmental knowledge” (p. 312). This contextualized learning can be viewed as a type of indigenism, which is a body of thought advocating and elaborating diverse cultures (e.g., beliefs, behaviour, values, material products, and symbols) emergent from diverse places. It is purported that “[t]o indigenize an action or object is the act of making something of a place” (Wildcat, 2001a, p. 32). Thus, if we are attentive about processes and relationships when we experience places, we will invariably learn. This type of emplaced learning is further illuminated by Theobald & Siskar (2008):

A particular place on earth can be a kind of curricular lens through which all traditional school subjects may be closely examined. The immediacy and relevance of place in the lives of students can be a huge catalyst to develop learning- learning at the level of understanding (p. 216).

Appreciating that every place is shaped by various histories, stories, circumstances, and experiences, it is impossible to be prescriptive about place-conscious lessons or units (Theobald & Siskar, 2008). Moreover, individual “[p]laces cannot be bounded but are inexplicably linked to wider scales, with particular interactions and articulations of social relations, through a mixing of local and larger-scale processes” (Cook & Hemming, 2011, p. 4). Cook & Hemming (2001) note that “[e]ducation spaces and places are no exception: they are active and dynamic forums that cannot be understood apart from their wider social, cultural, political and economic contexts” (p. 4). Thus, “a politics of scale is necessary in enabling critique and in rearticulating forms of education policy-making and practice that prioritize interscaler local ‘good sense’ [sic] over neoliberal global ‘common sense’ [sic]” (McKenzie, 2012, p. 165). These politics of scale must be brought to educational policy (McKenzie, 2012) and each place (e.g., classroom, school, school district) should collectively determine the sorts of questions that they wish to explore based upon current problems that impact their community.

Section 2: Education Policy Enactment

The previous section underscores the fact that place is a crucial element to most if not all educational endeavours, as it serves as a backdrop for all social life. To extend this theory, Braun, Ball, Maguire & Hoskins (2011) outline a framework that “takes context seriously”, which implies that policies are enacted differently at each individual school, and that these place-specific factors tend to be neglected. Schools have varying capacities to cope with policies, so

this framework “identifies and relates factors that influence policy enactments between similar schools” (Braun, Ball, Maguire & Hoskins, 2011, p. 585). Furthermore, policies do not necessarily tell schools what to do, but they create an environment where the options are narrowed and/or changed (Braun, Ball, Maguire & Hoskins, 2011).

The traditional view of the policy process involves solving educational problems by finding a likely solution on which to base policy, then utilizing “the resulting policy as a lever for predictable and efficient changes” (Weaver-Hightower, 2008, p. 153). However, this view grossly underestimates the complexity and grittiness of policy formation and implementation (Weaver-Hightower, 2008). The formation of policy is rarely “a linear, logical process; a host of political and economic factors shape how policies get made, imported, exported, adapted, and indigenized” (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2009, p.13). Putting policies into practice is a constrained process, but is also creative and complex (Braun, Ball, Maguire & Hoskins, 2011). Moreover, policy should be viewed as a “process” as opposed to a way to “solve a problem” (Braun, Ball, Maguire & Hoskins, 2011).

As policies are enacted, they enter varying resource environments, including a diverse array of histories, buildings, staffing profiles, leadership experiences, budgetary situations, students with English as an additional language (EAL), and special needs children. Next, I explore the contextual dimensions of policy enactment, which involves the reconceptualization of policy (e.g., through reading, writing, and talking) as a way to move an abstract idea/policy into a contextualized practice (Braun, Ball, Maguire & Hoskins, 2011).

Contextual Dimensions

In relation to particular problems, “policies are enacted in material conditions, with varying resources” (Braun, Ball, Maguire & Hoskins, 2011, p. 588). Thus, a framework for policy enactment needs to include a set of objective conditions in relation to a set of subjective dynamics that acknowledge the material, structural, and relational part of policy analysis (Braun, Ball, Maguire & Hoskins, 2011, p. 588). In analyzing data from their case study of four schools, Braun, Ball, Maguire & Hoskins (2011) conceptualized the contextual dimensions of policy enactment as situated, professional, material, and external. Situated dimensions are defined by locale, school history, student intakes, and settings; while values, teaching commitments and experiences, and policy management in schools define professional dimensions. Staffing, school budgets, buildings, technology and infrastructure define material dimensions, while external dimensions are defined by degree and quality of local authority support, pressures and expectations from broader policy context.

Much of the policy enactments literature underscores the fact that schools are always specific, and they are dynamic and shift both internally and externally (Braun, Ball, Maguire & Hoskins, 2011). There is a move to disrupt the idealism (ideal buildings, ideal students, ideal staff, etc.) of policy-making to incorporate enactment/implementation factors to make things real. In order to accomplish this goal, we must try to understand the schools situated and material contexts, their specific professional resources and challenges, and their different external pressures and supports (Braun, Ball, Maguire & Hoskins, 2011). I will focus on the concept of policy mobility next because it allows for a deeper understanding of how localities and multiple locals connect through policy development and enactment.

Policy Mobility

As opposed to historical policy analysis that was conducted within bounded national frameworks, Cochrane and Ward (2012) stress the necessity to appreciate the wider framing of policy, whether through policy transfer, the lens of multilevel governance, or policy mobility. The mobilities perspective leads us to discard our usual notions of spatiality and scale and undermines linear assumptions about temporality and timing (Sheller & Urry, 2006). Thinking in terms of policy mobilities “requires careful attention to the multiple and overlapping spaces of policy making” (Cochrane & Ward, 2012, p. 5). Cochrane and Ward (2012) assert that:

the implications of taking such an approach for the ways in which geography is understood are also profound, since they make it necessary to rethink or revisit how to conceptualize some of the taken-for-granted tools and heuristics that are often mobilized in geographical thinking—including scale, territory, place, locality, and even the global (p. 6).

Policy mobility illustrates how policy networks with widespread geographical influence are essential to the construction of seemingly local responses, while globalized policies can only be realized in specific, grounded and localized ways (Cochrane & Ward, 2012).

Policies are not just defined in place but also reflect active production, circulation, and reproduction through global networks (Cochrane & Ward, 2012; Peck & Theodore, 2012). Thus, “policy making has to be understood as both relational and territorial; as both in motion and simultaneously fixed, or embedded in place” (Cochrane & Ward, 2012, p. 7). As opposed to viewing this process as inherently contradictory, instead what matters is the exploration of the tensions that produce policies in place, along with policies and places (Cochrane & Ward, 2012). “The challenge faced is that of capturing the complex dance associated with the grounding of mobile policies in place, in ways that give material existence to the policies while also helping to shape the politics of particular places (Cochrane & Ward, 2012, p. 8). This is a key component to the study of policy mobilities, which emphasizes an understanding of power and politics as they relate to and influence policy (McKenzie, Bieler, & McNeil, 2015).

The concept of mobility is important for educational policy because it can no longer be assumed that what works in one school district will be successful in another. This goes beyond disparities in resource allocation and/or educator participation, but highlights differences in interpretation, reconstruction, and hegemonic practices that may or may not have been imbued into the policy. In the next section, I revisit my initial question of how can or should considerations of place (e.g., location, local-global, land as historical, contested, impacted by dominant culture) inform the engagement of sustainability in education policy enactment and practice?

Section 3: Engaging the Local in Sustainability Education Practice

Engaging the local in sustainability education practice along with rethinking childhood has to be a central component of eco-focused pedagogies. Childhood as a discursive construct is romanticized as a time of innocence (Duhn, 2012), while our society often operates under a culture of fear by placing children into protected areas under the constant gaze of adults (Duhn, 2012;

Louv, 2005). Gruenewald & Smith (2008) posit that by “connecting to and appreciating places, children and youth begin to understand and question the forces that shape places; they develop a readiness for social action, and, with proper adult guidance, the skills needed for effective democratic participation” (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008, p. xx). I argue that adult guidance need not be a limiting factor to allowing children to connect to the land, and that much can be learned when children venture off into outdoor places either alone or with friends. Louv (2005) articulates the fact the children need the freedom to play, explore, and experience nature without adults’ constant supervision. However, pedagogy is a critical component to connecting students to places, which I will explore in the next sub-section.

Places of Pedagogy

Wals and Corcoran (2012) assert that new forms of learning can aid schools and communities in re-orienting people towards a more sustainable society. To address this call for new forms of learning, critical pedagogies “are needed to challenge the assumptions, practices, and outcomes taken for granted in dominant culture and in conventional education” (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 3). The practices and purposes of place-based education are “concerned with context and the value of learning from and nurturing specific places, communities, and regions” (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 3). Gruenewald (2003) posits that place:

foregrounds a narrative of local and regional politics that is attuned to the particularities of where people actually live, and that is connected to global development trends that impact local places. Articulating a critical pedagogy of place is thus a response against educational reform policies and practices that disregard places and that leave assumptions about the relationship between education and the politics of economic development unexamined (p. 3).

It has been articulated that “[b]eing in a situation has a spatial, geographical, contextual dimension. Reflecting on one’s situation corresponds to reflecting on the space(s) one inhabits; acting on one’s situation often corresponds to changing one’s relationship to a place (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 4). Gruenewald (2003) argues for the need for a critical pedagogy of place, whereby people are “challenged to reflect on their own concrete situationality in a way that explores the complex interrelationships between cultural and ecological environments” (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 6).

This critical pedagogy of place “aims to (a) identify, recover, and create material spaces and places that teach us how to live well in our total environments (reinhabitation); and (b) identify and change ways of thinking that injure and exploit other people and places (decolonization)” (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 9). McInerney, Smyth & Down (2011) endorse this critical perspective in place-based education, which encourages young people to connect local issues to global environmental, financial and social concerns, while inviting teachers and students to question the established order and work for the common good. Moreover, this calls for a “*relational* [sic] worldview and episteme that is in tune with reality: a worldview that is participative, holistic, systemic, [and] ecological” (Sterling, 2012, p. 514).

In expanding upon this notion of critical pedagogy of place, McKenzie (2008) suggests a pedagogy that seeks “to create spaces that enable youth to engage in collaborative,

intersubjective experiences, which are not pre-determined, but that support de- and re-familiarisation and cultural formation” (p. 367). This is in accordance with Simpson’s (2014) argument for land as pedagogy, and the “need to create generations of people that are capable of actualizing radical decolonization, diversity, transformation and local economic alternatives to capitalism” (p. 23). In the next sub-section, I would like to review a few examples of place-based/place-informed initiatives and recommendations for connecting students with the land.

Praxis in practice

One goal of place-based education is to expand the landscape of learning opportunities between and amongst students, educators, and community members (Gruenewald, 2008). Israel (2012) posits that “[p]lace-based education calls for a thorough reorientation of pedagogic practice, challenging the isolation of schools and classrooms from their social and ecological contexts and the isolation of academic subjects from one another” (p. 79). Barnhardt (2008) advocates for connecting what students learn in school to everyday life with the goal of restoring a traditional sense of place while deepening and broadening the educational experience for all students. In reviewing place-based Indigenous education in Alaska, Barnhardt (2008) states that:

Although much remains yet to be done to fully achieve the intent of Alaska Native people in seeking a place for their knowledge and ways in the education of their children, they have succeeded in demonstrating the efficacy of an educational system that is grounded in the deep knowledge associated with a particular place, on which a broader knowledge of the rest of the world can be built (p. 132).

Gruenewald (2008) illustrates how “our cultural experience is “placed” [sic] in the “geography” [sic] of our everyday lives, and in the “ecology” [sic] of the diverse relationships that take place within different places” (p. 137). Place is fundamental for education because it provides a focus for “cultural study, and because it expands a cultural landscape to include related ecosystems, bioregions, and all the place-specific interactions between the human and the more-than-human world” (Gruenewald, 2008, p. 143). In a qualitative research project looking at teachers’ engagement with the intersection of global and local in the development of pedagogies of place, Duhn (2012) observes:

The notion of ‘place’ and a place-based focus featured strongly in many of the teachers’ narratives. ‘Place’ was often considered as a particular territory, a spatially defined area that could be described. Developing a sense of place proved to be an effective strategy for many teachers, in particular those who felt overwhelmed by the magnitude of a global topic such as climate change” (p. 23).

In education, considering place and the local in relation to globalization unsettles the idea of globalization occurring elsewhere: global change that trickles down into the local (Duhn, 2012). Pedagogy of place involves thinking about global issues; talking about plastic in relation to landfill use, pollution, fossil fuels, and recycling. In this way, place is viewed as a “fluid concept that enables rapid expansion from the local to the regional and the global” (Duhn, 2012, p. 27).

Fazio & Karrow (2013) explore environmental education practices, which involved

teachers and students engaging with nature and environmental issues in the school-community context, using mixed-methods (survey and focus groups). Their findings were as follows:

Our analysis of elementary and secondary school EE practices within one school district allowed us to confirm that while the ‘Stevenson gap’ still exists, especially with respect to how school’s organize their aims and purposes, EE leaders (teachers and administrators) are reporting that curricular and school organization constraints are being negotiated to some degree (Fazio & Karrow, 2013, p. 649).

Recommendations included increased relationship building, principle leadership, and professional learning teams within schools and school districts. Moreover, the researchers “believe that a renewed commitment is required to address the oft-cited rhetoric-practice gap, building upon practitioners’ contextual theories and the cultural-historical practices of schools” (Fazio & Karrow, 2013, p. 651).

Investing energy and time into creating a comprehensive and sustainable environment-based education (EBE) program is well worth the effort, and choosing an appropriate environmental context is often the most important step in the process (Koushik, 2015; Lieberman, 2013). Schools are believed to be vehicles for transmitting alternative cultural and social values and practices (Smith, 2007), so EBE programs may be able to serve as the type of catalyst needed to promote societal change. Lieberman (2013) emphasizes two distinctive types of environmental contexts, the first being those focused upon the local environment and/or community, and secondly those centered around “big” environmental ideas, which allows students to see that similar situations (whether separated spatially and/or temporally) produce similar results (Koushik, 2015). The emphasis on place and space should not be overlooked, regardless of whether students are focused on local issues such as community gardens or big issues such climate change.

Sobel (2013) recommends that the goal for education should be for the classroom walls to open wide so that elders, parents, grandparents, and other community members can be invited into schools to share stories, histories, and life experiences. He further stresses the importance of preparing students for the present as opposed to issues that we (as a local and global society) may face in the unknown future, and that students are more likely to connect with place when they are involved in addressing real world problems now (Sobel, 2013). Another alternative is given by Sterling (2012), who suggests that educational thinking and practice should not assume that the future will be a linear progression from the past, and should instead be anticipative in “recognising the new conditions and discontinuities which face present generations, let alone future ones” (p. 514). This debate between local/global and present/future is rampant throughout academia, but considerations of place offers a common ground in which sustainability education policy can spread roots and grow.

Conclusion

The prevailing disconnect between children and the land, including a disconnection between the people of the land, is intensified by the fact that the majority of North American youth spend more time watching television and/or playing video games than in school (Louv,

2008; Smith, 2007; Sorensen, 2008). To disrupt this trend, an education in place “requires us to go deeper with our understanding through observation, study, dialogue, and action; place requires us to lead from a sense of community history, human and ecological dynamics, and the practice of democratic action through common problem solving” (Morris, 2008, p. 252). Morris (2008) states that:

Place contextualizes us-it provides a grounding for where we come from, where we have had profound experiences, and what communities we identify ourselves to be from. Place influences our personal sense of nature, hometown, socioecological values, and the visions we hold for the world. Place effects our sense of problems and priority issues that we believe our primary communities ought to deal with and why (p. 225).

Thus, considerations of place, guided by land-based educational endeavours and opportunities, can inform the engagement of sustainability in education policy enactment and practice by promoting critical thinking skills in students along with bridging local issues with global problems. As mentioned previously, places operate through reiterative and continual practice but can be disrupted through social change and movements, political shifts, and differing ideologies. This protean characteristic of place is significant when reviewing the policy enactments literature, which underscores the fact that schools are always specific, and they are dynamic and shift both internally and externally.

In identifying areas for future research, Gieryn (2000) states that “[i]t is difficult to spot the most vitally overlooked gaps when the domain of study is as unbounded as the one discussed here—place matters for politics and identity, history and futures, inequality and community” (p. 482). I believe that these overlooked gaps offer numerous opportunities for future scholarship on place and land, and the unbounded characteristics surrounding place allows for a diverse array of researchers to contribute innovative voices and pluralistic perspectives to the academy and beyond. As each voice is a reflection of the history and place(s) from which it was born, so too is the knowledge and resulting discourses that can flourish from a deeper engagement with place.

Pontificating Place Redux

My family and I currently live in Stonebridge, which is a relatively new community in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. This neighbourhood is distinguished from others because every home, apartment complex, and senior living establishment must have stonework as a part of its’ building exterior (Figure 1). This gives the area a charming and rustic feel, and makes the new construction seem like a more long-standing and rooted addition to the city. Our community is slated to get a new elementary school in the next few years, and this development has spurred the construction of new homes. While driving down Preston Avenue, which is one of the main roads that leads into Stonebridge, I noticed a large billboard advertising the construction of a new condominium complex near the site where the school will be built. The billboard listed the starting price for units, the number of bedrooms that will be available, and an interesting “history” of this place that newcomers should want to call home: “A community rich in heritage and tradition” (Figure 2).

This slogan is provocative seeing that the oldest dwelling in Stonebridge is about eleven

years old, but the majority of construction has taken place in the last five years. For me, this billboard resonates with Cresswell's (2004) theory surrounding the commodification of place and the "idea of an authentic past is being manufactured as an image for consumption" (p. 96). Before reading literature on place and spatial justice I may have been lulled into a sense of comfort by the words "heritage" and "tradition", but now they are met with criticism and unease. I now understand that place "sustains difference and hierarchy both by routinizing daily rounds in ways that exclude and segregate categories of people, and by embodying in visible and tangible ways the cultural meanings variously ascribed to them" (Gieryn, 2000, p. 474). Stonebridge sits on Treaty 6 territory, but I doubt that this heritage and tradition will be modelled after the First Nations peoples that inhabited these lands. So, in furthering my pontification of place, how can a new housing construction on undeveloped land be rich in heritage and tradition? Which social and cultural groups will benefit from this newly constructed history, and which groups will be excluded?

Only time will tell, but I have a feeling that my place may be elsewhere.

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Figure 1. Condominium showing the exterior stonework that is typical of the housing stock in the Stonebridge neighbourhood of Saskatoon, SK. Photo credit: Jada Renee Koushik, 2015.



Figure 2. Advertisement for a new community in the Stonebridge neighbourhood of Saskatoon, SK. Photo credit: Jada Renee Koushik, 2015.



