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**Power in Place-Based Education: Why a critical pedagogy of place needs to be revived and how narratives or collective biographies support its practice**

By

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## **Abstract**

David Greenwood introduced a critical pedagogy of place in the literature on environmental and place-based education over ten years ago. A critical pedagogy of place aims to engage place-based educators with critical pedagogues to challenge dominant discourse in our education of places and the environment. Through a critical pedagogy of place, students can develop solutions to both the social and environmental issues that their local places face by having a more comprehensive understanding of how social and ecological problems are connected. Because of power structures and dominant social paradigms that still exist in place-based education, I hope to revive the conversation on a critical pedagogy of place. To do this, I take a step back to reveal how power structures influence place and education. Through this analysis, the need for a critical pedagogy of place becomes evident. I review how a critical pedagogy of place has been discussed in existing literature, and how the use of a collective biography of place or narratives is a way to turn a critical pedagogy of place into practice.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Developing a critical pedagogy of place means challenging each other to read the texts of our own lives and to ask constantly what needs to be transformed and what needs to be conserved. In short, it means making a place for the cultural, political, economic and ecological dynamics of places whenever we talk about the purpose and practice of learning. (Gruenewald, 2003, pp.10-11)

David Greenwood<sup>1</sup> argued for a critical pedagogy of place over ten years ago, yet his argument continues to be as salient, if not more pertinent today as it was then. A combination of ecological problems (such as climate change or natural resource exhaustion) and social problems (such as racism or poverty) threaten the places we live and the quality of life, especially for those who live at the margins of society. Place-based education has the potential for students to become democratic and engaged citizens who care about improving environmental and social quality in their communities (Center for Place-based Learning and Community Engagement, 2015; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Smith & Sobel, 2010). However, how can the objectives of place-based education be fulfilled without a critical review of the power structures that influence social constructions of place, as well as a critical review of dominant practices in education that

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<sup>1</sup> David Greenwood has changed his last name to Greenwood from Gruenewald. It should be noted that when he is referred to in the text, the name Greenwood will be used. In citation, his last name will reflect the name he had at the date of publication.

perpetuate these hegemonic discourses about a place? The answer is by practicing a critical pedagogy of place in place-based education.

A critical pedagogy of place combines the efforts of two education camps: place-based education and critical pedagogy (Gruenewald, 2003). Place-based educators seek to inspire students to take social and ecological action in their local places, while critical pedagogues seek to “challenge the assumptions, practices and outcomes taken for granted in dominant culture and in conventional education” (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 3). A critical pedagogy of place combines the objectives of place-based educators with the objectives of critical pedagogues to ensure that environmental place-based education attends to both social and ecological issues and factors. To do this, Greenwood (2003) calls upon critical pedagogues to include an analysis of the environment and place in their practices, and he calls upon place-based, environmental educators to include a critical review of social paradigms. He hopes that if practitioners in both fields were to follow suit, then the social and ecological problems our world faces and often separates into a dichotomy, would be integrated and the solutions would be collaborative. In other words, not only should place-based education challenge dominant paradigms in education, but it should also challenge the way places, and social and ecological justice in places, are conceived. A critical pedagogy of place not only breaks down power structures in education, and in place-based education specifically, but it also has the potential to inspire social and ecological justice at the local level.

My Plan B aims to revive the discussion of a critical pedagogy of place, particularly for place-based educators. In order to support the need for a critical pedagogy of place, I first take a step back and examine how social power intersects with place and with education. I then use this foundation to recall and support Greenwood’s (2003) argument for a critical pedagogy of place

and how it has since been discussed in the literature. Finally, using the questions: “What is happening here? What happened here? What should happen here? What needs to be transformed, conserved, restored or created in this place?” asked by Greenwood (2003; 2008b) and the added questions: Who am I in this place? Whose voices do we hear in this place? Who gets to speak in/for this place? combined with the need to transform theory into praxis, I argue that the use of local narratives, or a collective biography of place (see Davies and Gannon, 2011) in place-based education is a way to practice a critical pedagogy of place, and a way to reveal answers to the above questions.

### **My Inspiration**

My research was not only inspired by Greenwood’s (2003) argument for a critical pedagogy of place but also through my own experience as a place-based, environmental educator who is passionate about social justice. Through my own experiences, I was exposed to instances of both social privilege and oppression in the context of place-based education. For example, during one field-based experience, I travelled to a local National Park with a group of local 5<sup>th</sup> graders who lived in the town nearby. To my students, I posed the question, “Who has visited this National Park before?” The majority of students who raised their hands were white, while those who did not were primarily Latino/Latina. For another example, a group of inner-city, urban youth that I worked with for a week in rural Wyoming had never seen snow, yet I was supposed to be teaching about animals’ winter adaptations. And finally, a teacher once called upon me to teach about a local river, simultaneously covering river safety, because the majority of my lower-class students lived in its flood plain. When I asked how many students lived near the river, none of them raised their hands. They did not even know it was so close to their homes. These unfortunate contradictions that I have encountered as a place-based educator have revealed



to me the need for a critical analysis of social factors that intersect with environmental studies in place-based education.

Place-based education, without a critical analysis of the social and political factors that influence ways of life and connections to local places, has the potential to perpetuate social and environmental inequalities. While my experiences may be taken as biased support for a critical pedagogy of place, my Plan B aims to examine existing literature to support the need beyond my own experiences. Through my Plan B, I provide a foundation for a critical pedagogy of place, using the existing literature to reveal how social power shapes places and education, and how a critical pedagogy of place in place-based education has the potential to deconstruct these unfortunate applications of power.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

In order to understand my Plan B, key terms need to be defined. Broadly, place-based education is defined as interdisciplinary education aimed to connect students to the local community and environment, and to increase student democratic engagement through a love of place (Center for Place-based Learning and Community Engagement, 2015). For the purpose of my research, when place-based education is mentioned, I am primarily referring to environmental, place-based education, where educational programs use both a social and ecological lens to teach about local landscapes, surrounding environments, and the natural world to engage students to become stewards of environmental quality in their respective communities (Antioch University New England, 2015; Smith & Sobel, 2010; Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000). As a result, multicultural and multigenerational knowledge about natural resources often emerges (Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000).

This knowledge is important for students to be exposed to because it reveals the intersection of cultural and social knowledge and interactions with ecological phenomena in their own places. For example, students may begin to recognize the social and ecological connections and “consequences of climate change, economic globalization, and resource exhaustion” in their local environments (Smith & Sobel, 2010, p.viii). Alternatively, students may begin to recognize how environmental inequality, when a social group is unequally affected by environmental hazards, is the product of social inequalities such as racism, sexism, classism, political climates, and other prejudices (Brulle & Pellow, 2006). Through place-based education, students can begin to understand that climate change, globalization, resource exhaustion and environmental inequalities are not just solely ecological or social problems; they are inextricably linked (Kahn, 2010).

Students and teachers who come to understand that environmental problems are also local, social problems are better candidates to promote local ecological sustainability and social justice through resulting behaviors and actions (Smith & Sobel, 2010). A critical pedagogy of place takes place-based education one step further, by intentionally including these objectives, as well as challenging the dominant paradigms that are exposed as a result of a critical, place-based analysis. This type of place-based education allows students to better understand themselves and their roles and positions in the context of both the social and natural world.

Other terms that need to be defined in order for me to be an active participant in the discussion of a critical pedagogy of place in place-based education are: place, sense of place and power. First, everything that we perceive or do is placed, and by being placed, our perceptions and actions are not free from the confines of social and political forces happening in a place (Bender, 2002; Tiley, 1994). In addition, “critical issues of race, class, gender and other aspects

of culture can become abstractions unless these issues are grounded in concrete experience, experience that always takes place somewhere” (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008, p. xxi). Places can be the channel on which students are being affected by social constructions and political views, or students can be the subject that creates a place, as a result of their identities and experiences (van Eijck, 2010). The latter is often referred to in the literature as a sense of place.

A sense of place is different from a placed experience. A placed experience is the phenomenological context for which an experience occurs. On the other hand, a sense of place is both a social and personal construction of meaning, values, memories and experiences around a geographic location that ideally promotes stewardship within and love of place, as well as action, such as pro-environmental behaviors (Kudryavtsev, Stedman & Krasny, 2011; Ardoin, 2006; van Eijck, 2010). A sense of place is relevant to the discussion of a critical pedagogy of place, because power can influence the objectivity and subjectivity of a student in a place as a result of his or her identities (van Eijck, 2010), as well as how a student connects to and constructs a sense of place.

The word “power” in my Plan B refers to power structures or dominant and hegemonic social constructions created intentionally or unintentionally to benefit a certain group of people, while oppressing others (Jackson Lears, 1985; McIntosh, 1989). These power structures influence how individuals understand, relate to and make sense of the world around them because of identity factors such as race, class, ethnicity, ability, sex, gender, etc. This in turn can affect a student’s sense of place and their place in education. Because of power, it becomes evident that a student’s position in place-based education can be affected depending on how a student’s identity aligns with dominant discourses about a place.

A preliminary understanding of the ways in which power intersects with place-based education is important to understanding the rest of my Plan B, and to understand the importance of a critical pedagogy of place. Place-based education can reinforce certain social and political power-relations, or it can break down such relations. For example, when teachers promote pro-environmental behavior through place-based education, they may ignore or devalue other injustices that students may be experiencing, such as poverty. The use of a teacher's power to discuss the environment without acknowledging the social positions of students can, sometimes unintentionally, create borders between teachers and students (Tzou & Bell, 2012). On the other hand, place-based education can challenge social and political power by giving agency to teachers and students to critically think about power and how a sense of place is constructed for different people with diverse identities (Gruenewald, 2003; van Eijck, 2010). In particular, place-based education that uses a critical pedagogy of place offers multiple ways of thinking about place, as a result of being exposed to diverse perspectives in local environments (Gruenewald, 2003; Lim, 2010; Martin, 2010; Stevenson, 2008). Place-based education with a critical pedagogy of place can challenge social power's influence on the social construction of environments. It can also challenge power in education by teaching diverse perspectives and ways of living using a non-traditional, non-institutionalized form of education. A critical pedagogy of place that ensures this exposure, simultaneously deconstructing hegemonic points of view of place and hegemonic educational practices, is what I support in my Plan B.

### **Road Map to my Plan B**

In my Plan B, I argue that Greenwood's (2003) critical pedagogy of place is still relevant today, and place-based educators can use narratives or collective biographies in order to answer the questions motivated by a critical pedagogy of place: What is happening here? What happened

here? What should happen here? What needs to be transformed, conserved, restored or created in this place? (Gruenewald, 2003; 2008b), as well as three other key questions: Who am I in this place? Whose voices do we hear in this place? Who gets to speak in/for this place? As mentioned previously, place-based educators seek to inspire students to take social and ecological action in their local places, while critical pedagogues seek to “challenge the assumptions, practices and outcomes taken for granted in dominant culture and in conventional education” (Greenwood, 2003, p. 3). A critical pedagogy of place is the result of combining these two outcomes.

In chapter 2, I support my argument for a critical pedagogy of place in place-based education by first outlining how power intersects with each of a critical pedagogy of place’s constituents: place and education. I do this to provide a theoretical background to why a critical pedagogy of place is needed. I continue to support its need through a discussion of critical pedagogy of place in existing literature. Further, I suggest that the use of local narratives and collective biographies in place-based education are one way to turn the theory of a critical pedagogy of place into practice. Using existing literature on collective biographies and narratives in place-based education, I argue that these specific pedagogical practices challenge dominant paradigms in place and in education, and as a result, can inspire social and ecological justice. I conclude with a discussion of implications for practice and future research.

In chapter 3, I discuss the process of turning my Plan B into a journal manuscript (see Appendix A), and I also present a critical reflection of the process of my research. Using the guidelines of *Journal of Environmental Education*, I selected key information from my Plan B, and formatted it correctly to submit it to be published as an essay/analysis. I chose *Journal of Environmental Education* because of its aim to include environmental-related educational dialogue and debate (Journal of Environmental Education, 2015). I believe that my discussion of

environmental, place-based education and power fits strongly within this category, because it would contribute to the cross-discipline conversations of environmental and place-based education, a critical pedagogy of place, and power. My critical reflections at the end of my Plan B examine the personal and professional impacts of my work.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Discussion of the Literature**

#### **Introduction**

Why does a critical pedagogy of place need to be revived, and how can we do it? In this chapter, I answer these questions to contribute to the discussion of a critical pedagogy of place. In what follows, I show how a critical pedagogy of place may be used to expose and challenge power in places and in our education about places. To do this, I first take a step back and dissect the key aspects of critical pedagogy of place in place-based education: place and education, to see how power influences these two constituents. The purpose of this examination is to reveal how power contributes to the social constructions of discourses surrounding local environments, as well as in environmental, place-based education. Through this analysis, it becomes evident that a critical pedagogy of place is still relevant today.

Because a critical pedagogy of place is still needed to deconstruct dominant paradigms in environmental, place-based education and consequently, in local places, I then present how a critical pedagogy of place has been discussed in the existing literature. From this, I make a recommendation on how to turn the theory of a critical pedagogy of place into practice. Specifically, I argue that the use of narratives or collective biographies is a way to expose and deconstruct dominant paradigms about local environments in education. Simultaneously, narratives are a way to respond to Greenwood's (2003; 2008b) questions, which are part of the aims of a critical pedagogy of place in place-based education: What is happening here? What happened here? What should happen here? What needs to be transformed, conserved, restored or created in this place? In addition three other questions should be included that are relevant to

deconstructing power in place-based education: Who am I in this place? Whose voices do we hear in this place? Who gets to speak in/for this place? I conclude chapter 2 with a discussion of the implications of my research.

My arguments are supported in the sections below. The first section “Power, Identity & Place: The Role of Power in Social Construction of Place” reveals how social and political factors are transcribed onto landscapes, which affects how people construct a sense of place. The second section “Power Structures at Play in the Education System” shows how power affects traditional education, and as a result, how it affects environmental education. Together these sections support the need for a critical pedagogy of place in place-based education and how place-based educators can practice a critical pedagogy of place. This is presented in the section “A Critical Pedagogy of Place: Letting the Stories of Places be Told in order to Deconstruct Dominant Paradigms in Places and in Education.” In this last section, I conclude my review of literature with implications of my research.

### **Power, Identity & Place The Role of Power in Social Constructions of Place**

If place-based educators seek to connect place with self and community, they must identify and confront the ways that power works through places to limit the possibilities for human and non-human others. (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 7)

In this section, I analyze the intersection of place (specifically, natural environments) with social and political power, and how these intersections influence the ways in which people construct a sense of place. This is important in the context of my paper, because the aims of a critical pedagogy of place are to identify, examine, and eventually problem-solve the often



unfortunate results of power in environments. This power can contribute to the social construction of landscapes and ideas of ecological sustainability that can marginalize some and privilege others. In other words, social and political power influences the ways in which people construct a sense of place, as well as how places are constructed, developed, or maintained to benefit certain groups of people. A critical pedagogy of place aims to identify these power structures at play in order to resist them.

In the discussion that follows, I first define a sense of place to narrow the scope of my definition of place. From a discussion of sense of place, I provide examples of how social power can influence a sense of place, as well as how power can create contested landscapes. Contested landscapes highlight how certain discourses can dominate discussions about the use of land and natural resources, when in actuality, there are diverse discourses about environments. This section concludes by demonstrating how a critical pedagogy of place can expose dominant discourses of place, simultaneously providing the opportunity for diverse, often marginalized discourses to be heard.

Place-related studies are complex, multidisciplinary, and primarily contextual. For the purpose of narrowing the scope of my discussion of place, I will focus on the idea of a sense of place, which is an interdisciplinary understanding of place (Ardoin, 2006). A sense of place is connected to place-based education, because many place-based educators give epistemic worth to personal and emotional attachments to place in an academic setting (Semken & Freeman, 2008). A sense of place can also be an outcome of place-based education to see how much a student has developed his or her connection to a place in the process of learning about it (Semken & Freeman, 2008; Semken et al., 2009). In addition, senses of place can be leveraged in

place-based education to inspire learning (Semken & Brandt, 2010). As a result, sense of place is a key connection between place-based education and place.

A sense of place is an interdisciplinary construction that is created from the biophysical (natural and built) setting, sociocultural elements, personal psychology elements, and political economic elements of place (Ardoin, 2006), and is dependent “on the contours of gender, age, status, ethnicity, and so on” (Bender, 2002, p.107). Consequently, a sense of place is what holds the cultural, social, political, religious, emotional, and even scientific meanings of a place (Semken et al., 2009). As a result of these meanings, and memories or experiences that people associate with places, a sense of place can be either positive or negative (Cross, 2001). For example, “people who are alienated [from places] often have a negative assessment of place, do not identify with the place and are not highly satisfied with the place” (Cross, 2001, p.10). Taking these theories together, it becomes clear that power structures can affect the construction of a sense of place in a variety of ways, including in positive or negative ways.

Using Ardoin’s (2006) multidisciplinary framework of a sense of place, which includes four place elements: biophysical, sociocultural, political, and psychological, it becomes clear that each of these elements can be influenced by power. For example, at the biophysical level, power can create physical or perceived borders in landscapes, such as when public lands are inaccessible because of their proximity to private lands (Brooks & Champs, 2006), or for another example, National Parks have an entrance fee that may exclude certain populations. At the sociocultural level and political level, hegemonic beliefs can intentionally or unintentionally exclude groups of people from a place. For example, the designation of Wilderness prevents certain social groups (i.e. motorized recreationists) from entering wild lands (Laitos & Gamble,

2008). Finally, at the psychological level, identities that are affected by racism, sexism, and other prejudices, can make people feel excluded from or marginalized within a place.

From these examples, it is clear that the inability for certain social groups or people to develop a positive sense of place may be a result of larger power structures at play in places that oppress certain groups of people by attributing meanings or regulations that are not culturally or personally relevant. Place-based educators can use the above examples to identify examples in their own communities and to call upon their students to do the same. Moreover, educators should be wary of community beliefs that may create both knowledge and ignorance about power, in order to continue to privilege certain social groups while marginalizing others in environments.

In general, when broader political ideas, social constructions, and experiences are shared by individuals in a place, a community begins to form, and the more instances when this occurs, a stronger sense of community is developed (Theobald & Siskar, 2008). What is problematic about the word community, though, is when these shared aspects translate into shared beliefs that marginalize groups of people and places (Gruenewald, 2003; Theobald & Siskar, 2008). For example, racism, one of the most problematic shared beliefs, is inherently tied with places when one considers colonization and slavery. During colonization white European settlers essentially removed and/or moved Native Americans from their places, and during slavery, whites used blacks for slave labor on land owned by whites (Johnson, 2014). As a result, one may argue that the United States is built on stolen land (McIntosh, 2015), and the beliefs of one community, in these cases whites in general, negatively influenced others', in this case Native Americans' or blacks', relationship to land. These stories might not be obvious in place-based education and are

important to expose in a critical pedagogy of place. Further, both of these historical instances are examples of contested landscapes.

A contested landscape is a result of complex social, ecological and political attributions of land that cause debates around land use (Bender, 2004; Squire & Jan, 2007). A contested landscape develops from the unfortunate use of hierarchical social power to exploit or oppress a social group, and this use of power is often juxtaposed on an aesthetically pleasing or a valuable landscape (Bender, 2004). Most often, the hegemonic or dominant ways of thinking about natural resources or land use are produced by colonization (Greenwood, 2009), and these discourses are the ones that dominate the political conversation, while the stories of contested landscapes may be ignored. When students study places, they most likely interpret them through a dominant perspective (most often one that privileges whites) or a positive perspective, which is why places should be analyzed at a multidimensional level. When diverse perspectives are included in place-based education, then a variety of stakeholder voices can help eliminate hegemonic points of view. A critical pedagogy of place in place-based education has the potential to reveal other voices and senses of place.

Greenwood (2009) argues that knowing the diverse relationships people have with landscapes expands the possibilities of solutions to people and place exploitation or oppression. Using a convergence of diversity with community (Theobald & Siskar, 2008) in combination with place-based education and critical pedagogy, diverse values, beliefs, use and senses of place that surround a specific natural environment (or result in a contested landscape) can be revealed. In other words, places need to be analyzed at the social, political, cultural, and ecological level in order to define what social and environmental quality look like from the perspective of different

interest groups. Social cohesion (community) within places can occur through a multidimensional (or diverse) approach to place (Backhaus, 2008).

However, even if power structures are deconstructed in places, they are still at play in schools. The question remains, then: “Urban or rural, how does settler society come to terms with the reality that colonization and its pattern of violence, slavery, genocide, and ecocide are the foundation of Western industrialized culture that is reproduced in part through schooling?” (Greenwood, 2009, p.4). As a result, it is also important to examine the power structures that affect the education system.

### **Power Structures at Play in the Education System**

If...the environmental crisis cannot be solved without social justice, then ecological educators and critical pedagogues must build an educational framework that interrogates the intersection between urbanization, racism, classism, sexism, environmentalism, global economics, and other political themes. (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 6)

A critical review of power in education is important to my paper, because critical pedagogy by its definition aims to deconstruct power by giving social control to teachers and students through the examination of power in society (Giroux, 1988). Power structures at play in education must be reviewed to see how place-based education could perpetuate this power or deconstruct it using a critical pedagogy of place. In order to understand power in education

within the context of my paper, I first outline the broad ideas of institutionalized power that marginalize certain students in the education system at large. I then focus my discussion on the influence of power in environmental education, which leads into a discussion of how a critical pedagogy of place in place-based education can be an avenue to deconstruct or resist much of this power.

Education in the United States is predominately rooted in Eurocentric constructions of knowledge that do not value nor acknowledge the lived experiences of many students from non-white backgrounds (Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Nieto & Bode, 2012). A leading voice of the discussion of power and oppression in education has been Paulo Freire. Freire (1989; 2000) discusses how education is often viewed as the transmission of knowledge into empty or inadequate vessels without acknowledging diverse sociopolitical backgrounds from which students are coming. Much of this has to do with the institutionalization of schooling where diverse perspectives are marginalized in order to perpetuate power structures that ensure teacher-student relationships and what constitutes as knowledge (Banks, 1993; Pomeroy, 1999). Because the majority of teachers is white, and these teachers the holders and the communicators of knowledge, western hegemonic beliefs continue to dominate the educational system, and non-white discourses and knowledge systems become marginalized (Banks, 1993; McIntyre, 2002; Richardson & Villenas, 2000). Our current institutionalization of education is primarily monocultural and focuses on one perspective: the white, Eurocentric perspective, and diversity is discussed in the context of “the other” (Nieto & Bode, 2012). In other words, institutionalization in schooling distorts the meaning of diversity (Gruenewald, 2008).

Moreover, the ignorance that exists about the backgrounds of diverse students contributes to the “achievement gap,” which highlights the difference in academic performance between

higher “achieving” whites and their lesser “achieving” non-white counterparts (Editorial Projects, 2011). I put achievement gap in quotes intentionally, because what is not taken into consideration with these students’ performances are their diverse social, cultural, political, economic and familial backgrounds that affect their achievement or even affect the very definition of achievement. In other words, “place matters: *where children come from and where their schooling occurs* influence what they know and can do, thereby influencing their measured achievement in ways that privilege some and marginalize others” (Johnson, 2014, p. 5). As a result, the designation of relevant knowledge is by a system that does not acknowledge diverse epistemologies. One can see, then, how diverse place or environment epistemologies can continue to be exploited, oppressed or silenced. An example of this can be seen in the cases of environmental science and traditional ecological knowledge, which both are connected to place-based education.

Environmental science, while growing more popular, is a field of science that has been looked down upon by individuals in the fields of hard sciences (Kahn, 2010), a field that has traditionally been dominated by white males. Within the field of environmental science, the field of traditional ecological knowledge (knowledge produced by indigenous peoples who have had long-standing connections with the environment) is “highly underrepresented (i.e. absent) in environmental studies classes on many campuses” (Kahn, 2010, p. 106). Consequently, students who hold this knowledge are at a disadvantage, because their knowledge is not privileged to be a part of mainstream academic curricula. Additionally, the silencing of traditional ecological knowledge also prevents other students from being exposed to diverse ecological and cultural perspectives. As seen here, power structures can oppress the lived experiences of students by devaluing their systems of knowledge, and further, this power can perpetuate cultural ignorance.

When teachers use dominant discourse or refer only to hegemonic points of view in environmental science or place-based education, they can create barriers to ecological and social change, specifically if the discourses threaten the ways of life of certain populations (Tzou & Bell, 2012). For example, in a case study by Tzou and Bell (2012), a particular teacher recommended that students use ‘chemical-free’ products to protect local watersheds, when in reality, the students did not necessarily have access to the more expensive, ‘chemical-free’ products due to their socioeconomic status. Further, dominant political messages in place-based pedagogies can incite fear among students, when place-based education is supposed to inspire action (Tzou & Bell 2012). For another example, during the same case study, Tzou and Bell advised that students might feel fear if the chemical products, which an environmental educator is discussing as harmful to the environment, are the ones being used at the students’ homes. This is where a critical pedagogy of place becomes increasingly salient.

In environmental, place-based education, the social context from which students are coming needs to be taken into consideration. To do this, diverse cultural epistemologies can be called upon, including those from indigenous people. Using a critical pedagogy of place, place-based educators can build a framework to prevent fear, the creation of borders, and the silencing of certain voices, while practicing pedagogies that de-institutionalize the production of knowledge. In fact, place-based education can challenge power in education by breaking down institutionalized, standardized and centralized curriculum (McJerney, Smyth, & Down, 2010); however, institutional barriers are what many place-based educators come up against in their practices (Gruenewald, 2006). Place-based educators are faced with this unfortunate cycle that is bound by power structures, but by recognizing how power and institutionalization influences



education (in addition to places), one can see the need for a critical pedagogy of place in place-based education.

From this section, it becomes clear that because non-white discourse is devalued in education at large, in addition to environmental education or traditional ecological knowledge being devalued in the sciences, environmental, place-based education is affected, as well. A critical pedagogy of place can reveal the influence of power in places, in senses of places and in the discourses about place in environmental, place-based education. By applying a critical pedagogy of place in environmental, place-based education, teachers can begin to change the dominant discourses that they use to teach about the environment by using diverse, cultural, environmental, and place epistemologies and practices.

**A Critical Pedagogy of Place  
Letting the Stories of Places be told in order to Deconstruct Dominant Paradigms in Places  
and in Education**

Critical place-based pedagogy cannot be only about struggles with human oppression. It also must embrace the experience of being human in connection with the others and with the world of natures, and the responsibility to conserve and restore our shared environments for future generations... Though the ecologically grounded emphasis of these place-based educators differs from the socially grounded emphasis of critical pedagogy, taken together, a critical pedagogy of place aims to evaluate the appropriateness of our relationships to each other, and to our *socio-ecological* places. (Gruenewald, 2003, pp.6-7)

## **A Review of Greenwood's Critical Pedagogy of Place**

The above examination of the influence of power on the social constructions of place, and of institutionalized power in education lays out the foundation for the need of a critical pedagogy of place in place-based education. A critical pedagogy of place aims to challenge dominant discourses and practices in place and in education to inspire students to take both social and ecological action as a result of place-based education (Gruenewald, 2003). In the context of power in place, a critical pedagogy of place examines how sociopolitical power and dominant culture influences the development of people's sense of place. In the context of education, a critical pedagogy of place decentralizes institutional power in education by empowering students to use their lived experiences and local places as educational texts, in addition to revealing the multiple perspectives and systems of knowledge that people have about an environment. This gives agency to marginalized and oppressed students by putting them at their center of the learning and valuing their knowledge.

Greenwood (2003) conceptualizes a critical pedagogy of place as a necessary theoretical discourse that critical pedagogues and place-based educators must engage with in order to be the most effective agents of social and environmental change. When using a critical pedagogy of place, place-based educators are expected to apply critical pedagogies in order to provide education that promotes social and environmental quality, while challenging dominant systems of conventional education (Gruenewald, 2003). Simultaneously, Greenwood (2003) asks that critical pedagogues consider including the environment and places in their aims to deconstruct dominant paradigms. Taking place and education together, it becomes evident that a critical pedagogy of place in the context of place-based education makes students and educators "aware of the links between social and ecological systems by developing a critique of the way in which

dominant culture affects people and places, humans and habitat” (Furman & Gruenewald, 2004, p. 55). Through a critical pedagogy of place, students are exposed to and can begin to critically examine the use of dominant discourses and educational practices that perpetuate power in place and in education, and ideally, this would inspire students to take social and ecological action.

Greenwood (2003) asks students to take action in place-based education through decolonization and reinhabitation of places. Decolonization is the process of identifying and changing the ways in which people exploit others and places, and reinhabitation is the process of “identify[ing], recover[ing] and creat[ing] material spaces and places that teach us how to live well in our total environments” (Gruenewald, 2003, p.9). Reinhabitation has also been extended by Perumal (2015) to mean deterritorializing place, which is taking back and reclaiming spaces that previously could not be accessed by certain groups of people because of segregation. These practices of identifying power and finding solutions to improve, create or recover environmental and social quality in local places are the ways in which students can use a critical pedagogy of place in place-based education (Gruenewald, 2003).

### **A Critical Pedagogy of Place in the Literature**

A critical pedagogy of place continues to be discussed in existing literature. In this section, I will review how this has been done. Specifically, I focus on the revival of a critical pedagogy of place in 2008 in the *Journal of Environmental Education Research*, and then how a critical pedagogy of place has been discussed by other theorists. First, I will broadly summarize the discussion that occurred in the *Journal of Environmental Education Research*, and then I will outline the use of a critical pedagogy of place in the literature.

In 2008, the *Journal of Environmental Education Research* published a discussion between Bowers, Stevenson and Greenwood on a critical pedagogy of place. In what follows, I

summarize this discussion to show how a critical pedagogy of place was developed in this journal. Bowers (2008) argues that a critical pedagogy of place is an oxymoron, because he believes the processes of decolonization and reinhabitation promote hegemonic ways of living and learning and do not acknowledge nor incorporate multiple perspectives. As a result, instead of a critical pedagogy of place, Bowers believes that students should engage with thick description. Thick descriptions (when a subject describes an event or place in detail to critically analyze social, political, economic, and cultural systems) are key to revealing cultural differences in place-based education and cultural epistemologies of place (Bowers, 2008). In other words, thick description “leads to acquiring language necessary for exercising the communicative competence required in democratic process of deciding what needs to be resisted, fundamentally changed or conserved, and intergenerationally renewed” (Bowers, 2008, p. 332). Thick descriptions are different from Greenwood’s (2003) arguments for decolonization and reinhabitation, because instead of arguing that places need to be decolonized and reinhabited, thick descriptions allow students and teachers to come to their own conclusions about what needs to be done in a place to deconstruct power.

Greenwood (2008a) is surprised that Bowers (2008) creates a “false dichotomy” between their arguments, because Greenwood believes Bowers’ previous work is essential to understanding the deconstruction of power in place-based education (p.338). As a result, Greenwood argues that their arguments need to be taken as a parallax, or an open, complementary, adaptive discourse. Similarly, Stevenson (2008) argues that dualism is problematic for authentic learning, because dualism creates the boundaries between students, teachers, and researchers that place-based education tries to deconstruct. While Stevenson argues that a critical pedagogy of place cannot be simplified merely to the acts of decolonization and

reinhabitation, especially because these two theories are not easily translated to praxis, he believes that Bowers' (2008) use of thick descriptions does not acknowledge the realities of globalization and technology. As a result, Greenwood's argument for a parallax of ideas of a critical pedagogy of place becomes even more relevant, and it is clear that the definition of a critical pedagogy of place can be expanded.

In fact, many theorists support a critical pedagogy of place, while augmenting it with other ideas. For example, Furman and Greenwood (2004) suggest that natural history, cultural journalism, and action research are ways to expose the connections between ecological and social or cultural aspects of life in a critical pedagogy of place, and diversity and biodiversity are a way to think about the intersections of social and ecological justice in places. Morehouse (2008) points out the need for teachers to use diverse critical and place-based pedagogies to teach about place, while McIerney, Smyth and Down (2010) say that while a critical pedagogy of place is essential, it needs to be theorized more than a mere critical engagement with place, community and identity. Hodson (2011) argues that critical, place-based education should include citizen and community science projects in local communities, and Cutts (2012) specifically calls for the use of counter-narratives in education. From these perspectives, it becomes clear that students and teachers can adopt many strategies applying a critical pedagogy of place to develop solutions to local ecological and social problems.

One strategy that I will expand on in the next section is the use of narratives, storytelling and collective biographies to expose students and teachers to power structures that influence social and ecological factors in place. Through a critical pedagogy of place, students identify power relationships that affect both human and non-human interactions in natural environments

(Gruenewald, 2003), and in order for this to happen, the voices of multiple stakeholders need to be heard.

### **Turning a Critical Pedagogy of Place into Practice: The need for narratives and a collective biography of place**

A critical pedagogy of place provides the framework to discuss and concurrently tease apart the relationships between power, place, education, diversity, biodiversity, and the environment. What remains almost absent in the existing literature, though, is how to practice a critical pedagogy of place beyond using the practices of decolonization and reinhabitation. I argue that storytelling and narratives are a way to turn the theory of a critical pedagogy of place into practice. By hearing diverse voices, the influence of social and political power within local places can be exposed. Specifically, place-based educators can use collective biography workshops (see Davies & Gannon, 2011) for this to occur.

In order to support my argument, I first describe why stories and narratives are important to place-based education, and how they fall into a critical pedagogy of place. I then outline the arguments of theorists who have discussed narratives in place-based education previously, not only to support my argument but also to show how my argument is set apart from those who have come before me. Building from this foundation, I argue that narratives help to answer the main questions of a critical pedagogy of place: “What is happening here? What happened here? What should happen here? What needs to be transformed, conserved, restored or created in this place?” (Gruenewald, 2003; 2008b). Narratives answer these questions, and they provide the “template for understanding our trajectory and journey” getting to this place and point in time (J. Barnes-Johnson, personal communication, April 7, 2015). I end my discussion with how place-

based educators can be facilitators for their students to collect and analyze the narratives of a place.

Greenwood (2008) argues that the field of critical pedagogy is “*plural and diverse*” (p. 338), and “the best place-based education...emerges from the particularities of place [and] the people who know them best (including people with indigenous roots)” (p.339). Stories from diverse stakeholders reveal how power personally affects community members in their places, and what social justice and environmental quality look like for community members due to “the sociospatial practices, historical relations, and economic processes that contribute to environmental inequity” (McLaren & Houston, 2004, p.32). In fact, narratives reveal how people relate to places and construct their sense of place as a result of their identity, since narratives play different roles in diverse cultural contexts (Cross, 2001).

When teachers allow a space for multiple voices to be heard and encourage diverse voices in place-based education, then students come to understand who they are in the context of where they are (Hodson, 2011). This is important, because when students confront local social and environmental issues through direct experience, then these issues gain personal meaning, and consequently, students become more committed to social and ecological changes in their local places (Hodson, 2011). As a result, engaging with personal stories in place has the potential to increase the number of diverse stakeholders and activists in social and ecological problem solving. Stories reveal how power influences identity and ways of life in places, and they also provide an opportunity for students to be empowered to develop solutions to such issues.

The use of narratives in place-based education has already been discussed in existing literature. As mentioned previously, Bowers (2008) argues that thick descriptions (e.g. when a subject describes an event or place in detail to critically analyze social, political, economic, and

cultural systems) are key to revealing cultural differences in place-based education and cultural epistemologies of place. Similar to Bowers' discussion of thick descriptions, van Eijck and Roth (2010) argue that places should be thought of as chronotypes. In other words, places as chronotypes are defined by the narratives and discourses that exist at a certain time and space (van Eijck & Roth, 2010). In the context of place-based education, when students view place as a chronotype, then they learn that places cannot exist from a mono-cultural point of view or universal system of knowledge (such as western science), but rather the study of place should emphasize "the dialogical relation of a material location and the narrative nature of the account in which it appears" (van Eijck & Roth, 2010, p. 896).

Van Eijck (2010) and Lim (2010) echo this argument. Van Eijck states: "Place is not simply a location that we can identify by listening to a particular voice...it is articulated by a multitude of voices" (p.189). In other words, a multitude of voices and knowledge systems can be exposed through place narratives. Lim (2010) expands on van Eijck and Roth's (2010) argument that place is a multi-dimensional construction of narratives. In doing so, Lim argues that "place-based education efforts should be able to recognize multiple place histories of youth and acknowledge and reclaim marginalized voices of youth in place." (2010, p. 904). Narratives reveal student positionality as well as the dynamic nature of place, simultaneously providing students with "ownership or agency over the event [that is being described] (and place ultimately)" (Lim, 2010, p. 906). Beyond the use of narratives in place-based education, there are three theorists that I have encountered who discuss the use of narratives in a critical pedagogy of place, specifically.

Somerville (2008), Martin (2010) and Cutts (2012) discuss narratives in the context of a critical pedagogy of place. Somerville (2008) works with local aboriginal populations in



Australia. Using her experiences, she sees the necessity of a critical pedagogy of place, and asserts that places should be communicated through stories that use culturally-relevant art mediums. Furthermore, stories reveal alternative meanings of places; Somerville states that places are the “intersection of multiple contested stories,” and uncovering these stories is key to a critical pedagogy of place (2008, p. 338). She discusses that stories show how places are shaped, and analyzing stories is an applied process of Greenwood’s (2003) decolonization.

Martin (2010), inspired by a case study of science teachers in Hawaii, evaluates how a critical pedagogy of place can be enacted in science education in Hawaii. Hawaii is relevant to a critical pedagogy of place, because colonization, as well as other social, cultural, genealogical and historical factors, has shaped its landscapes and the discourses of them (Martin, 2010). She argues that listening to individual, and eventually, collective narratives of a place, reveals the need to challenge cultural assumptions, and to challenge “the purpose of education in relationship to the places and social spaces we inhabit” (Martin, 2010, p. 264). She continues by advocating for cogenerative dialogues to challenge power systems at play in the construction of science curriculum (p.265). From her arguments, it is clear that Martin is a proponent of a critical pedagogy of place that challenges dominant knowledge systems in environmental science education by listening to narratives that reveal diverse cultural epistemologies.

Cutts (2012) also discusses the importance of narratives to practice a critical pedagogy of place. She argues that counternarratives “provide the platform for silenced stories to be told” (p.148). Often these silenced stories are those that belong to rural, indigenous and non-white populations (Greenwood, 2009), or similarly, dominant stories of places often silence the role of white supremacy in the social constructions of places (Flynn, Kemp, & Perez, 2010). As a result,

counternarratives give voice to marginalized populations, simultaneously revealing the importance of critical whiteness studies.

Each of these theorists argues that descriptive narratives expose and help to deconstruct power structures at play in place-based education by practicing a critical pedagogy of place. They discuss how narratives give agency to diverse groups of people not only in their education but also in their places. Flynn, Kemp, and Perez (2010) state that diversity is: “personal, embodied, and derived from the narratives of experience shaped by the particulars of individual, family dynamics, historical factors, and social, cultural, and political contexts, all of which are crucial to place-based education” (pp. 141-142). Using local knowledge systems is one of the objectives of place-based education, and narratives provide the opportunity for diverse, local knowledge to be exposed. In other words, narratives expose the lived experiences of diversity, which is essential to practice a critical pedagogy of place in place-based education.

My work supports the use of narratives in a critical pedagogy of place, and extends this argument, because I argue that narratives help to answer the questions: What is happening here? What happened here? What should happen here? What needs to be transformed, conserved, restored or created in this place? (Greenwood, 2003; 2008b), in addition to three other key questions: Who am I in this place? Whose voices do we hear in this place? Who gets to speak in/for this place? By using local narratives to answer the questions of a critical pedagogy of place, teachers and students begin to practice decolonization and reinhabitation. While decolonization and reinhabitation provide the framework to discuss, and simultaneously tease apart the relationships between power, place, education, diversity, biodiversity and the environment, a critical pedagogy of place may rest in language that is too theoretical. In order to invite practitioners to the conversation around a critical pedagogy of place, the practices must be

accessible. I argue that storytelling or narratives is more easily transferrable to place-based educators. While narratives are not the only way to practice a critical pedagogy of place, they can be starting point, because they can expose the inextricable links between social and ecological factors as a result of people's lived experiences. From this exposure, students and teachers can pose the above questions, which require investigation into local communities, as well as personal and social critical reflection, to develop sound ecological and social solutions in their local places.

In order to use narratives in place-based education, students should call upon local experts, such as scientists, conservationists, indigenous people, community members and even other students, to answer the questions by telling their stories and trajectories of a place. Corbett (2014) argues that rural populations have unique relationships to landscapes, because more frequently, they must use the land for survival materials such as food and heat. Furthermore, indigenous populations are holders of traditional ecological knowledge, or environmental knowledge systems that are passed down generationally and may not align with traditional science (Kahn, 2010). As a result, it is important that students draw from as many diverse groups of people as possible to reveal how power has oppressed people in their community and in their places (Greenwood, 2009). Through hearing multiple social perspectives within an environment, students can begin to see the important connections of ecological and social factors that shape the landscape. As a personal narrative is introduced into education, and is analyzed among other narratives, a collective biography of place can be formed.

Davies and Gannon (2011) describe how a collective biography of place can successfully reveal diversity in people's constructions of sense of place. A collective biography of place is a pedagogical strategy in which teachers ask students to tell their stories of a place, and each

participant closely listens. These stories are then written down, read, and students respond to them, and the process is continued. Students are encouraged to approach the reading and response with a critical lens, looking for diversity in each other's stories. By engaging with one another's stories of place, students build a community, simultaneously realizing the "multiplicity of facets of being" (Davies & Gannon, 2011, p.139). This process would "cultivate a sense of community and develop an awareness of ties to others and the forms of obligation, responsibility and support that nurture and sustain communities" (Hodson, 2011, p.276) to support a critical pedagogy of place's objectives.

A collective biography of place transforms the theory of a critical pedagogy of place into practice, and can be the starting foundation for teachers to use place-based education as a way to inspire "inquiry and action, while helping to bring together educators [and students] working for social justice and those working for ecological sustainability" (Greenwood, 2008, p.339). Using a collective biography of place, students can ask questions of one-another, and identify social and ecological problems they may or may not have seen before. Also, developing a collective biography of place, students can utilize partnerships with local organizations, experts, and the public as participants. From these narratives and the resulting collective biography, students can identify the links between a place's social and ecological problems. Students can identify these problems and then create an action-inquiry and other community-based projects to develop solutions (Hodson, 2011). A collective biography of place can either be the foundation for an action-inquiry project or it can be the data collected to lead students towards solutions. Either way, it is a pedagogical strategy that reveals the multiple dimensions of a place and includes diverse stakeholders.

In order to ensure that a collective biography of place is in fact a practice of a critical pedagogy of place, students can ask each other, or other stakeholders, Greenwood's (2003; 2008b) questions in addition to the three other key questions mentioned above. The resulting answers and narratives would expose what needs to be developed, challenged, maintained or created in a local environment to ensure better social and ecological quality, according to the people who live there and the social positions of the people telling the story. In fact, "by focusing on the community and the issues and problems that residents confront in their everyday lives, students come to recognize their own experiences as shared, social and political" (Hodson, 2011, p.276). In addition, the answers to the questions would ideally reveal social and political power that affect community members' social position in place; their constructions of a sense of place; how their perceptions or experiences differ with what is taught about or discussed in dominant discourses in education; and what voices or stories are silenced. The personal connections to these narratives would inspire students to take action (Hodson, 2011). Ideally, this action would result in deconstructing, challenging, or resisting dominant social and ecological paradigms to improve social and ecological quality, and place-based education.

In order for these collective biographies to be a practice of a critical pedagogy of place, educators need to work as facilitators. To do this, place-based educators must view a critical pedagogy of place as a process where power is shared between the teacher, the students, and even diverse members of the community. Milner (2003) argues that critical pedagogy (and racial competence) is a pursuit, not an end goal. As a result, there is not a "one size fits all" list of methods to ensure a teacher's success practicing critical pedagogy (Milner, 2003, p. 194).

While recognizing there isn't a set list of characteristics to be practitioners or facilitators of a collective biography place as a way to practice critical pedagogy of place, educators must

move their students beyond merely identifying differences within narratives of place, and engage their students in a critical reflection. To do this, teachers should first practice critical, cultural reflection, themselves. This reflection ensures that the teachers identify their social position, or positionality, and how their position relates to the students and from where they are coming (Howard, 2003). By critically reflecting on their dynamic and changing positionality, teachers can begin to see the ways that power affects their relationships with students, the connections and importance between students' cultures and their lived realities to educational content, and how alternative teaching methods can benefit diverse students (Howard, 2003).

Once teachers have recognized and reflected on their own social position, they can facilitate the same process for their students. Through this facilitation, the students can begin to identify their own dynamic positionalities in context of their education, their place, and in relation to the people who are telling the narratives that they are hearing. This process would help students to identify power in narratives. Through this critical reflection, in addition to the important questions that should be asked to practice a critical pedagogy of place, student engagement with the diverse narratives of a place moves beyond recognizing mere differences among narratives of an ecological and/or social environment. A critical reflection pushes students to move forward, question, and challenge how power affects their senses of place or others' senses of place. As a result, because critical pedagogy is a process and both the teacher and students would be engaging with the process, power is shared across the classroom. Eventually, this critical reflection, combined with personal connection to the narratives (Hodson, 2011), would inspire students to move forward with ecological and social action that develop environmental and social quality.

A critical pedagogy of place in place-based education is the theory that exposes the inextricable link between social and ecological factors in places, simultaneously challenging dominant paradigms that influence the constructions of an individual's sense of place, as well as educational discourses about the environment. Narratives or collective biographies are a way a critical pedagogy of place can be transformed into praxis. A collective biography of place gives voice, and as a result, agency, to often marginalized populations whose understandings and discourses may be silenced or ignored in field-based, environmental science and educational experiences. A critical pedagogy of place in place-based education that calls upon diverse local people as stakeholders or sources of knowledge can help deconstruct hegemonic ways of living in and learning about places.

Dominant voices often define places and the developmental directions to which places are headed, but with a critical pedagogy of place in combination with collective biographies (or stories and counternarratives), diverse voices within a community can be heard. By calling upon local community members and students to tell the stories of the places they know best, a critical pedagogy of place can be turned into practice. There cannot be social and ecological sustainability without listening to diverse stakeholders (Backhaus, 2008). Knowing the diverse relationships that people have with places, in addition to how power and positionality influence these relationships, students can create encompassing and collaborative solutions to ecological and social problems.

### **Implications**

A critical pedagogy of place in place-based education aims to challenge dominant discourses about uses and social constructions of local environments through a critical examination of power. Using a type of education that challenges dominant, often Eurocentric,

educational discourse, environmental, place-based educators use field-based experiences to connect educational content to the lived realities of students. However, without a critical examination of power and its effect on student identity and sense of place, place-based educators can perpetuate oppression, marginalization and ignorance of certain groups of people and their knowledge systems.

Because these unfortunate applications of power still exist in places and in education, a critical pedagogy of place needs to be renewed. In my Plan B, I provided a foundational understanding of power in place and power in education to show why. I then reviewed the existing literature on a critical pedagogy of place to build theoretical support, and explained how the use of narratives or a collective biography of place is a way to expose power and the connections between social and ecological factors in place-based education, and in local environments. The use of narratives or a collective biography of place, specifically, is only one way to practice a critical pedagogy of place. It achieves the mission of critical pedagogy of place in place-based education by exposing power in places based on student and community experiences.

In a field-based experience, this could take shape in a variety of ways. However, because a critical pedagogy of place tries to challenge dominant paradigms and its practices are distinguished by local places, there is no prescribed list of steps that explicitly explain how every collective biography of place should be put into action. For the purpose of clarification, though, here is one example to better understand how to transform the theory into practice. At a place-based school that invites students from a variety of locations, educators could draw upon diverse voices from the community to share their narrative around a specific ecological issue and how it affects or is affected by the social context of the community. The place-based educator could



then facilitate a critical reflection with the students, teaching them tools to critically identify power, points of agreement, and/or contestation among the collective biography that results from listening to the narratives of diverse stakeholders. Once these factors and issues have been identified, students could then come up with an action or inquiry plan to develop encompassing solutions that respond to the variety of stakeholders. This would ideally promote an intersection of social justice and ecological sustainability in response to the variety of issues that they identified. Through this process, students would preferably gain the tools to be able to practice a similar critical pedagogy of place in their home communities.

Educators must also help the students to understand that these tools are not universally applicable. Each student will have to: understand how power works through their own home communities; collaborate with their own local communities, peers and teachers to identify relevant ecological and social issues; and use a variety of different critical lenses that are situational to the issue that they are addressing in their local places. However, through this process of transference, combined with critical engagement, field-based experiences would ideally create more meaningful action to develop ecological and social quality in a variety of communities.

Through narratives or collective biographies, our field-based experiences as place-based educators would no longer be bits of scientific facts or hegemonic beliefs of natural science, but they can be transformed to reflect diverse points of view and experiences. With a critical examination of power, educators take into account the social contexts from which students are coming, as well as including and supporting voices and knowledge systems that are on the margins of society. Through narratives and collective biographies about place, place-based

education can inspire more encompassing and inclusive definitions of environmental and social quality, and can inspire students to take action that deconstructs power in place and in education.

It is important to note, here, that I do not mean to completely disregard discourses of natural science, but through narratives and the exposure of diverse points of view, alternative scientific perspectives can be recognized and hegemonic systems of knowledge can be challenged. Narratives should not only focus on the social experience, but they should also include an ecological or scientific story or way of knowing, if applicable. As Deloria (1999) states, “For every scientific ‘discovery’ ...there may exist one or more alternative ways of understanding natural processes” (p. 13). As a result, while narratives give a social understanding of place, so too may they reveal alternative important scientific understandings of place.

Because narratives or collective biographies of place are just one approach to Greenwood’s (2003) ideas of decolonization and reinhabitation, it is important to acknowledge that more research about the actual praxis of a critical pedagogy of place can occur, and the discussion on a critical pedagogy of place needs to continue. In fact, in a recent publication of *Environmental Education Research*, titled: *Environmental Education in a Neoliberal Climate*, scholars discuss the role of environmental education in a neoliberal time (vol. 21, issue 3). Specifically, and in short, Hursh, Henderson and Greenwood (2015) introduce the journal and argue that environmental education in the context of neoliberalism is political and not free from the confines of dominant ways of thought that marginalize some while privileging others. With this recent publication, a critical pedagogy of place becomes even more relevant to present issues in environmental education.

Reflecting back on my own recent experiences as a place-based educator where I encountered unfortunate contradictions of social factors with environmental education because of

power, I can see why a critical pedagogy of place would have been essential to my practices. A critical pedagogy of place through the use of a collective biography and narratives would have been helpful to not only understand my students, but also understand the type of education I was providing and the social dynamics of the places where I taught.

I could have asked Greenwood's questions (2003; 2008b): What is happening here? What happened here? What should happen here? What needs to be transformed, conserved, restored or created in this place? in addition to my own added questions: Who am I in this place? Whose voices do we hear in this place? Who gets to speak in/for this place? Asking these questions to my students, the community or my fellow educators, I would have practiced a critical pedagogy of place. For example, through witnessing how Latina/Latino students were less likely to visit their local National Park, I am inspired to ask the community the questions to find out what actions are being taken by National Park officials, local agencies and citizens to encourage marginalized populations to participate in public land use. To my inner-city students who had never seen snow, I wish I had asked these questions before starting my lesson, and involved them in the analysis of their social backgrounds in relation to my lesson and in relation to the new place that they were in. And finally, when taught about the local river, simultaneously covering river safety, I could have used these questions to engage my students with their local community to hear narratives, historical information, and scientific data to find out why their community was constructed in a flood plain. Engaging with these people, my students could then have begun to develop social and ecological solutions that ensured their safety.

From my own examples, it is clear that narratives provide a point of entrance that exposes students to power in their local places and in their place-based education. While my experiences

provide an example of how my arguments could manifest in place-based education contexts, more research needs to be done. For instance:

- How can theoretical examinations of power in the environment be communicated effectively to those on the ground in field-based experiences?
- What are the lived realities of those who are a part of place-based education; do they feel racism, sexism, classism, and other prejudices, and to what extent?
- And how can empirical research support the effectiveness of a critical pedagogy of place in place-based education?

My experience in researching power in place-based education exposed the necessity of reviving the conversation surrounding a critical pedagogy of place, as well as the potential for further research. However, moving this conversation forward, those who engage in the discourse or research must be wary of creating hegemony in the process. In other words, standards, specific objectives or promoted ways to practice a critical pedagogy of place that do not give room for teacher and student autonomy in identifying power structures have the potential to perpetuate power and institutionalization. Greenwood (2006, 2008) reminds of us of this problem; he states, “Once diversity discourse is institutionalized in schools and universities, its meanings become standardized, shaped, and absorbed by the institutional culture” (Gruenewald, 2008b, p. 139). As a result, it is important that the discourse and research surrounding the practice of a critical pedagogy of place leave room for educational planning that is rooted in local systems and prevents institutionalization of a pedagogical strategy that is trying to break down such institutionalization (Gruenewald, 2006). The discourse and research around a critical pedagogy

of place should be challenging dominant paradigms in our places, in our education and in our education and research about our places.

It is clear that dominant paradigms are not affected by disciplinary boundaries or the education system. Dominant paradigms persist in places, are perpetuated in education, and affect the students who we encourage to develop ecologically and socially just futures. Encouraging cross-disciplinary approaches to education through a critical pedagogy of place in place-based education is key. Power and privilege continue to define our places and our systems of education, putting many students and places at the margins of our discourses and practices. If we engage environmental, place-based educators with critical pedagogues, as Greenwood (2003) argues, then the developed solutions to deconstruct power and privilege in our places, education and consequently in place-based education, have the potential to be more encompassing and relevant to the lived realities of oppression and discrimination that students face in and outside of school.

In order to spread this message and encourage environmental, place-based educators to approach their lessons and curricula with a critical pedagogy of place, I have used my literature review to create a journal manuscript for publication. This manuscript invites environmental, place-based educators to revive the discussion of a critical pedagogy of place. In the next chapter, I discuss how my journal manuscript is infused with the work of my literature review and how my manuscript fits the guidelines for the *Journal of Environmental Education*. The next chapter also includes a critical reflection of my Plan B process, and how this process has impacted me personally and professionally as a place-based educator.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Discussion of Process**

In this chapter, I discuss the process of turning my Plan B into a journal manuscript (see Appendix A) for the *Journal of Environmental Education*, as well as the impacts of my research on personal, academic and professional growth. First, I discuss why I chose this journal, including a discussion of the journal's guidelines and how my manuscript meets these guidelines. I then discuss how my manuscript is infused with the arguments made in my literature review. From overviews of the process of transformation, I highlight the importance of my Plan B to the contribution of research on power in place-based education. This chapter ends with a reflection on my entire Plan B process and the impacts of my work.

### **From Plan B to Manuscript**

My manuscript is appropriate for the *Journal of Environmental Education*, based on the aim of the journal, as well as its categories for submission. This journal aims to “promote dialogue and debate on key areas of interest in the fields of environmental and sustainability education. Publication of diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives for international audiences is aimed at improving the quality of research and practice in education” (The Journal for Environmental Education, 2015, para. 2). My research falls within this category, because it discusses how place-based, environmental education can be improved to include a social justice perspective.

Specifically, my article falls under the category of an essay or analysis. According to the *Journal of Environmental Education* (2015), manuscripts in this category are “related to policy, philosophies, theories, or historical perspectives... These manuscripts should contain a strong [environmental education] component, supported by relevant sources” (para. 9). My manuscript

is considered an essay or analysis, because it discusses the theory of a critical pedagogy of place, supports this theory with relevant and current research, and applies it to environmental, place-based education. Part of the reason I chose the *Journal for Environmental Education* is because of the broad scope of the journal and how my theoretical research falls into the category of essay/analysis. Further, other journals required much more extensive and lengthy manuscripts that were not conducive to a Plan B study. The guidelines of the *Journal for Environmental Education*, in addition to its relevance to my study topic, made it the best fit for my research.

All manuscripts for this journal must be formatted under specific guidelines. Manuscripts must be in APA format and under 5,000 words, including references (Journal of Environmental Education, 2015). Further, they must include an abstract that is less than 100 words, with 3 to 6 keywords (Journal of Environmental Education, 2015). My manuscript fits these guidelines, as it is approximately 4,900 words. All of my references are listed in APA format and in-text citations follow APA style.

From my research, and the lack of sources explicitly discussing power in place-based education, it is clear that Greenwood's (2003) argument of critical pedagogy of place in place-based education needs to be revived. As a result, my manuscript provides a current discussion of a critical pedagogy of place, including "the why" and "the how" in order to inspire awareness and action surrounding the intersection of social and ecological factors and issues in places.

To support my manuscript, I took excerpts of my Plan B and modified them for a shorter manuscript. Instead of having two explicit sections on power in place and power in education, I use the research of power in place-based education to show how dominant discourses about place still exist in place-based education. These arguments support why a critical pedagogy of place is needed. I then took the excerpts of my discussion on narratives in place-based education to show

how a critical pedagogy of place can be enacted. First, I describe how narratives have been discussed in the literature, and then how narratives support the aims of a critical pedagogy of place. As in my Plan B, I argue that a collective biography of place support the exposure that places are multifaceted and multidimensional because of the people who live in them and their experiences as a result of their identities. Through collective biographies, students can begin to recognize and develop solutions to both ecological and social problems that they face in their places. Because collective biographies are only one way to practice a critical pedagogy of place, I conclude similarly to my Plan B with the need for further empirical and theoretical research on power in place-based education and on the practices of critical pedagogy of place.

Turning my Plan B into a manuscript helped me to synthesize my arguments into a digestible summary of my work. Not only does a journal manuscript allow me to contribute to the ever growing body of literature surrounding place-based education, a field in which I am a practitioner, but it also allows me to further my skills as an academic. In the next section, I reflect on my research process to analyze the impacts of my learnings.

### **The Impact of my Plan B: A personal reflection**

Completing the Plan B project and transforming my work into a manuscript, I became confident in my contributions to the field of environmental, place-based education. My manuscript is a product that reflects my own work and publically contributes to the existing literature with I have become so familiar throughout my research process. In this section, I critically reflect on the process of my research and how it personally affects my understanding of place-based education, as well as how I would personally communicate its implications.

When I began this research project, I had three questions that I wanted to answer:

- How do power and privilege intersect with place-based education?



- How can multicultural education, specifically critical pedagogy and culturally relevant pedagogy, merge with place-based education to create best practices that expose students to the dynamic ecological, social and political forces that shape places in a variety of ways?
- What can educators do to reveal these active constructions using best practices in critical pedagogies within place-based education to allow students to become autonomous agents of social and environmental change for the better, without reinforcing unfortunate uses of power in place?

While I feel as if these questions are still relevant to my research and to my arguments, it became clear as I read the literature that an argument for Greenwood's (2003) critical pedagogy of place synthesizes the answers to these questions. I chose not to include these questions in my final chapter 2. As I realized throughout my investigations that Greenwood's argument needed to be revived, my questions evolved to be: why and how? In order to answer these questions, it was important for me to take a step back and to analyze power in both place and education to show why a critical pedagogy of place is still important, and then describe how the use of narratives transform the theory of critical pedagogy of place into practice.

Because a critical pedagogy of place can be practiced in other ways beyond the use of narratives, I view my work as a foundation to revive the conversation around a critical pedagogy of place. In my research, I primarily focus on the practices of environmental, place-based educators who need to take into account and modify their practices according to the sociopolitical and cultural backgrounds from which their students are coming. I focus on this camp, instead of critical pedagogues, because of my own experience as a place-based educator.

Now, if I were to return to the field and work among environmental, place-based educators or lead professional development for place-based education, I would promote my arguments that place-based educators must understand the social factors that influence ecological decisions and environmental problems, as well as how students perceive or experience these issues. In other words, I would encourage place-based educators, including myself, to not focus primarily on hegemonic scientific beliefs, but to incorporate lessons and experiences, such as collective biographies, in place that reveal how social power influences student understanding of place and constructions of a sense of place.

When educators (and students) come to understand the social and ecological connections in places, then they can become better at developing place-based education that addresses the intersection of power in place-based education. As place-based educators, we need to encourage our students to understand and identify links between social and ecological problems as our future is threatened by climate change, natural resource exhaustion and other problems that become amplified and stratified across social groups. A critical pedagogy of place has the potential to make people more aware of the inextricable links between social and ecological factors and issues, simultaneously inspiring action for those who are ready for change. I believe that a critical pedagogy of place ensures collaboration among environmentalists, social activists and educators, and as a result, a stronger commitment to improving our local places.

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## Appendix A

### Manuscript

#### **A revived review on the why and how of David Greenwood's critical pedagogy of place**

Heather Wakeman

**Abstract:** A critical pedagogy of place was introduced in the literature on environmental and place-based education over ten years ago and is a conversation that needs to be revived among environmental, place-based educators. Through a critical review of David Greenwood's arguments, I hope to renew the conversation on a critical pedagogy of place. Not only do I support a critical pedagogy of place by exposing how power structures influence place-based, environmental education, but I also suggest that the use of narratives in environmental, place-based education can turn the theory of a critical pedagogy of place into practice.

**Keywords** place-based education · critical pedagogy of place · power · narratives

David Greenwood<sup>1</sup> argued for a critical pedagogy of place over ten years ago, yet his argument continues to be as salient, if not more pertinent today as it was then. A combination of ecological problems (such as climate change or natural resource exhaustion) and social problems (such as racism or poverty) threaten the places we live and the quality of life, especially for those who live at the margins of society. Place-based education has the potential for students to become democratic and engaged citizens who care about improving environmental and social quality in their communities (Center for Place-based Learning and Community Engagement, 2015; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Smith & Sobel, 2010). However, how can the objectives of place-based education be fulfilled without a critical review of the power structures that influence

social constructions of local environments, as well as a critical review of dominant practices in education that perpetuate hegemonic discourses about a place?

Such a question is not only inspired by Greenwood's (2003) argument for a critical pedagogy of place but also through my own experience as a place-based, environmental educator who is passionate about social justice. Through my own experiences, I was exposed to instances of both social privilege and oppression in the context of place-based education. For example, during one field-based experience, I travelled to a local National Park with a group of local 5<sup>th</sup> graders who lived in the town nearby. To my students, I posed the question, "Who has visited this National Park before?" The majority of students who raised their hands were white, while those who did not were primarily Latino/Latina. For another example, a group of inner-city, urban youth that I worked with for a week in rural Wyoming had never seen snow, yet I was supposed to be teaching about animals' winter adaptations. And finally, a teacher once called upon me to teach about a local river, simultaneously covering river safety, because the majority of my lower-class students lived in its flood plain. When I asked how many students lived near the river, none of them raised their hands. They did not even know it was so close to their homes. These unfortunate contradictions that I have encountered as a place-based educator have revealed to me the need for a critical analysis of social factors that intersect with environmental studies in place-based education.

Environmental, place-based education, without a critical analysis of the social and political factors that influence ways of life and connections to local places, has the potential to perpetuate social and environmental inequalities. However, a critical pedagogy of place in environmental place-based education has the potential to expose social power structures that affect our environments and the people of our local places. In this article, I argue why a critical

pedagogy of place needs to be revived in environmental, place-based education and one way it can be applied.

A critical pedagogy of place combines the efforts of two education camps: place-based education and critical pedagogy (Gruenewald, 2003). Place-based educators seek to inspire students to take social and ecological action in their local places, while critical pedagogues seek to “challenge the assumptions, practices and outcomes taken for granted in dominant culture and in conventional education” (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 3). To do this, Greenwood (2003) speaks directly to both camps; he calls upon critical pedagogues to include a discussion of the environment and place in their practices, and he calls upon place-based, environmental educators to include a critical review of dominant social paradigms. He hopes that if practitioners in both fields were to follow suit, then the social and ecological problems our world faces and often separates into a dichotomy, would be integrated and the solutions would be collaborative. In other words, a critical pedagogy of place combines the objectives of place-based educators with the objectives of critical pedagogues to ensure that environmental place-based education attends to both social and ecological issues and factors.

### **A critical pedagogy of place: The Why**

An understanding of the ways in which power intersects with environmental, place-based education is important to grasp “the why” of a critical pedagogy of place, but in order to discuss this, let me first define place-based education. In the context of my paper, I focus on place-based education that uses local ecosystems and natural environments to teach about broader social and ecological issues. Place-based education most often uses both social and ecological lenses to teach about place (Smith & Sobel, 2010; Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000) and as a result, multicultural and multigenerational knowledge about natural resources often emerge from the

community (Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000). This knowledge is important for students to be exposed to because it reveals the intersection of cultural and social knowledge and interactions with ecological phenomena in local environments. For example, students may begin to recognize the social and ecological connections and “consequences of climate change, economic globalization, and resource exhaustion” in their local environments (Smith & Sobel, 2010, p.viii). Or students may begin to recognize how environmental inequality, which is when a social group is unequally affected by environmental hazards, is the product of social inequalities such as racism, sexism, classism, political climates, and other prejudices (Brulle & Pellow, 2006). Through place-based education that uses a critical pedagogy of place, students can begin to understand that climate change, globalization, resource exhaustion and environmental inequalities are not just solely ecological or social problems; they are inextricably linked (Kahn, 2010).

A critical pedagogy of place is needed in place-based education to make the intersection of social power and the environment explicit. Place-based education can reinforce certain social and political power-relations or it can break down such relations. For example, when teachers promote pro-environmental behavior through place-based education, they may ignore or devalue other injustices that students may be experiencing. The use of a teacher’s power to discuss the environment without acknowledging the social positions of students can, sometimes unintentionally, create borders between teachers and students (Tzou & Bell, 2012), or dominant perspectives on the environment, usually the white-male perspective, can go without a critical examination (Flynn, Kemp & Perez, 2010).

On the other hand, place-based education can challenge social and political power by giving agency to teachers and students to critically think about power and how a sense of place is

constructed for different people with diverse identities (Gruenewald, 2003; van Eijck, 2010). In particular, place-based education that uses a critical pedagogy of place can offer multiple ways of thinking about a place or local environmental issues, as a result of being exposed to diverse perspectives on local environments (Lim, 2010; Martin, 2010; Stevenson, 2008). More specifically, a critical pedagogy of place examines how social and ecological factors together shape one another, concurrently by deconstructing social power that perpetuates dominant discourses about place; Greenwood (2003) argues:

Critical place-based pedagogy cannot be only about struggles with human oppression. It also must embrace the experience of being human in connection with the others and with the world of natures, and the responsibility to conserve and restore our shared environments for future generations... Though the ecologically grounded emphasis of these place-based educators differs from the socially grounded emphasis of critical pedagogy, taken together, a critical pedagogy of place aims to evaluate the appropriateness of our relationships to each other, and to our *socio-ecological* places. (pp.6-7)

From this it becomes clear that a critical pedagogy of place in environmental place-based education can provide diverse ways of thinking about what it means to promote both ecological sustainability and social justice.

### **The How of a Critical Pedagogy of Place: The power of narratives**

In order to practice a critical pedagogy of place, Greenwood (2003) argues that environmental, place-based educators must take students through a process of decolonization and reinhabitation. Decolonization is the process of identifying and changing the ways in which people exploit others and places, and reinhabitation is the process of “identify[ing], recover[ing]

and creat[ing] material spaces and places that teach us how to live well in our total environments” (Gruenewald, 2003, p.9). While decolonization and reinhabitation provide the framework to discuss, and simultaneously tease apart the relationships between power, place, education, diversity, and the environment, a critical pedagogy of place may rest in language that is too theoretical. In order to invite practitioners to the conversation around a critical pedagogy of place, the practices must be accessible. I argue that Greenwood’s (2003; 2008) questions that a critical pedagogy of place aims to answer: “What is happening here? What happened here? What should happen here? What needs to be transformed, conserved, restored or created in this place?” in addition to three other important questions: Who am I in this place? Whose voices do we hear in this place? Who gets to speak in/for this place? are more easily transferable. I argue below that narratives and collective biographies are a way to turn the theory of a critical pedagogy of place into practice by providing answers to these questions.

Greenwood (2008) argues that “the best place-based education...emerges from the particularities of place [and] the people who know them best (including people with indigenous roots)” (p.339). Narratives from diverse stakeholders reveal how power personally affects community members in their places, and what social justice and environmental quality look like for community members. Through narratives, place-based educators can reveal how different people use the landscape, as well as “the sociospatial practices, historical relations, and economic processes that contribute to environmental inequity” (McLaren & Houston, 2004, p.32). Not only do narratives reveal how power influences identity and ways of life in places, but they also provide an opportunity for students to be empowered, if students are the ones sharing their stories.

When teachers allow a space for multiple voices to be heard and encourage diverse voices in place-based education, then students come to understand who they are in the context of where they are (Hodson, 2011). This is important, because it allows students to develop a sense of place that affirms their identities, which in turn, ideally promotes the participation of environmental and social care. When students feel a personal connection to an issue, then they are more inspired to take action (Hodson, 2011). By calling upon local community members and students to tell the stories of the places they know best, a critical pedagogy of place can begin to be turned into practice.

The use of narratives in place-based education has already been discussed in existing literature. For example, van Eijck and Roth (2010) argue that places should be thought of as chronotypes; the narratives and discourses of place at a certain time and space are what define them. In the context of place-based education, when students view places as chronotypes, they can see that places cannot exist from a mono-cultural point of view or universal system of knowledge (van Eijck & Roth, 2010). Van Eijck (2010) echoes this argument, stating: “Place is not simply a location that we can identify by listening to a particular voice...it is articulated by a multitude of voices” (p.189). From narratives, a multitude of voices and knowledge systems about places can be exposed.

Lim (2010) expands on van Eijck and Roth’s (2010) argument that place is a multi-dimensional construction of narratives. Lim argues that “place-based education efforts should be able to recognize multiple place histories of youth and acknowledge and reclaim marginalized voices of youth in place” (2010, p. 904). Narratives reveal student positionality, as well as the dynamic nature of place, simultaneously providing students with “ownership or agency over the event (and place ultimately)” (Lim, 2010, p. 906). Beyond the use of narratives in place-based

education, there are three theorists who discuss the use of narratives within a critical pedagogy of place, specifically.

Somerville (2008), Martin (2010) and Cutts (2012) discuss narratives in the context of a critical pedagogy of place. Somerville (2008) works with local aboriginal populations in Australia. Using her experiences, she sees the necessity of a critical pedagogy of place, and argues that places should be communicated through stories that use culturally-relevant art mediums. Furthermore, stories reveal alternative meanings of places; Somerville states that places are the “intersection of multiple contested stories,” and uncovering these stories is key to a critical pedagogy of place (2008, p. 338). She discusses that stories show how places are shaped, and analyzing stories is an applied process of Greenwood’s (2003) decolonization.

Martin (2010), inspired by a case study of science teachers in Hawaii, evaluates how a critical pedagogy of place can be enacted in science education in Hawaii. Hawaii is relevant to a critical pedagogy of place, because colonization, as well as other social, cultural, genealogical and historical factors, has shaped its landscapes and the discourses of them (Martin, 2010). She argues that listening to individual, and eventually, collective narratives of a place, reveals the need to challenge cultural assumptions, and to challenge “the purpose of education in relationship to the places and social spaces we inhabit” (Martin, 2010, p. 264). She continues by advocating for cogenerative dialogues to challenge power systems at play in the construction of science curriculum (p.265). From her arguments, it is clear that Martin is a proponent of a critical pedagogy of place that challenges dominant knowledge systems in environmental science education by listening to narratives that reveal diverse cultural epistemologies of place.

Cutts (2012) also discusses the importance of narratives to practice a critical pedagogy of place. She argues that counternarratives “provide the platform for silenced stories to be told”



(p.148). Often these silenced stories are those that belong to rural, indigenous and non-white populations (Greenwood, 2009). Similarly, stories silence the role of white supremacy in the social constructions of places; as a result there is a need for critical whiteness studies in place-based education (Flynn, Kemp, & Perez, 2010). Counternarratives give voice to marginalized populations, simultaneously revealing the importance of critical whiteness studies.

Each of these theorists argues that descriptive narratives expose and help to deconstruct power structures at play in place-based education by practicing a critical pedagogy of place. They discuss how narratives give agency to diverse groups of people not only in their education but also in their places. Flynn, Kemp, and Perez (2010) state that diversity is: “personal, embodied, and derived from the narratives of experience shaped by the particulars of individual, family dynamics, historical factors, and social, cultural, and political contexts, all of which are crucial to place-based education” (pp.141-142). Using local knowledge systems is one of the objectives of place-based education, and narratives provide the opportunity for diverse, local knowledge to be exposed. In other words, narratives expose the lived experiences of diversity, which is essential to practice a critical pedagogy of place in place-based education.

I develop the aforementioned arguments by arguing that narratives help to answer Greenwood’s (2003; 2008) questions: “What is happening here? What happened here? What should happen here? What needs to be transformed, conserved, restored or created in this place?” and the questions: Who am I in this place? Whose voices do we hear in this place? Who gets to speak in/for this place? Posing these questions to community members and students, teachers can facilitate a point of entrance into a critical pedagogy of place. Through narratives, decolonization and reinhabitation can begin by revealing the inextricable links between social and ecological factors in place-based education. In order to practice using narratives in a critical pedagogy of

place, students should draw upon local experts: scientists, conservationists, indigenous people, community members and even other students, to answer these questions by having these experts tell their personal trajectories of an environment.

It is important that students draw from as many diverse groups of people as possible so that influence of power (such as oppression, marginalization, or discrimination) on people and in places can be revealed (Greenwood, 2009). Corbett (2014) argues that rural populations have unique relationships to landscapes, because more frequently, they must use the land for survival materials such as food and heat. Furthermore, indigenous populations are holders of traditional ecological knowledge, or environmental knowledge systems that are passed down generationally and may not align with traditional science (Kahn, 2010). Through hearing multiple social perspectives within an environment, students can begin to see the important connections of ecological and social factors that shape understandings of places. As a personal narrative is introduced into education, and is analyzed among other narratives, a collective biography of place can be formed.

Davies and Gannon (2011) describe how a collective biography of place can successfully reveal diversity in people's constructions of sense of place. A collective biography of place is a pedagogical strategy in which teachers ask students to tell their stories of a place, and each participant closely listens. These stories are then written down, read, and students respond to them. By engaging with one another's stories of place, students build a community, simultaneously realizing the "multiplicity of facets of being" (Davies & Gannon, 2011, p.139). This process can "cultivate a sense of community and develop an awareness of ties to others and the forms of obligation, responsibility and support that nurture and sustain communities" (Hodson, 2011, p.276) and support the practices of a critical pedagogy of place.

A collective biography of place transforms the theory of a critical pedagogy of place into practice, and can be the starting foundation for teachers to use place-based education as a way to inspire “inquiry and action, while helping to bring together educators [and students] working for social justice and those working for ecological sustainability” (Greenwood, 2008, p.339). Using a collective biography of place, students can ask questions of one-another, and identify social and ecological problems they may or may not have seen before. Also, collective biographies draw on partnerships with local organizations, local experts, and the public to reveal the stories of places and a place’s political and ecological problems. Students can then identify these problems to create action-inquiry and other community-based projects (Hodson, 2011). In other words, collective biographies can either be the foundation for an action-inquiry project (which is most often one of the aims of place-based education), or they can be the data collected to lead students towards a solution.

Through hearing multiple social perspectives within an ecological environment, students can begin to see the important connections of ecological and social factors that shape the landscape. In fact, “by focusing on the community and the issues and problems that residents confront in their everyday lives, students come to recognize their own experiences as shared, social and political” (Hodson, 2011, p.276). Using Greenwood’s (2003; 2008b) questions, mentioned above, students can practice a critical pedagogy of place using a collective biography. Students can pose these questions to diverse stakeholders either as the starting point for an action-inquiry project or as a way to collect data about a place. The answers to these questions from diverse stakeholders can reveal what needs to be developed, challenged, maintained or created in a local environment to ensure better social and ecological quality. Power can be

challenged by giving students agency, and by using local voices to overcome dominant discourses.

A critical pedagogy of place in place-based education is the theory that exposes the inextricable link between social and ecological factors in places, simultaneously challenging dominant paradigms that influence the constructions of an individual's sense of place, as well as educational discourses about the environment. They are a way a critical pedagogy of place can be transformed into praxis. Narratives, or collective biographies specifically give voice, and as a result, agency, to often marginalized populations whose understanding and discourse may be silenced or ignored in field-based, environmental science and educational experiences. A critical pedagogy of place in place-based education that calls upon diverse local people as stakeholders or sources of knowledge can help deconstruct hegemonic ways of living in and learning about places. Dominant voices often define places and the developmental directions to which places are headed, but with a critical pedagogy of place in combination with collective biographies, diverse voices within a community can be heard.

### **Conclusion**

Because unfortunate applications of power still exist in places and in environmental and place-based education, a critical pedagogy of place needs to be renewed. In this article, I have provided a foundational understanding of power in environmental, place-based education to show why. I then reviewed Greenwood's (2003) argument for a critical pedagogy of place, in addition to existing literature to show how a critical pedagogy of place has been supported and developed since its conception. I then selected the use of narratives as a way to show how power in place-based education can be revealed to students. Specifically, I explained how the use of narratives can be a point of entrance into practicing a critical pedagogy of place. Narratives

expose power and the connections between social and ecological factors in place-based education, and in local environments. The purpose of this entire discussion is to support the deconstruction of power in place-based education by calling upon place-based educators to revive this discussion and modify their practices in order to attend to both social and ecological factors and issues in place. A critical pedagogy of place in place-based education that calls upon diverse local people as stakeholders and their sources of knowledge about local environments as content can help deconstruct hegemonic ways of living in, learning about places, and can help students to develop ecologically sustainable and socially just solutions.

Dominant voices often define places and the developmental directions to which places are headed, but with a critical pedagogy of place in combination with narratives, diverse voices within a community can be heard that give reason for change or inspire students to ask questions that lead to change in their local environments. This, in turn, deconstructs power in education through the practice of culturally-relevant and diverse pedagogies that challenge hegemonic systems of knowing. Knowing the diverse relationships that people have with places, in addition to how power influences these relationships, students can begin to create problem-solving questions that are locally, socially and ecologically relevant, and/or contribute to the development of more encompassing solutions to ecological and social problems. Just as Greenwood (2003; 2008) argues, these practices allow students to answer the questions: “What is happening here? What happened here? What should happen here? What needs to be transformed, conserved, restored or created in this place?” in regards to both social and ecological justice. Furthermore, these practices would answer the questions Who am I in this place? Whose voices do we hear in this place? Who gets to speak in/for this place? Through narratives, field, place-based educational experiences would no longer focus solely on ecological or scientific facts or

hegemonic beliefs of natural science, but they would be transformed to reflect diverse points of view and stories of local environments. It is important to note, here, that I do not mean completely disregarding dominant discourses of natural science, but through narratives and the exposure of diverse points of view, alternative scientific perspectives can be recognized and hegemonic systems of knowledge can be challenged. Narratives should not only focus on the social experience, but they should also include an ecological or scientific story or way of knowing. As Deloria (1999) states, “For every scientific ‘discovery’ ...there may exist one or more alternative ways of understanding natural processes” (p. 13). As a result, while narratives give a social understanding of place, so too may they reveal alternative important scientific understandings of place.

Narratives are only one approach to practice a critical pedagogy of place. As a result, it is important to acknowledge that more research about the actual praxis of a critical pedagogy of place can occur. Reviving the conversation around a critical pedagogy of place, especially for environmental, place-based educators is key, but questions remain that give room for further research:

- How can we translate our theoretical examinations of power in the environment and in educators to those on the ground in field-based experiences?
- What are the lived realities of those who are in place-based education; do they feel racism, sexism, classism, and other prejudices, and to what extent?
- Finally, how can empirical research support the effectiveness of a critical pedagogy of place in place-based education?

My experience in researching power in place-based education exposed the necessity of reviving the conversation surrounding a critical pedagogy of place, as well as the potential for further research.

A critical pedagogy of place, in order to be developed to its fullest potential, must include insight, especially from those who are environmental, place-based educators and those passionate about practicing critical pedagogy, because it is clear that dominant paradigms are not affected by disciplinary boundaries. Dominant paradigms persist in places, are perpetuated in education, and affect the students, as a result of their positionality, who we encourage to develop ecologically and socially just futures. Encouraging cross-disciplinary approaches to education through a critical pedagogy of place in place-based education is necessary. Power and privilege continue to define places and place-based education, putting many students and places at the margins of our discourses and practices. If we engage environmental, place-based educators with critical pedagogues, as Greenwood (2003) argues, then the developed solutions to deconstruct power and privilege in our places, education and consequently in place-based education, have the potential to be more encompassing and relevant to the lived realities of oppression and discrimination that students face in and outside of school.

When educators (and students) come to understand the social and ecological connections in places, then they can become better at developing place-based education that addresses the intersection. Place-based educators need to encourage students to understand and identify links between social and ecological problems as our future is threatened by climate change, natural resource exhaustion and other problems that become amplified and stratified across social groups. A critical pedagogy of place has the potential to make people more aware of the inextricable links between social and ecological factors and issues, simultaneously inspiring

action for those who are ready for change. A critical pedagogy of place ensures collaboration among environmentalists, social activists and educators, and as a result, a stronger commitment to improving our local places.

NOTES:

1. David Greenwood has changed his last name to Greenwood from Gruenewald. It should be noted that when he is referred to in the text, the name Greenwood will be used. In citation, his last name will reflect the name he had at the date of publication.



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