



Acts of Reading and Gathering in Place: Our Stories So Far...

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THE CONTEXT: OUR READING GROUP

Collaboration among the authors, in the form of a monthly reading group, began with our common interest in exploring the intersections of outdoor learning, environmental education, and early childhood pedagogies. We are a group of faculty members and graduate students from various departments and disciplines, currently teaching and studying in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam). Our writing group was formed from a larger reading-group community which included teacher candidates, in-service educators, school administrators, parents, and academics. Our individual and shared experiences in academia, formal and informal outdoor learning, personal understandings, stories, and inquiry contributed to the interwoven ideas and format of this paper.

WRITING METHOD

This article tells the story of an ongoing journey, of our reading group's investigation of the relation between outdoor learning and early childhood education, as a form of activism. Moved, conceptually and practically, by our monthly readings, discussions, and outdoor gathering places, the method and format of this paper attempt to invoke the fluid nature of our discoveries. In an effort to reflect the interconnected yet often unpredictable direction of our discussions, the intensity of the gatherings, and the diversity of our ideas and stories, we offer the content as three 'streams', each composed of text and images. The article, therefore, is formatted into three columns, which are the major themes, or 'streams,' of the article. This is our intentional effort to resist a unidimensional and linear representation of the movements of our thoughts and bodies in relation to place and text. We invite the reader to engage with the paper vertically, by flowing down a stream, or horizontally, ferrying across streams. The vertical and horizontal lines in the structure below should be considered porous and malleable. We hope readers will engage with our writing by continuing or contributing to this ongoing conversation.

STREAMS

| Gatherings/ <i>Environmental Education</i> | Land/ Place | Movement/ Activism |
|---|--------------------|---|
| How we met | Where we met | Why we met |
| Children's disconnection from local outdoor places | | Activism as concerned people coming together in public spaces |



| Gatherings/ Environmental Education | Land/ Place | Movement/ Activism |
|---|--|---|
| | | Taking action by <i>being</i> in the outdoors |
| Multiple notions of wellbeing, including Indigenous perspectives | Wellbeing as spiritual, and as connected with place | Movement within the reading group gatherings |
| Questioning meaning: 'ecology' as a term | | 'Ecological education' as a movement |
| Sensory ecology | | |
| Our reading group as early childhood education and outdoor learning | | |
| Does nature participate in democracy? | | Is 'democracy' sufficient? Is 'ecology'? |
| The power of gatherings to create and maintain power and meaning | The history of the place | |
| Connections between education, action, and deep ecology | | The importance of questioning and critical thinking in activism |
| | The privileging of some places over others as suitable for outdoor learning | |
| Our reading group as an environmentally educative activist experience | | |
| Crossing borders: this land is traditional, ancestral, unceded x ^w məθk ^w əyəm (Musqueam) territory | | |
| Children draw pictures that show their connection to place | Indigenous and Aboriginal ways of knowing place are no longer being taught to children in traditional ways | |
| | | The re-animation of traditional, land- and place-based Indigenous teachings |
| Our understanding of place and land affects how we are in the world; it influences our culture and our language | | |
| | Does place call on us to act? How do we treat place pedagogically? | |
| De-Colonization | | |
| | Places as tangled and storied relations | |
| Our university and our | | |



| Gatherings/ Environmental Education | Land/ Place | Movement/ Activism |
|---|---------------------|---|
| academic gatherings are just one of many layers of stories that exist on and are held by this land. | | |
| | Contextual learning | |
| Places and gatherings are full of simultaneously unfolding ‘stories-so-far’... | | |
| The reading group as a public act for reconsidering pedagogy and our relations with our world | | Sharing stories of our experiences of working with children in the outdoors and re-thinking our pedagogical relationships |

OFFERINGS FOR ON-GOING PRACTICE

The major themes, or streams, that we discerned in our reading group’s experiences were Gatherings/Environmental Education, Land/Place, and Movement/Activism. We believe that these overarching concepts cannot be separated from one another, nor can they be disentangled from our personal stories and experiences. Each of these have contributed to how we have been changed and how we continue to change as teachers, scholars and humans in relation to the world. Our aim in this article is to offer readers an opening that invites *more* movement and *more* gatherings, perhaps inspiring the creation of or the participation in a reading group. As this practice has presented us with opportunities to re-consider how gathering, place, text, pedagogy, and action are interrelated, we hope that readers might also feel the call to explore this form of learning and activism in place.

AUTHORS

Dr. Hartley Banack is a Lecturer and the Coordinator of the Outdoor Environmental Education programs with the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. He works with pre- and in-service teachers, at undergraduate and graduate levels, on how to increase the amount of time spent outdoors during instructional times and how TSO intersects with health and wellbeing, an environmental ethic, and learning. Hart has lived in Vancouver since 1999. He grew up in and around Toronto, and lived in Chile for five years, and in Costa Rica for eight months. His work intersects a notion of place through locality, which he broadly describes as where learning happens, with emphasis on developing the outdoor ‘where.’



Elizabeth Beattie is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia. Her research focuses on how students create meaningful outdoor environmental and science learning experiences through unstructured play, with an emphasis on early childhood education. She hopes to work with teachers and curriculum planners to incorporate outdoor learning into the standard curriculum, to promote meaningful, active, relevant, student-driven learning, teaching, and assessment.

Dr. Iris Berger has been involved in the field of early childhood education as a classroom teacher, researcher, community organizer, policy consultant, and university lecturer since the mid 1990s. Her passion for early childhood education (ECE) as a distinct and ever-engaging realm of/for research-pedagogy began when she worked with two, three and four-year-olds in the model classrooms at the *Child Study Centre* under the auspices of the Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia (UBC), Vancouver, Canada. She is currently a Lecturer and a Coordinator with the UBC ECE Program. At the centre of her professional and academic inquiry lies the abiding notion that matters pertaining to education *and* childhood are entangled with questions of ethics and politics.

Hailing from the desert state of Utah, with degrees in Cultural Anthropology and International Studies, Annie Montague is a Master's student in the Department of Educational Studies in the Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia. Her research explores the intersection of Early Childhood Education and Environmental Education, focusing on understanding how young learners form relationships with their environments in geographies, places, and cultures worldwide. Annie's Master's work includes an ethnographically oriented case study with preschoolers in Bali, Indonesia: examining how culture, curriculum, and place are woven into learning.

David Strich is a doctoral student in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia. He explores how (young) people develop what Aldo Leopold coined as a "Land Ethic" and is very interested in the philosophy of place. He very much wants to see a Land Ethic and place-based approaches incorporated into public education curricula. He serves as the grant director of after-school programs that promote cultural enrichment, academic achievement, and socio-emotional growth.