

Place-responsive outdoor learning

Mike Brown
University of Waikato
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Overview

Why place?

Place-responsiveness

Research project: Student & teacher perspectives

Prevalent themes in outdoor education texts

- ▶ Risk & challenge are needed to enhance learning. Pushing one's comfort zone is desirable. A focus on activities, risk management & staff competence.
- ▶ Promotion of a simplistic experiential 'method'.
- ▶ Learning is transferable.

Current approaches promote individualism

Learning is an individual 'cognitive act'.

Silences context; diminishes connections with places, communities.

Dis-empowers learners, teachers.

Impoverishes opportunities for learning.

Points to ponder

- ▶ How do participants learn, what do they learn & what constraints are inherent in our pedagogy?
- ▶ Why are participants continually taken into 'novel' terrain? Do they get beyond the 'risky edge'?
- ▶ Rethink of the 'orchestrated otherness'
- ▶ What are the opportunities for connections & ongoing engagement?

Place

Place has to do with how people develop and experience a sense of attachment to particular locations on the Earth's surface.... place is suggestive of both the imaginative and physical reality of a location and its people, and how the two interact and change each other.

(Wattchow & Brown, 2011, p. xxi)

Place: Ideological

A lack of attention to place,

impoverishes human experience, conceals from view the correspondence between ideology, politics, and place, and potentially leads to biological and cultural extinctions that we may regret.

(Gruenewald 2003, p. 645)

Place: Pedagogical role

*Places **teach** as about how the world works and how our lives fit into spaces that we occupy. Further, places **make** us: As occupants of particular places with particular attributes, our identity and our possibilities are shaped.*

(Gruenewald 2003, p. 621)

Place-responsiveness

- ▶ More than just be local – it is responsive to that place
- ▶ Responsiveness carries with it the impetus to act, to respond (Cameron, 2001)
- ▶ Acknowledges that people and places always exist in mutual bonds of interdependence

Place in education

Future of places (& humanity) is inherently linked with how humans experience places.

There is *potential* for outdoor learning experiences to make a contribution to the wellbeing of both people & places.

Question for educators

How do we encourage and enable learners to feel safe and comfortable in places rather to feel like a stranger with little or no attachment?

Project: Developing a place-responsive approach to outdoor education in Aotearoa/New Zealand

- ▶ Explore the possibilities made available by linking outdoor education with sites of local significance and meaning for participants.
- ▶ **Investigate how both teachers and students respond to a place-responsive approach.**
- ▶ Two schools, 20 students, 4 teachers, 2 years



Student perspectives: Themes

(i) A physical challenge: Scope for self regulation

[no] little games and team building stuff - this was like straight in there, hard work and stuff

(ii) Being self-propelled: A sense of achievement

(iii) Cultural connections

- ▶ Drew on stories told by family
- ▶ Marae stay drew on students 'outside school knowledge'

Themes

(iv) Planning: The opportunity to make decisions & contribute

- ▶ Students saw through contrived nature of camps that focused on confidence building and cooperation.

you teach yourself almost

we took control... we are going to be adults soon, we need to organise stuff ourselves & just take responsibility (emerging of imposed leadership)

Themes

(v) Opportunities afforded by connections/familiarity

This allowed students to incorporate their out of school knowledge

We went kayaking and the kayaking was pretty good for me cause where we went kayaking is where I go fishing and stuff so I knew the area quite well and I was the leader of the group, so I got to lead the way

Themes

(vi) Discovering/appreciating new places

I have lived here like forever, like all my life but I still haven't paid any attention whatsoever to like, where I live, which I had not even bothered to think about before hat, so that was pretty cool, just actually realising that.

Teacher perspectives

- ▶ Increased cross - curricula engagement
- ▶ Building connections
- ▶ Lowered stress levels
- ▶ An 'emerging' curriculum

From the feedback we got from the kids, from the point of view of connecting to their local environment and maybe opening their eyes to what is here and what they can make use of with friends, families etcetera I think it was really good.

Learning about place: a modest achievement?

- ▶ Beames & Ross (2010) suggest that helping students understand more about the world which they inhabit is arguably one of the educator's primary tasks.
- ▶ Cameron (2001) argued that the task of the educator is to foster a sense of place so that students love of wild places can extend to care for all places.
- ▶ Evidence suggests attachment to a local natural resource can influence environmentally responsible behaviour (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001).

Key points

- ▶ Students/teachers valued this style of programme
- ▶ Drew on teachers & students knowledge – no need for external specialists
- ▶ Students were often the experts; marae and waka
- ▶ 'Outcomes' of increased communication, cooperation, displays of empathy were evident in the mundane rather than the dramatic.
- ▶ Cross-curricula learning intentions
- ▶ Identity is formed in interaction with people/places.

Shift in discourse

- Move from 'cognitive' to situated account for learning. Embodied knowing, people, place, task.
- Greater cultural/place awareness.
- Discourse changes. From 'instructor centered' to more 'learner centered'.
- Pedagogical role of place is central
- Removes "big bang" approach
- Modest claims – more empathetic approach

References

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