Place-based Education: Challenging the neo-colonizing processes of the New Zealand and Canadian schooling systems

Background in relation to the problem

- Opening Doors Program/Alternative Education
- Student Demographics
- Indigenous Education
- Community Schooling
- Ecological Education
- Place-based Education

Alternatives to "Mainstream Schooling"

- Alternatives in schooling (Montessori, Steiner, Neill)
- Critique of schooling (Illich, Postman, Gatto)
- Schools for students with "special needs" or "at-risk"
- Schools specific for sports, music, drama
- Four Avenues Program in Christchurch (opened in the 1970's and then closed twice by the government)
- Saskatoon Native Survival School (First Nations High School)

Background

- Canada and New Zealand share a common British colonial history and, accordingly, share many similar problems as a result of the importation of British industrial schooling models that have impacted negatively on learners, especially those of Indigenous ancestry.

Schooling in New Zealand and Canada

- Mandatory schooling to the age of sixteen
- Curriculum
- Subject specific
- Classroom based learning
- Physical spaces of schools are very similar
- Set time for subject specific classes/learning, 9am-3pm
- Vacation time
- Standardized testing

Background

- Approximately 50% of Māori students leave school without any qualifications, compared to 21% of non-Māori students (Bishop in Steinberg, 2009 p. 112) likewise, in Saskatchewan - Canada, it was reported (Anderson, 2010) that 53 % of Aboriginal people did not have a high school diploma; compared to the national average of 15% (Census Canada, 2008).

- Barnhardt (2002)"teachers and educators are becoming aware that the values in which the current systems of schooling that are rooted in European-North American (i.e., Eurocentric) culture and that those values and those of culturally different students, such as those with Indigenous ancestry, frequently come into conflict in learning processes."

Place-based Education (PBE)

- Sobel (2004) defines PBE as:

"The process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science and other subjects across the curriculum. Emphasizing hands-on, real-world learning experiences helps students develop stronger ties to the community, enhances students' appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens"(p. 7).

Place-based Education (PBE)

- As Gruenewald and Smith (2007) suggest:

Support for place-based education means creating space within the current structures and practices of schooling for more relevant and engaging learning that focuses on local situations and experiences; it means challenging and sometimes changing assumptions and policies that make creating this space difficult (p. 350).

Indigenous PBE

- From the literature PBE aligns very well with Indigenous ways of thinking and being (Penetito, Alsaka Native Knowledge Network, Barnhardt, Deloria, and Atleo)

Research Questions

- Why and how have alternative education programs located in Christchurch, New Zealand and Saskatoon Saskatchewan, Canada:
  - Evolved in their development (historical analysis)?
  - Implemented the tenets of place-based education to work with their students; including their Indigenous students?
- To what extent do the participants in both countries, provide resistance, at their respective local community levels, to the neo-colonizing processes of their respective schooling systems?
- What challenges do participants in both countries face when attempting to provide resistance at their local community levels to the neo-colonizing processes of their respective systems?

PBE Criteria for selection of research participants:

1. Using the local community and environment (localizing curriculum/learning)
2. Hands-on, real-world learning experiences, (experiential education/learning)
3. Serving as active, contributing citizens
4. Appreciation for the natural world (Environmental education/learning)
5. Cultural studies
6. Nature investigations (Outdoor education)
7. Real-world problem solving (Inquiry based learning)
8. Internships and entrepreneurial opportunities
9. Immersion into community life (Community-based learning)
10. Multidisciplinary
11. Connects place with self and community. Surrounding phenomenon are the foundation for curriculum development (Place-based)
12. Students becoming the creators of knowledge rather than only consumers of knowledge. Students questions and concerns play central roles in determining what is studied (student-centered)
13. Teachers act primarily as co-learners and "brokers" of community resources and learning possibilities (teacher as facilitator)
14. Walls between the community and school buildings are crossed frequently (Education outside the classroom)

Using the work of Woodhouse and Knapp (2000), Smith (2002), Sobel (2004)

Research Participants

- 6 teachers from Saskatoon, Canada
  - 4 are elementary/intermediate – grade/year 8, students are 13-14. Public and Catholic school systems. 3 male, 1 female
  - 2 are high school – year 10-11, students are 16-17. Public school. 1 male, 1 female
- 5 teachers from Christchurch, New Zealand
  - 2 are high school years 9-12, Special character designation. 1 female, 1 male.
  - 2 are high school year 9-11, Public state schools, Catholic special character. 1 female, 1 male.
  - 1 is intermediate/principal – year 8. Independent school. Male.

Background of Teachers

Teaching experience
- Four had ten or more years teaching experience
- Five had over five years
- Two were brand new teachers

Education
- Seven had or were completing a Master's degree and one had a PhD degree

Data Collection

- The data was collected through an initial online questionnaire using Qualtrics software, an in-person interview with research participants as well as observations of the teachers teaching spaces. Research participants were all teachers:
- 6 questionnaires/interviews in Saskatoon and 5 in Christchurch
- Follow up - personal communication with research participants

Ethical/Cultural Considerations

- Research conducted whilst consulting with Professor Angus Macfarlane (Te Arawa descent, Professor of Māori Research at the University of Canterbury) and in Saskatoon, with Gordon Martell (Superintendent Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools, Waterhen Cree Nation)

Christchurch Earthquakes

- Many teachers/students were displaced during this time including two of my research participants
- All teachers were effected by the earthquakes in one way or another
- Schools amalgamated and used shared spaces
- Change in place/time
- Change in Foundation/Philosophy of learning

Critical Pedagogy of Place

- Aims to take action against the oppressive elements (power relations) of reality and put them into local contexts and situations (local places)
  - Feminism
  - Racism
- Connecting the ecological with social and cultural issues in education
  - Urban and rural

Critical Pedagogy of Place

- Greenwood (2003) has argued within the realms of critical theory/pedagogy and adapted it to what he calls a critical pedagogy of place. It aims to (a) identify, recover, and create material spaces and places that teach us how to love well in our total environments (reinhabitation) and; (b) identify and change ways of thinking that injure an exploit other people and places (decolonization).

Data Analysis

Themes
- Time (timetabling, teacher with students all day, no bells)
- Space/Place(classroom, community, natural/built environments)
- Curriculum (thematic approach, student centered)
- Assessment/Evaluation (portfolios, self assessment, interviews, peer assessment, no letter/number grades)
- Social Justice

Time - "So time is fluid. Ya, time is totally fluid"

- Alternative timetabling
  - Teachers with students all day
  - No set school day from 9am – 3pm
  - Use of weekends and evenings
- Those teachers in strict timetabled schools talked about wanting more time with students (two classes combined/half day)
- No Bells
  - Class spent 50% of time outside of the classroom and used community resources (people, buildings, transport)

"Time to us is whatever makes us successful so we really don't have time for assignments. It's did we get to our destination. So we don't go by any subject period of 30 minutes or 50 minutes we let our kids define the time and what they think they need to be successful in a certain project."

"Time, well we don't have all these interruptions."

Space

- Use of classroom space

"Our classroom begins at the exit sign found at the end of our school's hallway"

Place

- School
  - Classroom
  - School grounds
- Local Community
  - Local public libraries
  - Local businesses
  - Green spaces
- Wider Communities
  - Surrounding towns/cities/natural areas
    "place gives context and history especially with the narratives behind those places and what has happened in the past and what is now happening. You are part of it now, in terms of the students, what are we going to do about it in cases of social justice and injustice? You can use place very powerfully that way"

Curriculum

- Thematically integrated
- Student centred
- Project-based
- Experiential
- Inquiry-based learning

Assessment/Evaluation

- Peer assessment/evaluation
- Portfolios
- Interviews
- No letter/number grades

Social Justice

- Exploring marginalization of groups (Gender, Sexual Orientation, Race, Class)
- Ethnographies
- Indigenous issues – Treaty

Key Findings

- The importance of post-graduate learning
- Shift from Outdoor Education to Place-based learning
- The beginnings of Critical Pedagogy of Place
- The process of decolonization leads to resistance and enables acts of reinhabitation
- Does reinhabitation lead to a re-colonization???

Challenges for teachers

- Little support by Administrators and colleagues
- Need to "prove" the programme to everyone (ERO/Trustees/Principals/Staff)
- Time – not enough hours in the day
- Funding
- Integration of Math

Thank You

- Questions/Comments
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