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### Abstract

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**Book Review of *Place-Based Education in the Global Age: Local Diversity*  
David Gruenewald & Greg Smith (Eds.), NY: Lawrence Erlbaum**

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Public Law 107-110, The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), requires states to use state-standardized assessments to hold schools and school districts accountable for student learning. The implementation of NCLB has resulted in the standardization of state curricula. As a high school science teacher in Washington State, my job was to prepare students to pass the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) by focusing instruction on a set of learning outcomes known as grade level expectations (GLEs).

A problem with this standardized approach to teaching and learning is that it widens the gap between what happens in schools and the communities where schools are located. Teachers in Seattle, a metropolis of over 3 million people located in the remnants of once-primeval forests, teach to the same learning objectives that I did when teaching in tiny Asotin, WA, a desert community of 1,700 just upstream from the confluence of the Snake and Clearwater Rivers. The needs and resources of Seattle and Asotin are quite different and yet are not recognized under the mandated NCLB approach to K-12 education.

John Dewey recognized the need to con-

nect schooling with the needs and resources of local communities. According to Dewey (1929), "The school must represent present life – life as real and vital to the child as that which he carries on in the home, in the neighborhood, or on the playground" (p. 293). Furthermore, Dewey (1929) attributed the failure of the schools of his time to their neglecting the role of the school in community life.

Gruenewald and Smith offer an antidote to locally-disconnected curriculum in their new book, *Place-Based Education in the Global Age: Local Diversity*. Place-based education (PBE) is simply teaching and learning that is tied to the needs and resources of the students' community (Sobel, 2004). There is no single theoretical framework or epistemology that is the foundation for PBE, in part because place-based approaches have grown out of different disciplines, as well as the creativity of many individual teachers. Gruenewald (2003) recently demonstrated that educators claiming place as a guiding construct hail from outdoor education (Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000), environmental and ecological education (Orr, 1992; Sobel, 1996; Thomashow, 1996), and rural education (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998; Theobald, 1997).

*Place-Based Education in the Global Age: Local Diversity* is a significant contribution to the literature of place. This edited volume features the work of 14 practitioners of place-based education working in such diverse places as Israel, Australia, and Alaska. Three key questions lie at the core of Gruenewald & Smith's (2008) *Place-Based Education in the Global Age: Local Diversity* (p. xix):

1. What educational forms promote care for places?
2. What does it take to conserve, restore, and create ways of being that serve people and places?
3. What does it take to transform those ways of being that harm people and places?

The book is broken into three sections that serve to 1) expose the reader to diverse models of place-based instruction; 2) explore practitioner reasons for adopting place-based approaches; and 3) examine the practice of place within contemporary global society.

In section 1, *Models for Place-Based Learning*, the reader is presented with a range of place-based practices that demonstrate the transformative power that centering curricula in place can bring to schools and communities. Clifford Knapp's chapter, *Place-Based Curricular and Pedagogical Models*, is an excellent stand-alone introduction to place-based education that connects Knapp's teaching philosophy, borne of decades of practice, to the historical roots of place. Knapp provides the reader with a functional how-to manual that includes community-building activities, a method for investigating local resources, and the creation of place-based products. He completes his contribution with an overview of five key place-based approaches.

New York artist-educator Mark Graham leads the reader on a journey where students connect to the local through the process of finding and identifying with student-selected sacred spaces. In an effort to counter the influence of mass media on his students, Graham sent his students into their Long Island community with cameras, sketchbooks, and journals to connect with the complex landscape of ocean, animals, plants and people. Student art was shared with the community at the end of the course in an exhibition that demonstrated the value of merging of craft, experience, and connection to place.

Mark Sorenson writes and teaches about place from the perspective of *K'è*, a Navajo philosophy centered in respect, relationship, and responsibility. Sorenson is an administrator of the STAR School, a small, solar-powered K-8 charter school northeast of Flagstaff, Arizona. Indigenous knowledge is paired with traditional curricula at the STAR School in an effort to spark native students' love of learning and encourage cultural and environmental sustainability. Modeling Mahatma Gandhi's advice, "You must be the change you want to see in the world," service learning is used to further connect school, culture, and community.

In Maine the loss of traditional economies based in timber, textiles, and military bases has resulted in the out-migration of many of the state's young people. Julie Bartsch reports on collaborative efforts to connect students with the local by documenting area histories using cutting-edge technology. Assessments of place-based practice in Maine revealed increased student engagement, increased understanding of the inter-connectedness of place, economy, and environment, as well as, higher test scores on standardized measures.

In chapter five, teacher-activist Elaine Senechal documents the creation and implementation of a place-based science curriculum at an

alternative high school in Egleston Square, an economically-disadvantaged suburb of Boston, Massachusetts. Senechal anchored science teaching and learning in the context of her school's urban community with a place-based focus on air and environmental quality. Utilizing state-of-the-art air-quality monitoring technology, Senechal and her students challenged bus idling practices resulting in new legislation improving local air quality. Students and teacher went on to successfully fight the installation of a biohazard laboratory planned for location within their community. In Egleston Square, place-based practices benefited students and their community through the creation of an active local citizenry dedicated to community improvement.

In Alaska, place-based education is the guiding concept behind the decade-long Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative that integrates indigenous knowledge systems into the entire K-12 curriculum. Ray Barnhardt reports in chapter six how village and city elders work side-by-side with teachers and administrators to plan, teach, and reflect on robust locally-centered teaching and learning. The result is a pedagogy of place that shifts the focus from teaching about culture to teaching "through culture" (Barnhardt, 2007, p. 113). Students learn in an environment that openly acknowledges the complexity of living in two worlds: native and generic media-produced Americana. The result is a paradigm shift that recognizes a complex learning system involving traditional ways of knowing in a complementary relationship with contemporary scientific practice.

Section two of *Place-Based Education in the Global Age* explores some of the reasons why place-based practitioners have chosen place as their focus of praxis. In chapter seven David Gruenewald (2008) positions place at the "nexus between culture and environment" (p. 145). He challenges cultural studies devotees to widen

their net of cultural inclusion, to place *Homo sapiens* as one among the many species that inhabit Mother Earth; a truly post-anthropocentric view of humanity's role in the great cosmic stew. Gruenewald's rallying cry to bring place proponents together with diversity advocates is sustainability - sustainable neighborhoods, sustainable schools, and sustainable ecosystems where people can live together in peace and equality. Gruenewald argues that diversity advocates should consider including the place-relationship construct in their worldview for two key reasons: 1) to work towards achieving cultural grounding in specific and diverse places; and, 2) to connect diversity of identity, thought and expression with ecological diversity.

Drawing upon naturalist traditions dating back to Comstock's (1911) *Handbook of Nature Study*, Robert Michael Pyle argues in chapter eight that environmental awareness of place should be anchored to an intimate knowledge of an ecosystem's working parts. In the same breath, he illuminates how such a focus is risky business, for it can leave one "on the outside looking in" because, in reality, adopting a place-based focus is a political decision with sometimes-dire ramifications.

In chapter nine, Rachel Tompkins acts as voice for The Rural School and Community Trust in telling the stories of rural communities using place as a construct in an effort to fight rural school consolidation. Tompkins recognizes the important role that small schools play in fostering rural identity development and rural economic development; especially when place is central to educational practice.

The third and final section of *Place-Based Education in the Global Age* examines the practice of place-based education in the context of contemporary global university education. In chapter eleven Michael Malahy Morris contemplates his role fostering leadership training

among Native Americans bent on connecting education reform with community issues and challenges.

Centering education in place relationship takes on multiple layers of complexity in Israel/Palestine, where different religious groups have contested ownership of place for thousands of years. In chapter twelve, Freema Elbaz-Luwisch describes how the paradoxes of Israeli/Palestinian life extend to the educational system where instruction is segregated according to language and religion. In Israel/Palestine place takes on a whole new meaning as a promulgator of Zionist ideology that fails to acknowledge the cultural needs of Moslem, Christian, and Druse minorities.

Place teacher-researcher John Cameron has been practicing what he calls “new localism” in Australia since 1983. A former professional environmentalist, Cameron was instrumental in the creation of Australia’s Sense of Place Colloquium. Chapter thirteen highlights his methodology; a combination of awareness of one’s own locality with traditional Aboriginal teachings on ecology and stewardship. Cameron’s systematized approach to place-based instruction initiates students into place with field-based experiences of the local, followed by environmental and social justice projects in the greater community and farther out in the Australian bush country.

Dubel and Sobel bring the reader full circle in the 14<sup>th</sup> and final chapter of *Place-Based Education in the Global Age*. Beginning with a focus on the extreme local, mushroom identification and collection, Dubel and Sobel model place-based practice as they steer pre-service teacher attention to the bounty of opportunity just outside the classroom walls. I felt like I was back in 1911 with Anna Comstock, stooping with journal and magnifying glass in hand, examining “rocks, butterflies, salamanders” (Dubel &

Sobel, 2008, p. 313) and whatever else nature provided for the daily curriculum.

*Place-Based Education in the Global Age: Local Diversity* is a powerful alternative to the one-curriculum-for-all-places mentality promoted under No Child Left Behind. Gruenewald and Smith provide a panoramic view of how place-based education can reinvigorate schools and communities. This book is a serious contribution to the literature on place and new localism. It will appeal to readers interested in the philosophical underpinnings of place and to those wanting to examine the praxis of this dynamic, holistic approach to teaching and learning in the global age.

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