Place Empathy and Environmental Education

by

Tatiana Zakharova

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Ministry of Education documents define environmental education as education about, for, and in the environment. But how does formal curriculum actually describe “environment” in different subject areas and what does this say about students’ relationship with it? Relying on hermeneutics for foundation and methodology, I analyse and interpret the Ontario Grade 2 and Grade 3 environmental education curriculum and identify themes of damaged connectivity and fear of complexity that can be addressed with place empathy. Having defined place empathy as a cognitive and affective representation process in which an observer simulates another’s interpretations of place in order to deepen her understanding of place, and developed a place empathy framework, I identify a number of learning practices which could be used by teachers to engage students in place empathy to encourage, as I hypothesize, deeper understanding of and relationship with place.
To my Dad, who is always ready to see the world from my perspective
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Chapter 1. Introduction

*It is, as I say, the story of an education, and, as will be clear from the high incidence of folly in these pages, I remain more pupil than teacher.*

Michael Pollan, *The Second Nature*

1.1. Overview and Personal Reflections

The title of this paper is creativity-barren. From it, you directly know that I will be discussing three main concepts: place, empathy and environmental education ("EE"), in this case, within the Ontario curriculum. The premise upon which my paper is based is that the curriculum documents are important sources of information about who we are, and who we want to be. And that students’ understanding of the environment would come, as hermeneutic philosophers suggest (Zimmerman, 2015), from a movement between students’ understanding of their own worlds on one hand, and the world projected to them by the educators on the other.

But let me start by taking a step back. I am a parent of two students attending an Ontario public elementary school. I am also a student in a landscape architecture program with interest in the design of outdoor spaces for children and a part-time job dedicated almost entirely to “greening” public school grounds. I am also one who insisted, some years ago, that our family relocate from downtown Toronto to a rural property in Southern Ontario, to be “closer to nature”. With all of this disclosed, I now ask that you try to suppose what my attitude towards nature may be… Please, do take a moment to consider…

If you guessed that I think nature is dead, you’ve guessed correctly. As René Bihan, Managing Principal of landscape architecture firm SWA wrote back in 2011, “[n]ature—as consumers imagine it to be—is a controlled environment influenced by generations of politicians, landscape architects, and planners (n.p.). Whatever we may perceive as natural has been designed or affected, in one way or another, by humans. As contemporary British sociologist Anthony Giddens suggests, “nature is no longer nature because it is so thoroughly infused with human intervention and human activity. We have entered the age of the anthropocene” (2015, p.157). Another contemporary author Michael Pollan agrees, “Nature is dead, if by nature we mean something that stands apart from man and messy history. And now that it is, perhaps we can begin to write some new parts for ourselves, ones that will show us how to start out from here, not from some imagined state of innocence, and let us get down to the work at hand.” (2007, p. 189).
Don't get me wrong. I am not advocating against planting trees on school grounds or denying positive effects of time spent outdoors for children or adults alike. Instead, I am questioning the explicit and implicit presence of the term “nature” within the EE curriculum. In the 2017 Ontario EE curriculum covering grades 1-8 and the kindergarten program, “nature” and related words appear 147 times. For contrast, “teacher(s)” is mentioned 134 times. I mention the word count here not because it's an indicator of whatever, but rather to suggest that any underlying terms ought to be investigated. This includes, of course, the very core term “environment”.

Let me try to position this term within the 2009 Ontario policy framework for EE. The document, titled Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow, states, in part (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p.4):

*Environmental education is education about the environment, for the environment¹, and in the environment that promotes an understanding of, rich and active experience in, and an appreciation for the dynamic interactions of:*

- the Earth’s physical and biological systems;
- the dependency of our social and economic systems on these natural systems;
- the scientific and human dimensions of environmental issues;
- the positive and negative consequences, both intended and unintended, of the interactions between human-created and natural systems.

<...> The policy framework seeks to move beyond a focus on symptoms – air and water pollution, for example – to encompass the underlying causes of environmental stresses, which are rooted in personal and social values and in organizational structures. It seeks to promote changes in personal behaviour and organizational practices that will allow us to minimize our ecological footprint, while also fostering greater community engagement in meeting that goal.

Applying Lucie Sauvé’s typology of conceptions of the environment (1996) to this introduction, I expect that the Ontario EE curriculum positions environment primarily as ‘nature to live in’, to be appreciated, respected, and preserved. The human activity is then a largely negative influence upon nature. When I ask my daughter, a grade 3 student, about environmental education, she eagerly and innocently confirms this narrative (Figure 1.1.).

¹ The preposition “for” is particularly curios here, as I can hardly image it entering, say, a science curriculum, suggesting, say, that chemistry education is done for the field of chemistry itself.
Environment is habitat for spiders, humans and animals. It's nature that keep us and animals alive. And building and roads break it, so we need to keep it easy. Sometimes it's just buildings and roads, more city-like, and sometimes it can be meadows, woods and bodies of water. It's also learning about how animals adapt, like racoons had to adapt to living in the cities: they used to have nice places to roam free and now people don't like when racoons go through their garbage.

Figure 1.1. My daughter describing what she thinks environmental education is.
For an Ontario student, then, the hierarchical group-level narrative of the EE curriculum may be romanticizing nature. But the individual narrative, I expect, is the opposite: it’s socio-centric for the vast majority of students. Certainly, children attending urban schools have grown up in exclusively built environments, but suburban and rural students, too, are accustomed to socially-constructed places. I would like to illustrate this point with an anecdotal excerpts from a study conducted by Cincera, Johnson and Kovacikova (2015) in which students partook in a residential program at a mountainous EE centre (p.179). While researchers hypothesized an effect on the attractiveness of the natural area and teachers remarked on the beauty of the place where the residential portion occurred, the participating students commented on discomfort, physical activities beyond their capacity, missed Wi-Fi and lack of free time. In a way, the socio-centric nature of the individual preconception of the environment is the other side of the coin of the claim of nature-deficit disorder put forward by Richard Louv (2008) and, in my experience, believed in by many Ontario parents and educators.

The contrast of nature vs. culture, originated in Western masculism (Kheel, 2008), is not surprising as a historical legacy, but it is problematic. Within the sphere of primary education, students are asked to reconcile their individual preconceptions and socially-prescribed identities, but are they being provided tools to accomplish this? Moreover, highlighting the separation between natural creations (woman; nature; Latin “natura” meaning “birth” (ibid., p.38) and artificial creations (men; culture; Latin “colere” meaning “to till” (ibid.) continues to presuppose that the two are separate and can exist in their pure form. This is, of course, not true.

Take Richard Louv's Last Child in the Woods. The book enjoys glowing reviews (see its page on Amazon) and teachers I personally know say it is on their must-read lists. Louv’s work on the importance of children spending time in nature is regarded as influential (Gill, 2014). As much as I agree with many of Louv's points such as, for example, the importance of loose parts, he consistently speaks of “natural wilderness: biodiversity, abundance” (2008, n.p.) as the opposite of human-made indoor spaces, even though the “wild” he describes is comprised of human constructs: national parks, dirt paths, fruit orchard, and even those magnificent trees to climb as a child – are there as a result of human activity.

The designed character of our daily environments fails to take its place in the spotlight not just in popular books, but in the eye of most lay-persons I know. Unless you are a landscape architect or in a related profession, you likely assess the environment without the “design” operator in your
vocabulary. Recently, I read a post by a popular Russian urban design blogger who, having travelled to New Zealand, marvelled at the country’s ability to keep its nature looking wild (Varlamov, 2018). His trained eye easily identified the deceiving postcard-like natural appearance of local reserves: the laid-out paths though forests, limbs cut to maintain ease of access, leveled beams across streams, public toilets decorated in wallpaper of trees, signage, and even a shoe-washing station to presumably keep the invasives away (see Figure 1.2).

At the 2018 CSLA-OALA Conference, Anne Whiston Spirn began her keynote address with a photo taken at one of the parks within the Emerald Necklace, a chain of parks in Boston, Massachusetts. She described how most people assume that Frederick Law Olmsted, who designed the parks, just preserved what was already there. Similarly, in the introduction to his 1998 book Wilderness by design: Landscape architecture and the National Park Service, Ethan Carr writes that “many people intuitively reject the importance of human design in an environment valued primarily for its pristine, natural condition” (p.1). Carr goes on to describe years of design and planning efforts on the part of park superintendents, landscape architects and engineers in the US, yet their work is overlooked by the public who continue to see the primeval nature even when they observe it from a constructed overlook. If one was to say that wilderness still exists somewhere remote and inaccessible to humans, I would point them to the NASA’s 2018 visualization of how the quantity of older and thicker ice in the Arctic sea has changed between 1984 and 2016. The Arctic is as wild and inaccessible as you can get, yet it cannot remain immune to human-induced changes.

If you, like I have, adopt the hermeneutic assumption “that people make sense of their lives by placing themselves in a larger normative context of texts and other meaningful things” (Drenthen, 2017, p. 163), then you can recognize the dissonance between the larger narrative of the natural world to preserve and the small world of everyday lives where a wild nature may be but an imagined destination for a road trip. The desired effect may be to instil in children a ‘sense of wonder’ but the actual effect may, in fact, be a sense of confusion: if wild equals good, then me equals bad?

Even if a student manages to avoid the polarity between her personal realities and the pre-existing narrative of the EE curriculum by placing herself on the side of nature-preserving forces of good and assigning enviro-negative activities as being committed by some external “other”, such a position would, too, be infertile since the other must be concluded as an irrational creature (since wanting for the destruction of the planet is illogical) and, thus, outside the possibility for
Figure 1.2. A collection of the most glaring design elements from photographs of New Zealand’s nature trails and natural reserves; images by Ilya Varlamov with my own visual highlights.
conversation. Exclusion of self from enviro-negative effects and assigning those to others fails to recognize “shared normalcy” (Barton & LeVstik, 2004, p.211 as cited in Endacott, 2010, p.34): realization that, just like us, others have reasons for and values behind their decisions and their behaviour is “not the result of ignorance, stupidity, or delusion” (ibid.).

So far, I have shown how what we perceive as natural is, in fact, designed and artificial, and how the natural and cultural environments cannot be separated. I have also discussed how attributing the human impact to some unknown irrational player while assigning for yourself a role of environmental benefactor does little good since it denies a possibility for dialogue between the two opposing camps. If dualism is unproductive, and nature is dead anyway, then what? To answer this, let’s replace the word “religion” with the word “nature” in Christopher Hitchens’s 2010 talk: “So the great cultural question to me is not how to reject religion, because that’s easy enough to do, but how to transcend it, how to make something out of the extraordinary... [means] that it has produced”. We can, thus, transcend nature and arrive instead at place, here and now.

Conceptually, if nature were to remain natural, it must be only looked at, it cannot be “lived in”. Place, on the other hand, is entirely about living experience. Place is a designed synergy of human constructs built upon natural resources. Since, by default, place involves a cultural component, it must be artificial. But artificial is, too, governed by the natural laws, and being artificial does not preclude place from being authentic. Furthermore, place does not exist outside our understanding of it. As we articulate our relationship to the environment, “we transform the neutrality of space into a meaningful place, that is, through interpretation we make mere Umwelt (environment) into a Welt (world); that is, into a meaningful and inhabitable world that we can live in...” (Drenthen, 2017, pp. 167-168).

Moreover, place can be a uniquely personal reflection of each student’s individual realities. As Marc Augé wrote more than 20 years ago, these places as inventions “discovered by those who claim [them] as their own” (1995, p.43) are “places of identity...” (ibid., p.52). If students are already able to articulate what their places are, educators can help them to take the discussion deeper. If students are unable to do so3, educators can show them how.

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2 Although some of Augé’s writing was of interest, it pertained to anthropological places. His discussions of the relationship between indigenous people and the history of place, and the social (group) and geographical dimensions of place were outside the scope and my own operative definition of place. Similarly, I do not share Augé’s distaste for what he described as “non-places” produced by supermodernity.

3 Lippard (1997) mentions that when she asked 20 university students to name a place where they belonged, most could not.
The term “place” is fluid, personal and multi-centered. These characteristics can be celebrated as democratic, but they also make “place” a difficult term to work with in the more formal school setting which, generally, tends to move towards an equilibrium (Davies, 2004). A tool is needed to reconcile the different sources of data within “place”. The same tool can also accomplish “the fusion of horizons” (Gadamer, 1989, p.305 in Drenthen, 2017): resolving the multitude of individual and social interpretations of the environment described earlier. This tool is **empathy**, the ability to feel and think into the experiences of others. Research interest in both these terms has been rising. Acceleration in publication of place-related journal articles (Lewicka, 2010) is equally matched by the steady increase (at the very least over the past 14 years and likely longer) in the number of publications relating to empathy. A simple search for the term “empathy” through the *Web of Science* indexing service reveals that the per-cent increase in the number of articles involving empathy has moved into double-digit numbers since 2015. *Google Trends* shows the same upward trend (see **Figure 1.3**). This would not be surprising to, for example, the writer and theorist Jeremy Rifkin who, in his 2009 book *The Empathic Civilization* speaks of the rise of empathic consciousness as a “radical new view of human nature <...> with revolutionary implications for the way we understand and organize our economic, social and environmental relations in the centuries to come.” (p.43)

Welcome to the age of “*Homo empathicus*”! (ibid).

If the construct (place) and the tool (empathy) are used together, we arrive at **place empathy**. This is a new term that will be defined in this paper, but while I will attempt to explore place empathy and establish it as a teachable skill, I will not try to prove its existence. Why? Because I don’t need to. As the literature review will show, both concepts of “empathy” and “place” have long been recognized, with the former already having a philosophical history of connecting humans with inanimate objects. Additionally, as Weisz and Zaki (2017) point out with reference to studies on empathic responses that have been conducted since as early as the 1930s, empathy is malleable and empathic skills can indeed be developed.

If you wish, though, it can be said (in a manner of a loose adaptation of Wilson’s argument for biophilia) that the existence of place empathy would be compelled by the evolutionary logic that human well-being depended precisely on the knowledge of their environments, their places. As well, the innate proof of our deep personal empathic relationship with place may be in the human need to seek meaning deeper than our own survival, “[i]f we are by nature an affectionate species
Figure 1.3. Search results for keyword "empathy" of the Web of Science core collection (1999-2018) and on Google Trends
that continuously seeks to broaden and deepen our relationships and connection to others”: “...we extend our collective central nervous systems to encompass greater swaths of existence. We do so in order to find meaning in belonging to ever richer and deeper realms of reality” (Rifkin, 2009, p. 39.). Rifkin continues:

_We begin to sense the possibility that there may be a purpose after all to the human journey: that the deepening sense of selfhood, the extension of empathy to broader and more inclusive domains of reality and the expansion of human consciousness, is the transcendent process by which we explore the mystery of existence and discover new realms of meaning._ (ibid., p.40)

I have mentioned above and will reference again (see the **Method** chapter below) how the importance of recognizing and examining the observer’s position is stressed in the empathic process and in establishing the concept of “place”, as well as in the hermeneutic tradition, which will serve as the philosophical foundation for my paper. Therefore, it seems appropriate that I conclude this section by declaring that I believe myself, as a pupil of humanities, to be appropriately qualified to examine the meaning behind human actions through the process interpretation and analysis showing how such meaning may be tied to the context and vice-versa.

### 1.2. Research Question and Objectives

The following research question guided this study: **How can place empathy be integrated into Ontario’s Grade 2 and 3 environmental education curriculum?** In order to answer the questions, the following objectives were established:

**Objective 1:** Define place empathy

**Objective 2:** Establish a framework for place empathy by identifying the five sequential components of place empathy

**Objective 3:** Interpret and analyse the existing Grade 2 and Grade 3 Ontario EE curriculum within the context of EE policy and planning considerations, as well as the concepts of “place”, “empathy”, and “place empathy”.

**Objective 4:** Demonstrate tools and techniques through which empathy can be integrated into the Grade 2-3 EE curriculum.
1.3. Thesis Organization

This thesis is organized as follows: after this introductory chapter is concluded, Chapter 2 discusses hermeneutics as the foundation for this research and hermeneutics as the research method. Here, I also discuss the limitations and assumptions of the study. The literature review in Chapter 3 covers concepts of “place” and “empathy”, including a brief history of the term, its definition and role within environmental education. Chapter 3 also contains the definition of “place empathy” along with the discussion that compares this new term with a more-familiar “place attachment”. Finally, the five components of the place empathy framework are set up in the concluding pages of said chapter. The following chapter, titled Investigation, provides my interpretation and analysis of the existing Grade 2-3 Ontario EE curriculum, and identifies pedagogical tools and practices which build upon the place empathy framework. The concluding Chapter 5 contains my research summary and conclusions, where I return to my original research question and discuss lessons learned from the study, as well as its potential implications.
Chapter 2. Method

To understand recursion, you must first understand recursion

Internet humour

2.1. Research Method

Environmental hermeneutics and philosophical hermeneutics serve as the foundation for this research and as the research method.

Hermeneutics, eloquently described by Jens Zimmerman (2015) in his short introduction to the field as "the art of understanding and of making oneself understood" (p.2), is "the philosophical theory that claims that the quest for understanding is a fundamental characteristic of human existence" and focuses on "all those elements in the world that somehow convey meaning and yet require interpretation" (Drenthen, 2017, p.163). Environmental hermeneutics are also called upon when we examine our interpretation of and relationship with environments and landscape. Martin Drenthen explains:

*Environmental hermeneutics starts out from the assumption that the world we live in always already has significance because it is always already infused with meanings. It therefore explores what it means to interpret environments, how environments can become meaningful to us, and how certain interpretations of the environment support certain understandings of oneself. Moreover, environmental hermeneutics also stresses that in order to grasp the full meaning of a particular place, one has to get involved in a process of interpretation. For that reason, many works in environmental hermeneutics tend to combine fundamental philosophical reflection with concrete case studies.* (2017, p.167)

Hermeneutics embraces the locality of specific places, open dialogue and an inexhaustible number of other ways of knowing. It broadens moral understanding “by reflecting on cultural sources and confronting dominant interpretations with alternative ones” (ibid., p.171), and establishes places as multi-layered constructs that can support both the complex land ethics and “different environmental identities” (ibid., p.170).

Since hermeneutics presents the environment as “an always already interpreted world” (ibid., p.167), students of hermeneutics are tasked with acknowledging the existing issues before they respond to them with their personal contemporary interpretations. A dialogue results, thus producing “a richer,
more encompassing context of meaning—and by doing so we gain a better and more profound understanding not only of the “text” [here, environment] but also of ourselves” (ibid., p.164).

Hermeneutics is, thus, the perfect philosophical and ethical stage for research into the environmental education curriculum, with curriculum representing the socio-historical vantage point, students bringing their personal contemporary interpretations, and place empathy representing the “fusion of horizons” (ibid.) with a goal of producing deeper meaning/knowledge “about who “we” are and what the world is to “us.” (ibid., p.167).

To be fair, I should note that historically, the hermeneutic philosophers rejected empathy as a tool for interpreting other (Coplan & Goldie, 2011) and vice-versa (Clohesy, 2013). Stueber (2006), however, in offering a defence for empathy, points out that “empathy position was understood as being essentially tied to a problematic Cartesian conception of mind” (p.16).

As mentioned earlier, from the procedural point of view, environmental hermeneutics can be understood as a method of social science that combines “philosophical reflections with concrete case studies” (Drenthen, 2017, p.166). More traditionally, hermeneutics focused on the interpretation of texts (with the original text being the Bible). Within the interpretivist framework of inquiry, the interpreter (researcher) and the subject of investigation (text; environment) are “interactively linked in the creation of findings, with the investigator as a passionate participant” (Laverty, 2003, p. 26).

My research method seeks to establish a “guiding interpretation” (ibid.) of environmental education (in so far that it covers Ontario Grade 2 and Grade 3 curricula along with my personal presuppositions relating to empathy and place, and how place empathy can be weaved into Ontario’s primary environmental education curriculum. The result I am seeking is not one of universal truth, but rather a particular vantage point within a multitude of possible realities. To me, it is wonderfully serendipitous that hermeneutics, much like empathy, encourages “the interpretive humility” (Zimmerman, 2015, p.132), whereby an interpreter of a text, just like a student of empathy, must acknowledge that even her deepest beliefs could be wrong: “The awareness that our own interpretive framework can benefit from another’s encourages conversation in order to learn” (ibid.).

In my research, I have followed this sequence of steps:

(i) I began with explicitly stating a set of personal assumptions and positions, with my primary assumptions being the assertion of the importance of place narrative, the definition of place
empathy, and formulation of place empathy framework. This is consistent with a hermeneutical approach, whereby “the biases and assumptions of the researcher are not bracketed or set aside, but rather are embedded and essential to interpretive process. The researcher is called, on an ongoing basis, to give considerable thought to their own experience and <...> include the personal assumptions of the researcher and the philosophical bases from which interpretation has occurred (Allen, 1996; Cotterill & Letherby, 1993, as referenced in Laverty, 2003, p. 28).

(ii) I selected a particular case study: the Ontario Grade 2 and Grade 3 Environmental Education curriculum. The text of Environmental Education: Scope and Sequence of Expectations (2017) document pertaining to Grade 2 and Grade 3 represented the data for the study. Excluded from the analysis were language-related subjects (including French as a Second Language) and Health and Physical Education, as learning expectations and activities in both these fields lacked descriptors relating to the “environment” aspect. However, text relating to all study fields, including languages and physical education and health was included in the context-level (policy) review.

Grade 2 and Grade 3 curricula were selected for two reasons. First, I am personally most familiar with its effects as my oldest child is currently in Grade 3 and, throughout the years, has eagerly shared her learning experiences. Second, researchers (Hughes & Donaldson, 1979; Perner, 1991; Piaget & Inhelder, 1948; Rochat, 1995, as referenced in Carlomagno, et al, 2014) agree that from about eight years old children ‘outgrow’ the egocentric stage and acquire the skill of perspective taking. That would make Grades 2 and 3 the earliest line of empathic offence.

(iii) The data analysis stage included multiple stages of interpretation of (i) text and (ii) its context (see below), and included consideration of (iii) my own predisposition (i.e. place empathy) and (iv) its context (i.e. place empathy framework).

For the purposes of this research, the “context” was represented by: policy framework for environmental education in Ontario, Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009); report of the working group on Environmental Education, Shaping Our Schools, Shaping Our Future: Environmental Education in Ontario Schools (2007); and considerations for program planning, herein represented by excerpts from the relevant elementary curriculum policy documents, among others.

To help navigate the textual interpretation stage, I utilized NVivo software to organize and annotate the data. The use of software in addition to extensive note taking was adopted to enable further
“rigour of methodology and the transparency of method... that in essence constitutes research that is accountable, innovative, and effective” (Bong, 2002 in Goble, et al, 2012, n.p.).

The analysis was aimed at answering three questions:

i) How are the following concepts represented in the text of the Grade 2 and Grade 3 curricula?
   a. Environment
   b. Nature
   c. Place; and
   d. local

ii) What space has been allocated to perspective-taking”4 within the curricula?

iii) Are there opportunities to weave “place empathy” into the text?

I engaged in a sequence of interpretative and reflective exercises using the text, context and my personal positions. After the first stage of interpretation was complete, the second stage began, with the same questions being asked again, and so on. “This interpretive process continues until a moment in time where one has reached sensible meanings of the experience, free from inner contradictions (Kvale, 1996 as cited in Laverty, 2003, p. 30). The data analysis stage was meant to be an “open-ended iterative processes where the topic or research question of interest is honed over time as the nature of the evidence becomes more apparent” (Finfgeld-Connett & Johnson, 2013, p. 195).

(iv) Following the analysis stage, all findings were reported in a descriptive format, articulating ideas clearly and demonstrating what hopefully can be easily recognized as research rigour.

Here, as throughout the paper, I continued to try to engage in an implicit dialogue, an interaction (van Eemeren, 2014) with the reader. That is, in anticipation of criticism that could be articulated against my proposition, I pose and answer some critical questions, for “a presumption that the conclusion is true <...> can be overturned if a critical question is not satisfactorily answered (Walton, 1996, as cited in Nussbaum, 2011, p.88).

4 Please see Interpretation and Analysis of Ontario EE Curriculum section for discussion why I use the term “perspective-taking” and not “empathy”.
2.2. Limitations and Assumptions

The current study has several limitations associated with the research method, the data used and the overall scope. These are discussed below.

Hermeneutic interpretation, as a research method, relies on the researcher’s imagination and personal experience (Zimmerman, 2015). Within hermeneutics itself, this position is an integral part of the entire philosophical approach where understanding and interpretations are intertwined, and where no method can, in fact, be separate from the researcher (Laverty, 2003, in reference to Hans-Georg Gadamer). However, it would be fair to note that others may consider subjectivity and the weight of my (author’s) own position within the interpretation as a limitation. For that reason, this paper takes, in part, a personal narrative approach and states explicitly that place empathy, a construct I have developed, is the context for data analysis.

Similarly, I attempted to describe my analysis and interpretation in explicit detail, so the transparency and rigour of my work can be examined by the reader. Again, I refer back to the foundation of the hermeneutical approach where “[p]art of the horizon in which interpretation takes place includes the researcher’s own perspective and the historical context” (Koch, 1994, as cited in Kahn, 2000, p.2). Accuracy is, thus, “somewhat tentative” (ibid.) and contingent on the researcher/reader’s viewpoint. I embrace acknowledged viewpoints and am reluctant to view them as a research-hindering bias (for a rather literate illustration of viewpoints, see Figure 2.1). As a woman, immigrant, LA student, middle-class, caucasian, parent, atheist, I am most certainly a product of many contexts, and I would not want to check against them in what may be the pinnacle (or at least the conclusion) of my pursuit of an MLA degree. Furthermore, since one of the goals of my research is to understand the themes and prejudices buried within someone else’s narrative (i.e. the EE curriculum), I should be at the very least open about my own. I am deeply involved with the topic of primary environmental education but, as Zimmermann points out, with reference to Martin Heidegger, “interpretation is motivated by our personal interest and concern. <…> by the desire to hear an announcement that pertains to my own situation” (2015, p.5) and hermeneutics allows one to want to find their own meaning in the text.
Figure 2.1. The two photographs show my and my two-year-old son’s physical viewpoints
Of course, if one puts forward that, contrary to the hermeneutical approach, stating a bias outright as I have so far is not sufficient and that I must also check against that bias, I can put forth the following. Let’s look at two crucial relationships in the qualitative process: “the relationships of the researcher with participants and with the data” (Kahn, 1993 in Kahn, 2000, p.4). The data in my research is comprised of publicly-available formal curriculum and accompanied policy documents. There are no participants and no interview data that could have been manipulated or in any way influenced by me at the collection stage. Thus, no bias could then exist in my relationship with the participants.

When it comes to my relationship with data, the bias is kept in check by the degree of criticalness that I apply in my analysis of the data, its context and literature. My critical thinking ought to be visible (or so I hope) in the writing of this paper, its explicit language, and documentation of the decisions I made – and then “checked” for criticalness and rigour by my academic reviewers. Using the “[p]anels of judges [is] another way to open up the analytic process and identify and reduce investigator bias” (Kahn, 2000, p.5), as multiple constructions of understandings reduce the bias. Kahn points out to his and others (Hinds, Scandrett-Hibden, and McAulay, 1990) use of judges, colleagues and other readers to review analysis and comment on the study progress and findings.

Ultimately, of course, I can only offer access to my data, interpretation and positions taken, and the reader alone must decide whether I have sufficiently disclosed or checked against my biases and offered enough accuracy. “It becomes the responsibility of readers of the research findings to decide whether the findings are useful when transferred to their own situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 in Kahn, 2000, p.6).

I chose to focus my research on the Grade 2 and Grade 3 Ontario formal curricula, while recognizing the need for future additional field work. My study data was the mandated curriculum addressing teaching standards on a provincial level. As part of my research, I did not review the implemented curriculum, i.e. the EE curriculum that is actually delivered in the classrooms across Ontario. The implemented curriculum may be different, in a variety of ways and to different degrees, from the mandated curriculum as it would reflect social and personal experiences, goals and perspectives of individual educators and students. As Parker points out (2016, p. 107), “[t]eachers’ sense of their own expertise in curriculum content and pedagogy, as well as their positionality «…> influence how they facilitate or avoid discussions on conflictual issues”. However, since the mandated curriculum sets forward formal learning expectations and assessments that inform the daily learning within EE
classrooms, I believe it to be an appropriate data source that can reveal plenty about our existing take on the environment.

For the sake of brevity, this research focused on Grade 2 and Grade 3 curricula only. I did not analyse the EE curriculum outside those grades, so no generalized conclusions can be made (although the EE policy documents reviewed did cover the kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum). Similarly, because of time constraints, I did not conduct a focus group with primary teachers to whom, when this work was being considered, I hoped to present my analysis to and collect and analyse teachers’ comments. This and other activities are noted in the Further Research section of this report.

Finally, certain assumptions have been made by me for the purposes of my operations, including specific definitions that I have adopted. Many of the concepts I examine in this paper, including “place”, “empathy”, and “environmental education”, are of interest to researchers and writers from a wide range of fields and, as such, multiple and sometimes conflicting definitions of terms exists. As two European researchers put it, “[t]here are probably nearly as many definitions of empathy as people working on the topic” (de Vignemont & Singer, 2006). I have articulated, or adopted, definitions that best reflect my understanding of concepts.
Chapter 3. Review of Literature and Theoretical Foundation

*Let us never underestimate the power of a well-written letter*

Jane Austen, *Persuasion*

*If I were God, I’d work on the reach of empathy.*

Frans de Waal, *The Age of Empathy*

### 3.1. Literature Review

The following chapter contains the results of a narrative review of the literature. It is, in essence, my instrument of persuasion (see Figure 3.1). No publication time / scope limitations were imposed on the review, and literary sources from fields outside landscape architecture and pedagogy were included. No attempts were made to conduct a neutral review. Instead, the process organization was conceptual (Salkind, 2010), aimed to shed light on a specific set of arguments.

Furthermore, from the procedural point of view, my review of the literature followed a snowballing technique. The books and articles I have read came about firstly as suggestions from my advisor and committee member (both rightfully considered experts in the fields of landscape architecture and education). Once the initial set of literature was established, the second accumulation of sources came through ‘reference harvesting’. Here, I scanned citations in the initial set of books and articles in order to identify papers and authors whose work appeared relevant. I also engaged in forward chaining, thereby I reviewed, through the use of digital databases such as Google Scholar, the list of those who referenced works from my initial group in their subsequently-published writing. Similarly, as I discovered authors and terms that appeared relevant to my topics of interest, I sought their publications through digital databases.

In applying the snowballing technique I did not try to be exhaustive, and instead relied on my judgment in deciding which sources to pursue further and which topics have been addressed adequately.
Figure 3.1. Literary persuasion; author’s collage
3.2. What is Place?

I have already declared to you my position on nature (it is dead), and environment (it fails to recognize its own designed character), but to highlight the point most articulately, I will quote, once more the sociologist Anthony Giddens in his discussions of the detrationalization of society:

*Nature – a physical environment of human action existing independently of that action – has all but dissolved; the problems of environmental degradation which perturb us today come from the transformation of the natural into the social and cultural.* (1994, p.47)

Again, I do not propose that we do away with nature Raskolnikov-style (see Figure 3.2.), but rather that we *transcend* it. Akin to Giddens’s discussion of a post-traditional social order, where traditions are now open to discourse, the concept of natural environment should be open to interrogation and interpretation. Natural environment is no longer an “external framework for human activity” (ibid., p.49), but is defined and managed by us in a way that achieves continuity not only with the past, but also with the future (Giddens, 1994).

By acknowledging that our daily settings are designed realities, not stand-alone “nature” or vague “environments”, I ask not that one becomes immune to the idea of awe and beauty of the land or runs out to pollute rivers and lakes, but that one acknowledges that there is no ‘return to innocence’ in the natural world. The key is to move past the “deeply ingrained habit of seeing nature and culture as irreconcilably opposite” (Pollan, p. 4).

If the artificial (designed) nature of reality is accepted, then the personal “place” may be a better term to be used in the learning context of a multi-cultural society such as Canada since the term is *multicentered* and *democratic* (Parker, 2016). It is a “complex material and ideological entity, one that is never stable (though often quite resistant to change), never the purveyor of a single meaning (though also not open to just any definition), never solely the property of any individual (though clearly the product of relations of power, property and control)” (Mitchell, 2001, p.271 in reference to Lippard).
Figure 3.2. Rodion Raskolnikov contemplating doing away with nature; author’s own photo collage based on Fritz Eichenberg illustration to *Crime and Punishment*, 1939.
Place has many co-authors, natural laws among them, and some of the co-authors may carry opposing views. But the *designed* characteristic of place may, in fact, help bring these views closer together, or to the discussion table at the very least. Simon writes:

*Few engineers and composers, whether deaf, ignorant, or not, can carry on a mutually rewarding conversation about the content of each other's professional work. What I am suggesting is that they can carry on such a conversation about design, can begin to perceive the common creative activity in which they are both engaged, can begin to share their experiences of the creative, professional design process.* (1968, p.82)

Place as a designed reality no longer presupposes that nature and natural process are “larger than ourselves” (Goodin, as referenced in Giddens, 1994, p.205). On the contrary, it’s the design intention that has the upper hand. But here, instead of moving towards the ‘human impact equals negative impact’ stream of conversation, we ought to move towards what Michael Pollan calls the “Gardener’s ethic” (with the result, as I imagine, of all of us being *Thinking Gardeners*; see Figure 3.3.) and what Giddens (1994) described as “mastery over nature”: “… this is not *ipso facto* the same as harming the environment. <…> mastery can quite often mean caring for nature as much as treating it in a purely instrumental or indifferent fashion” (p.209).

Taking from Marc Augé’s definition (1995, p.34) and adding the embrace of individualism, I will define **place as an individual perception localized in time and space**. Within pedagogical discourse, this definition of “place” may be best compared to the discussion of a student’s *identity* – a flexible and deeply personal construct “[p]roduced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices,” [that] is also shaped by various social contexts (Parker, 2016, p.105 with reference to Hall, 2000, p. 17).

The above definition builds upon a more general one of place as a “meaningful location” (Lewicka, 2010, p.209). Any site, regardless of scale5 or composition, may become a subject of an empathic process. Direct experience of a place and perception of it as having a special meaning to the observer creates place. This way, we can work on “legitimizing of local knowledge systems” (Lauzon, 2015, p.46), whereby local refers to knowledge of *all* possible locally-present

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5 When it comes to a sense of place, people have been shown to express it toward places at all scales: small-scale objects, specific spots, national parks, settlements, cities, ecoregions, countries (Shamai & Ilatov, 2005; Ardoin, 2009; Altman & Low, 1992; Vancay, 2008; Smaldone, Harris & Sanyal, 2008 in Kudryavtsev, et al, 2012).
Figure 3.3. The Thinking Gardener; my visual tribute to Pollan's Gardener's ethic
stakeholders. An individual wishing to engage in place empathy needs to be situated, in space and time, in close proximity to place. The closeness ensures authenticity of personal perceptions, in a continuous “struggle for emancipation from the local hegemonies of ethnicity, religion, class and clan” (Williams & Van Patten, 2006, p.33.).

Locality makes the place narrative true. As Lucy R. Lippard beautifully puts it, the personal place is “a portion of land/town/cityscape seen from the inside, the resonance of a specific location that is known and familiar.” (1997, p. 7).

3.3. A Brief History of Empathy: Idea and Term

The origin of the idea of empathy is traced to the German verb einfühlen which is literally translated as ‘feel into’. Early explorers of the concept included Robert Vischer, Johann Herder, Rudolf Hermann, Wilhelm Wundt, Prandtl, Novalis and perhaps others (Clohesy, 2013; Coplan & Goldie, 2011; Stueber, 2006; Håkansson, 2003). For example, Novalis (around 1798) saw empathy as the means of achieving closeness to nature:

And thus will no one comprehend nature who possesses no organ of nature, no inner nature-generating and nature-isolating organ, who does not as if spontaneously recognize and distinguish nature everywhere in everything, and, with an innate urge to procreate, in a fervent manifold affinity with all things, intermingles, through the medium of feeling, with all natural beings, as it were feels into them... (Curtis & Elliott, 2014, p.360)

A German philosopher most closely associated with the broader establishment of the concept is Theodor Lipps (1851-1914). Lipps discussed6 Natureeinfühlung (or ‘natural empathy’) that is experienced in relation to inanimate objects (Curtis & Elliott, 2014) and maintained that because of our tendency to mimic we are able to empathize with “even a landscape, because «every sensory object demands an activity on my part.»” (ibid.). The imitating response to a stimulation by an inanimate object that Lipps described is “automatic and swift, and soon the observer feels himself into the object, loses conciseness of himself, and experiences the object as if his own identity has disappeared and he had become the object himself. The observer sees a mountain and apprehends it with his inner imaginative activity, his muscles as well as with his eyes. As his gaze moves upward

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6 In his text “Einfühlung und ästhetischer Genuß,” in Aesthetik, ed. Emil Utitz (Berlin: Pan-Verlag Rolf Heise, 1924); as cited in Curtis & Elliott, 2014
to the peak of the mountain, his own neck muscles tense and for the moment there is a sensation of rising.” (as cited in Katz, 1963, p. 85).

Although the definition of an empathic experience has since been redeveloped, it’s useful to acknowledge empathy’s historical origins, especially since many writers highlight a unique relationship between an observer and inanimate object or landscape:

*Empathy means, if anything, to glide with one’s own feeling into the dynamic structure of an object, a pillar, or a crystal or the branch of a tree, or even of an animal or a man, and as it were to trace it from within, understanding the formation and motoriality of the object with the perceptions of one’s own muscles; it means to “transpose” oneself over there and in there.* (Buber, 1948, p.97 in Katz, 1963, p.87).

Although modern science may criticize the romantics’ stance on empathizing with nature as arbitrary projection (Stueber, 2006), their take on nature as “an outward symbol of some inner spiritual reality” (ibid, p.7) is of interest in the similarities between this position and the theory of place attachment.

The person responsible for the “rendering” of Einfühlung into English language (in 1909 *Lectures on the Experimental Psychology of the Thought-Processes*; see Figure 3.4.) and for popularizing the concept further was the psychologist Edward Titchener. In 1915, he described empathy as the human tendency to feel ourselves “into a situation” (cited in Clohesy, 2013, p.14 with reference to Waxwell, 2008). Titchener also appeared to remain open to the idea of empathetic experience involving inanimate objects: “[a]s we read about the forest, we may, as it were, become the explorer; we feel for ourselves the gloom, the silence, the humidity, the oppression, the sense of lurking danger; everything is strange, but it is to us that this strange experience has come.” (ibid.)

In the early 1900s, a number of other theorists developed the concept further. These included George Herbert Mead and Jean Piaget who emphasized the cognitive component of empathy (Håkansson, 2003).
The next major (male) figure in the history of empathy was the American psychologist Carl R. Rogers, for whom empathy entailed “entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it” (Clohesy, 2013, p.15 with reference to Wispe, 1990). Rogers’ understanding of empathy as a process (1975, p.4 in Håkansson, 2003) read as follows:

...entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. It involves being sensitive, moment to moment, to the changing felt meanings which flow in this other person, to the fear or rage or tenderness or confusion or whatever, that he/she is experiencing. It means temporarily living in his/her life, moving about in it delicately without making judgments, sensing meanings of which he/she is scarcely aware...It includes communicating your sensing of his/her world as you look with fresh and unfrightened eyes at elements of which the individual is fearful. It means frequently checking with him/her as to the accuracy of your sensings, and being guided by the responses you receive...to be with another in this way means that for the time being you lay aside the views and values you hold for yourself in order to enter another world without prejudice...

3.4. Defining Empathy

The ability to empathize has been generally understood as a necessity for social structures and interactions (Berthoz & Thirioux, 2010; Rifkin, 2009; Davis, 2017; Schonert-Reichl, et al, 2012; Clohesy, 2013, with reference to Hoffman), and its influence on social intercourse can be traced to the works of Adam Smith, Herbert Spencer and Jean Piaget (Davis, 2017) with recognition in mind “that empathy in some guise is necessary to help us deal with the fundamental obstacle in social life: namely, other people” (ibid., p.1). Outside the sociology discourse, empathy has been of interest to philosophers, psychologists, psychiatrists, neurobiologists, animal scientists, and non-scientists alike, an interest that, coupled with the term’s colourful history contributed to the existence of multiple competing definitions, causing one writer exclaim, “it’s safe to conclude that whatever empathy is, it’s important.” (Coplan, 2011, p.4).

As I have mentioned in the appropriately-named earlier chapter, for the purposes of my research I needed to make certain assumptions including selecting a definition of empathy to work with. The first of my two operational definitions comes from neuroscientists Alain Berthoz and Bérangère Thirioux (in Berthoz & Thirioux, 2010). In empathy, the co-authors write, “...we enter into the

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7 It’s a long definition but, according to Håkansson (dissertation, 2003), Rogers held that empathy was too complex for a short definition.
other's body and see the world from his or her point of view, i.e., we are not only resonating with him or her from our standpoint, but really adopting *his or her perspective*” (p.34). Like Mark H. Davis (eds. Seppälä, et al, 2017), I think that empathy is best defined broadly, but I readily acknowledge that some may criticize it as too inclusive and in need of specificity (Preston & de Waal, 2002; Coplan in Coplan & Goldie (eds.), 2014)\(^8\). In that case, it can be further codified by addressing *reenactive empathy* which Karsten Stueber proposes as the central method for understanding others: “only by using our cognitive and deliberate capacities in order to reenact or imitate in our own mind the thought processes of the other person – are we able to conceive of another person’s more complex social behaviour as the behaviour of a rational agent who acts for a reason” (2006, p.21). I have relied on both these definitions in this paper.

Empathy needs to be distinguished from compassion and sympathy. Compassion, specifically, involves recognition of “negative emotional states (like pain) and subsequently experiencing an urge to help” (Weisz & Zaki, 2017, p.3). Sympathy “refers to a process in which we are feeling *with* the other and feeling the *same* thing that the other is feeling (pain, in this case) at the *same* time that the other is feeling it. Thus, *we here attribute to ourselves* what we are observing in the other” (Berthoz & Thirioux, 2010, p.33). Most frequently, sympathy is mentioned when one is feeling another’s distress and pain, though it’s not exclusive to the negative experiences. Empathy, on the other hand, refers to understanding what the other is feeling *and* thinking, while distinguishing other from self. The two terms are linked but separate, yet when I discuss the topic of my thesis with those familiar with both on an everyday level, the two are often confused. Even in literature, I do not always get a sense that the difference between empathy and sympathy is appropriately marked (this concern was voiced also in Berthoz & Thirioux, 2010). Perhaps the confusion is partly due to some of the contemporary writers defining empathy as an exclusively affective response. One can see it when, for example, when Marti Kheel writes about the rights of animals: “We need not always rely on science, however. As humans, we are also emotionally equipped to comprehend some of these needs [needs of animals - TZ] through our capacity for empathy. We typically know, for example, when an animal is in pain. Our *sensory-emotional experience* informs us that the suffering of other animal is much like our own.” (Kheel, 2008, p. 239, italics my own); or when de Vignemont and Singer (2006) discuss empathy in *The empathic brain: how, when and why?* and exclude cognitive perspective-taking to focus on “shared emotional representations” (p.439). In these examples, the authors see empathy as an affective

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\(^8\) As de Vignemont & Singer (2006) note, the trends for narrower and broader definitions of empathy are, nonetheless, prevalent throughout.
response, whereas I believe that empathy “is simultaneously a cognitive and affective process” (Coplan, 2014, p.5; also see Davis, 2017).

3.5. Defining Place Empathy

The following definition of place empathy is loosely based on Amy Coplan’s conceptualization of empathy which she describes as “informed by recent psychological and neuroscientific research” (in Coplan & Goldie, eds., 2014):

*Place empathy is a cognitive and affective representation process in which an observer simulates another’s interpretations of place in order to deepen her understanding of place.*

This definition reflects the five components that will be explored in the Place Empathy Framework section of this paper: (i) place; (ii) moral/ethical aspect in recognition that another’s interpretation is significant and worthy of representation; (iii) cognitive processes; (iv) affective empathy; and, finally, (v) the response.

The functions of place empathy within an environmental education curriculum include legitimizing students’ personal narratives within a larger EE narrative and catalysing the understanding of place and of others contributing to its identity. As empathy tears down the boundary between “us” and “them”, the experienced intimacy can enhance students’ power as learners, whereby the “feeling for the organism”<can be enlisted> in the service of impeccably rigorous research” (Keller, 1984, n.p.).

Empathy within EE may also be a source of scientific data among other methods via its cognitive process of place-oriented knowledge acquisition, and be a source of information about ourselves through affective process of recognition of observer-subject distance (Coplan in Coplan & Goldie, eds., 2014). Within empathy, affective and cognitive ways of knowing are interdependent (Hoffman, 1984 in Endacott, 2010), not exclusive of one another.

Another goal of place empathy as per definition above is to broaden understanding of place. If “our personal view is augmented by a range of others in our community, this means we massively expand our ‘possibility space’” (Davies, 2004, p.168). Place empathy affords us pluralism and diversity. As Lynn Davies puts it, “[j]ust as biological diversity is essential for evolution, an unpredictable future demand argumentative diversity. We do not know what arguments we might need. Some may seem chronically wrong today, but they may, under vastly different conditions, be right tomorrow.” (2004, p. 168).
3.6. Place Empathy vs. Place Attachment

In order to focus more specifically on a place empathy framework, it may be useful to compare place empathy to a similar and better known, in landscape architecture, concept of place attachment, a bond between humans and places, that has been discussed in literature since the 1960s (Giuliani, 2003 and Hammitt, Kyle, & Oh, 2009, as cited Korpela, 2012).

Unlike place empathy, place attachment is an experience of stillness. It is “a state of psychological well-being experienced by a person as a result of the mere presence, vicinity, or accessibility of the place” (Churchman & Mitrani, 1997 and Sharpe & Evert, 2000, as cited Korpela, 2012; emphasis my own). Place empathy, on the other hand, is a dynamic effort: “…empathy conjures up active engagement - the willingness of an observer to become part of another’s experience, to share the feeling of that experience.” (Rifkin, 2009, p. 12) Let me illustrate with Herbert A. Simon’s language of state and process descriptions:

A circle is the locus of all points equidistant from a given point. “To construct a circle, rotate a compass with one arm fixed until the other arm has returned to its starting point.” It is implicit in Euclid that if you carry out the process specified in the second sentence, you will produce an object that satisfies the definition of the first. The first sentence is a state description of a circle, the second a process description. (1962, p.479)

That is, place empathy (the process) may align with place attachment (product/state), but the two may also be entirely independent. The value of the empathic process, though, is not diminished should the attachment be absence, for place empathy focuses not on the bonds of affection, but on recognition of personal significance.

Unlike place attachment which can occur at both an individual or group level, with hierarchical attachment framed in cultural, gender, religious and other terms (Scannell & Gifford, 2010), place empathy is meant to be a highly personal experience, with the observer attempting to reconstruct the sense of others according to their own abilities, knowledge and experiences. As in hermeneutics, this is a pursuit of knowledge based on the observer’s own imagination, skills and personal narrative, but it’s not relativism in that there exists a truth to be discovered (the way others perceive the place), and the observer is attempting to discover this truth (Zimmermann, 2015).
Thirdly, while both place attachment and place empathy are psychological processes, place attachment is a self-oriented concept, while empathy is an other-oriented concept. A person experiencing place attachment performs a self-focused exercise, while a person engaging in place empathy uses the self-centred position of place’s personal significance only as a starting point, moving from it by using her cognitive and affective processes to understand others’ positions within and towards a place.

Lastly, as Scannell and Gifford maintain, place dimension is typically divided into the “social and physical” (2010, p.4). Here, place attachment and place empathy concepts agree; both the social relationships of people to place and the physical characteristics of a place are factors in empathic reconstruction. However, while research on place attachment may focused on the concept’s group-level societal descriptors, the place in place empathy is firstly a personal construct.

3.7. Place, Empathy and Education

Neither the concept of “place” nor of “empathy” are foreign to the field of education. Historical empathy, for instance, has been the subject of much research in pedagogy, and as an example will become one of the core goals of teaching history once the new (2016) National Core Curriculum is fully implemented in Finland (Rantala, Manninen & van den Berg, 2016). In another example, the charitable organization Roots of Empathy (“ROE”) runs programs for school-age children involving classroom visits by an infant and parent(s) and the program’s instructor (rootsofempathy.org, n.d.). A recent Canadian study (Schonert-Reichl, et al, 2012) showed the overall positive impact of this program on students’ social development and behaviour, though the authors write that, “[c]ontrary to expectations, there were no significant differences in self-reported empathy and perspective taking between ROE and control children” (ibid., p.17).

All that said, I could not find any existing theoretical or empirical work which combined, as the current paper does, the concepts of designed reality, relationship with place, empathic processes and primary education. This section provides brief overview of place-based education and environmental sensitivity, two concepts which I reviewed for their similarity with the concept of place empathy.

*Place-based education* includes a range of programs which teach students about their environments “through inquiry, environmental action, and other hands-on activities in a specific place” (Kudryavtsev, et al, 2012, p.240 with reference to Hutchinson, 2004 and Sobel, 2005). In
this pedagogical approach, “environments” are often described in civic terms (Kudryavtsev, et al, 2012; Cincera, et al, 2015 with reference to Gruenewald, 2008, Sobel, 2004, and Stone & Barlow, 2005), with some distinguishing place-based environmental education “by the attention its practitioners direct toward both social and natural environments” (Smith, 2007, p. 190).

However, from my (granted, somewhat limited) exposure to place-based literature and education programs, I see them as seeking homogeneous versions of place and defining place in hierarchical group terms, both of which are contrary to the concept of place empathy. Place-based education's goal to build “collective capacity [of children] to alter their neighbourhoods or communities for the better” (Smith, 2007, p. 192; my highlight) takes away from the pluralism of defining place as an individual construct unique to every student. While place-based education wishes to help students define “our place”, place empathy’s goal is to help them articulate “my place”.

Since the original research into the concept in the 1980s, environmental sensitivity, which is sometimes referred to as empathic perspective, has been identified as an affective attribute important to environmental education (Kim, 2003 with reference to multiple works). In particular, Hungerford and Peterson (1982; in Kim, 2003) used the term “empathy” to describe environmental sensitivity with Harold Hungerford highlighting the renewed emphasis of the concept in more recent years (Simmons & Volk, 2010). However, the subject of this sensitivity was natural environment and, judging by Hungerford's 2010 interview (ibid.), with origins in that awe-inspiring romantic view of nature. As noted in earlier sections of this paper, the wild and innocent nature of aesthetic beauty, although a source of pleasure for us all, can hardly be considered a solid foundation for understanding today’s artificial environmental constructs.

### 3.8. Place Empathy Framework

The proposed framework organizes the five elements of place empathy:

(i) Place

(ii) Moral / ethical positioning

(iii) Cognitive empathy

(iv) Affective empathy; and

(v) Response
The five components are meant to be sequential, with establishment of place and moral positioning representing the foundation for the process, followed by the process (cognitive and affective empathy) and concluded with response as the result of the process. While the advanced exploration of components (iii) and (iv) can occur concurrently, in the initial stages, cognitive empathic process is meant to precede affective as it includes the crucial step of data collection.

I will investigate these components in further detail in the following sections.

(i) **Place** is the empathic subject’s unique perception localized in time and space. Within the framework, place needs to be established and explored as a concept of significance to the student. Articulation and exploration of personal place is akin to students formulating their identity and a sense of place. As articulated in Kudryavtsev, Stedman and Krasny (2012) with reference to extensive research under the umbrella of the psychological approach, a sense of place is comprised of place dependence, place identity (Arnberger & Eder, 2008 in ibid.) and place meaning (see Figure 3.5.). Then, when a student is pursuing the ultimate goal of a deeper relationship with place through empathic processes, she first needs to articulate her personal sense of place: from its physical boundaries to its temporal descriptors, as means of satisfying her needs and supporting her activities, as part of her identity, and as holding meaning special to her.

The significance of place to the observer must be recognized as well because, in certain circumstances, it may serve as a stimulus for action, for “we act only when we value” (Lauzon; in conversation, 2018; also see Kudryavtsev, et al, 2012 for an extensive list of theoretical and empirical studies addressing the relationship between the sense of place and pro-environmental behaviour).

The initial step of articulating place of significance is important because it establishes the common physical and temporal ground between the subject (student) and objects of place empathy. As Carl R. Rogers wrote in 1975, “it is impossible accurately to sense the perceptual world of another person unless you value that person and his world – unless you in some sense care” (in Håkansson, 2003, n.p.). In place empathy, hers and his words are one and the same.
Figure 3.5. Components of sense of place, based on Kudryavtsev, et al, 2012, p.231.

(ii) **Moral/ethical positioning** recognizes that others, too, may have a unique perception of the place, that the others need to be identified and their interpretations considered as significant and worthy of representation. As Anthony Clohesy explains in the introduction to his 2013 book *Politics of Empathy: Ethics, Solidarity, Recognition*:

*Empathy is important because, uniquely, it gives us a sense of what it is like to be someone else. It gives us a sense of difference, a sense that there are other ways of being in the world.*

*This lived experience of difference is ethically significant because it allows us to see how we have denied the singularity of those we now recognize and it allows us to see how we have committed violence to them in order to sustain the unity of our own identifies and in order to resist the spectre finitude that haunts us.* <...>
This acknowledgment of violence is ethically significant because it allows us to emerge as subjects with a duty to recognize others as equals, with a duty to see them as no less finite than ourselves and with a duty to avoid committing arbitrary violence to them in the future (p.3).

From the procedural point of view, moral positioning requires identification of other parties who have interest in, relationship with, opinions about, feelings associated with, and powers to influence the place. Naming of such “others” corresponds with the recognition that their views matter.

From the psychological perspective, the moral element of the framework is reflective of the self/other differentiation. This is an idea that the optimal distance between observer and subject is necessary “to prevent ourselves from losing sight of the other as an other, but also to prevent us from losing our awareness of our own selves as separate agents” (Coplan, 2011, pp. 15-16). From the philosophical perspective, this element of the framework echoes Martin Buber’s contrast between the “I-You” model, where the connection with another person is both the means and the end, and “I-It” model, where the purpose of connection is to use the person or object. Simon Baron-Cohen, who also recalls that Buber resigned his professorship at a German university when Hitler came to power, explains the connection to empathy as follows:

*When our empathy is switched off, we are solely in the “I” mode. In such a state we relate only to things, or to people as if they were just things. Most of us are capable of doing this occasionally. We might be quite capable of focusing on our work without sparing a thought for the homeless person on the street outside our office. But, whether we are in this state transiently or permanently, there is no “thou” visible – at least, not a ‘thou’ with different thoughts and feeling. Treating other people as if they were just objects is one of the worst things you can do to another human being, to ignore their subjectivity, their thoughts and feelings.* (2011, p.5)

(iii) **Cognitive empathy** involves collecting evidence and interpreting it critically. It “is based on seeing, imagining and thinking about the situation from the other person’s point of view. It involves a more cognitively based, reflective process of understanding the other’s perspective.” (Howe, 2013, p.14).

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9 Cognitive empathy component of the framework can be compared to the second and third phases of Yeager, Foster and Maley’s phases of engagement in historical empathy (1998 in Endacott, 2010): developing an understanding of the historical evidence and interpretation of such evidence.
This element requires collection of evidence, since in order to achieve accurate cognitive understanding of another, a certain degree of pre-existing knowledge of the object is necessary (Baron-Cohen, 2011; Coplan & Goldie, 2011). Moreover, since empathic process is defined by its pluralism and complexity, it would require a lot of evidence. Researchers are rather unanimous, write Rantala, Manninen and van den Berg (2016) in the necessity of “sufficient amount of context knowledge” (p. 325) for empathy to take place. Thankfully, within the realm of education, the gathering of such knowledge is an integral part of the learning process.

Cognitive empathy may, perhaps, be akin to critical thinking in its necessity for integrity and intellectual courage\(^\text{10}\). It could be argued that younger students, those in Grades 2 and 3, are still developing their critical thinking skills (in fact Blatt (2015) suggests students in Grades 10-12 are still working on theirs). But within the place empathy framework, critical thinking revolves around a highly personal and intimately familiar concept (place) which should aid younger students.

Additionally, teachers’ deep involvement would be needed. “The teacher should <...> lead a class discussion giving the students a chance to explain their decisions. Only after the students have examined, interpreted, discussed, questioned and reasoned with the sources should they attempt to construct a narrative based upon the evidence” (Endacott, 2010, p.11).

(iv) **Affective empathy** involves students trying to use their imaginative abilities to understand the emotions and feelings of others. Procedurally, students engaging in affective empathy can follow Hoffman’s (1984, 2011 as cited in Endacott, 2010) models of affective response:

(a) focus on other,

(b) focus on self, and

(c) move between the two focuses (see **Figure 3.6**).

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\(^{10}\) These, along with intellectual humility and confidence in reason are elements of critical thinking articulated by Paul and Elder (2001).
Historically, the imaginative affective processes in education have been widely recognized (Jensen, 2016 with reference to Dewey, 1902/1990; Egan, 1997; Greene, 1988; Steiner, 1954; Warnock, 1976). As John Dewey put forward:

*An adequate recognition of the play of imagination as the medium of realization of every kind of thing which lies beyond the scope of direct physical response is the sole way of escape from mechanical methods in teaching. The emphasis put in this book, in accord with many tendencies in contemporary education, upon activity, will be misleading if it is not recognized that the imagination is as much a normal and integral part of human activity as is muscular movement.* (1916, p. 277 as cited in Weible, 2015, p.86).

More recently, researchers proposed “that notions of understanding and learning in environmental education need to include students’ and teachers’ imaginative capacities” (Jensen, 2016, p.92 with

**Figure 3.6.** Three modes of affective empathic responses, based on Hoffman (1984, 2001; as cited in Endacott, 2010).

One note to make here is that the emotional empathy is not (and should not) be limited to sharing distress. In my personal experience, many people confuse empathy with sympathy and, thus, assume that affective contagion must entail sharing another’s distress. On a similar note, Jason Endacott (2010, p.7) describes how “[w]hen employed with social studies students, the cognitive approach to historical empathy is commonly associated with the traditional examination of larger-than-life historical figures such as Neville Chamberlain (Foster, 1999) or Harry S. Truman (Yeager, Foster, & Maley, 1998). Alternatively, the affective approach to historical empathy typically focuses on underrepresented figures in the historical record, such as child laborers (Skolnick et al., 2004), Holocaust victims (Riley, 1998), and women (Kolhmeier, 2006)”.

Endacott’s examples highlight the similar discriminative tendencies as the ones I’ve observed: people tend to associate affective empathy with sharing distresses and painful experiences, when it can instead involve humour and play. Humour can channel emotions and games appeal to expressive rather than instrumental concerns (Davies, 2004). Endacott’s summary may also point out to the view of mutual exclusivity (perhaps masculism-driven) between rationality, which is reserved for power-holders and generally men, and emotions, reserved for those suffering, the women and the children. This divide should be wholeheartedly avoided and instead cognitive and affective empathy, and other elements of the framework, be utilized for all objects of empathic process, regardless of their power positions: “…limiting empathy to a purely cognitive endeavour limits its contribution to pluralist democracy. To engage in meaningful deliberation with those whose ideas differ from our own, we must do more than understand them – we must care about them and about their perspectives” (Barton & Levstik, 2004, p. 207 in Endacott, 2010, pp.7-8).

Affective empathy may also involve experiences of affinity towards the material, the very fabric of place (but not necessarily just towards nature). To explain such a manifestation, I refer to the late Barbara McClintock, who in 1983 received the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine “for her discovery of mobile genetic elements scientist”: 


Precisely because nature’s complexity exceeds our ability to understand it, McClintock believes that scientists must "listen to the material" and "let the experiment tell you what to do." Her major criticism of most contemporary research is based on what she sees as an inadequate humility.

"Much of the work is done because [scientists] want to impose an answer on it," she says. And if the material doesn’t give them the answer they want, "they don’t really recognize it as there, or they think it’s a mistake and throw it out." For McClintock, exceptions are central because they provide the key to new understanding. Aberrant kernels of corn are signs not of disorder or lawlessness but of a larger and different system of order—one that cannot be reduced to a single law. "The important thing," she says, "is to develop the capacity to see one kernel that is different and make that difference understandable."

<...> "I don’t feel I really know the story if I don’t watch the plant all the way along. So I know every plant in the field. I know them intimately, and I find it a great pleasure to know them." From days, weeks, and years of patient observation comes what looks like privileged insight.

<...> Her vocabulary is consistently one of affection, kinship, and empathy. In speaking of her microscopic work with chromosomes, she says, "I actually felt as if I was right down there and these were my friends. . . . As you look at these things, they become part of you. And you forget yourself.” (in Keller, 1984)

While emotional empathic processes of place empathy should be considered separate from affinity towards nature, itself a subject of many studies since the 1990s (see Blatt, 2015 for a discussion on that), affective place empathy can build on the prevailing acceptance of emotional connectedness with nature. This ought to make the idea of affective empathy easier to apply, unlike in a field like history where affective goals of historical empathy extend beyond the traditionally cognitive aspects of historical thinking (Endacott, 2010).

(v) **Response** is just as vital to empathic process as recognition; thus, empathic experience must involve communication (Howe, 2013; Baron-Cohen, 2011). This is a fitting requirement within the realm of curriculum, where response is required to assess learning experiences and student understanding.

It is important that the response element acts as a rest point, a sense of accomplishment in the empathic conversation, but not its decisive closure. The knowledge verbalized in the response should be unfinished (Davies, 2004), as the dialogue will continue and responses will change as learners’ own experiences grow and change. As Davies postulates in the final chapter of *Education*
and Conflict: Complexity and Chaos, “this notion of ‘unfinished knowledge’ is a crucial aspect of good democratic education: schools all too often present knowledge as finished (and individuals as lacking if they do not have it), rather than everything as tentative – even identities” (ibid., p.166).

Response may reflect the deeper understanding of place or an alternative explanation / interpretation of place. But it doesn’t just act as a measurable learning outcome. It allows a younger student to feel a satisfaction from reaching a personal conclusion following an empathic process. This is important if we consider that taking apart conflicting views can result in paralysis (Davies, 2004, with reference to Dimitrov, 1997). At the same time, the more times different responses can be verbalized, the stronger will be the acknowledgement of “hybridity” in place and identity (Davies, 2004, p.165), i.e. the acknowledgment that places do not exclude, but instead include.
Chapter 4. Investigation

*Learn, learn, learn.*

V. Lenin

4.1. **Interpretation and Analysis of Ontario EE Curriculum**

As discussed in the **Method** chapter, to allow for both the richness of the narrative and the auditability of the method, my iterative analysis involved text and context interpretations, and included extensive note-taking and data organization accomplished via coding (in NVivo) of Grade 2 and Grade 3 *Environmental Education: Scope and Sequence of Expectations* (2017), the documents made available by the Ministry of Education of Ontario to "help teachers plan meaningful programs for classes and schools".

The policy framework (here and below, the reference is to *Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow: A Policy Framework for Environmental Education in Ontario Schools*, 2009) sets three goals for the Ministry’s policy and subsequent EE curriculum development:

1. “By the end of Grade 12, students will acquire knowledge, skills, and perspectives that foster understanding of their fundamental connections to each other, to the world around them, and to all living things.” (p.11)

2. “Increase student engagement by fostering active participation in environmental projects and building links between schools and communities.” (p.14)

3. “Increase the capacity of system leaders to implement evidence-based environmental education programming, practices, and operations.” (p.18)

Because the goals are cumulative across the entire kindergarten-Grade 12 span, my aim was not to specifically assess their implementation within Grade 2 and Grade 3 curricula. Similarly, the action-oriented goals (#2 and #3 above) were not investigated further as assessing the ability of environmental education in general, and place empathy in particular, to encourage enviro-positive actions was outside the scope of this review. The first goal from the above list was, however, used to guide the analysis, in so far that I tasked myself with assessing how the concept of “environment” is represented, how connections between environmental players (e.g.: natural-cultural) are
described, and how both perspective-taking activities and the concept of “local” are addressed in the curriculum.

Manually and through the use of NVivo software, I organized the text into categories in accordance with what constituted “environment” in a particular sequence of learning practices and expectations. Three categories were established:

1. **Nature-centric** descriptions frequently used the term “natural environment” and consistently illustrated learning expectations with exclusively nature-focused scenes and elements such as insects, trees, forest, animals, birds, water, waves, etc.

2. **Culture-centric** descriptions referred to the environment (as in subject of study or a setting for a particular educational exploration) in predominantly human-centric concepts. These discussions placed people within cultural settings (e.g. “neighbours in a back alley”; people making music a “family gatherings, seasonal celebrations”; activities in local and/or global communities; “the ways in which people live (e.g., questions about how climate relates to clothing, agriculture, housing, recreation)”).

3. **Impact-centric** descriptions most often used the term “impact” and discussed interrelationships between natural elements (animals, water, air, soils) and humans and built environments.

With the Grade 2-3 EE curriculum document organized into three subject areas: the Arts (including Dance, Drama, Music and Visual Arts), Social Studies (covering, under the EE, the People and Environments: Global Communities part of the curriculum) and STEM (combining Mathematics, Science and Technology), three particular trends emerged around where and how “environments” were being described:

(i) Overwhelmingly, across Grade 2 and Grade 3 curricula, nature-centric descriptors were being used in the Arts category. Examples and teacher prompts that accompanies the curriculum expectations included “movements to suggest a butterfly emerging from a cocoon”, bending bodies “to create a picture of the trees and the sun and the wind and the animals”, “portraying wind or water as a character from the story”, “represent a pattern they have seen on insects”, “drawings of trees that are close and far away”, “warm, sunny colours for a beach or cool colours for a wet forest”, “the movements of animals, snow falling to the ground, ice melting, plants growing”, “make
a painting of nature”, “create organic forms that are inspired by nature, such as shells, seed pods, and water-worn stones”.

A few non-nature exceptions within the Art portion of the EE curriculum were noted, though these were primarily limited to references of non-organic materials and creative societal endeavours such as dancing, singing and visual arts. But even the latter suggested nature-inspiration as teachers/students were asked to consider trees represented in art work, the works of Emily Carr and Tom Thomson, Camille Saint-Saëns’s Carnival of the Animals, “dance for the earth [at powwows]”, or “the meaning of animals such as the orca in Aboriginal clan symbols or the Inukshuk in Aboriginal art”.

Only three attempts to integrate culture-centric environmental elements into the Arts curriculum were located. Here, students were to “engage in dramatic play and role play, with a focus on exploring main ideas and central characters in stories from diverse communities, times, and places (e.g., <…> neighbours in a back alley)” and, more broadly, to create “art that expresses feelings and ideas inspired by activities in their community” or “the community as their subject”. However, in all three instances the anthropocentric examples were encircled and codified by nature-centric ones. Additionally, no references to “impact” or “relationship” were found in the EE curriculum under the Arts category.

The tendency to define environment as romanticized nature within the Arts is guided by the rhetoric of the Considerations for Program Planning (2017) which describe nature as “inspirational starting point for creativity” (p.3). However, since those considerations also note that arts can serve as a platform for students expressing social and political issues related to the environment, the possibility of exploring the role of design in what we perceive as nature is looming.

(ii) Predominately, environment descriptors under Mathematics and Science and Technology headers took an impact-focused approach. This finding is, I suppose, not entirely surprising considering topics covered under these disciplines (e.g.: Understanding Life Systems: Growth and Changes in Animals; Understanding Earth and Space Systems: Soils in the Environment); nonetheless it will be interesting to compare it to the approaches in other subject areas in the discussion below.

(iii) People-centric concepts and elements were most frequently used to represent “environment” in the Grade 2 EE Social Sciences curriculum, though by Grade 3 the descriptors were both people-
centric and impact-focused. The change between the two grades was due to the expectation that older students will be using “the social studies inquiry process to investigate some of the environmental effects of different types of land and/or resource use” as well as the historical\textsuperscript{11} “interrelationship between the natural environment, land use, employment opportunities, and the development”.

These finding highlight the EE curriculum’s tendency to, firstly, position nature as a romantic concept, like John Keats’ wild and joyful “thing of beauty”. Here, the natural environment is but an inspirational subject for the arts, while an interrelationship between natural and design elements (impact) is proposed as the subject of ‘hard science’. And while it is not surprising that the curriculum positions environment as a people-centric construct in the field of social sciences, the more balanced view, with representation of socially-constructed natural elements or social constructs within natural environment, would surely be more democratic.

Overall, the Grade 2 and Grade 3 curricula were found to imply, in its linguistic choices, the separation between “natura” and “colere”, between the “birth” and the “till”, suggesting that natural and built/social environments are able to exist as separate entities in their pure form. In the text, examples from the two categories are most frequently positioned as alternatives, with terms separated by conjunctions “or”and “and”. Phrases like “animals have an impact on society and the environment” [here and below, highlights are my own], “relating science and technology to society and the environment”; and “inspired by the environment or that have the community as their subject” suggest society and environment are separate constructs. Similarly, examples like “inspired by activities in their community or observations of nature”; “stories from diverse communities, times, and places <…> animals in the tundra, or neighbours in a back alley” and “identify structures in the natural environment <…> and in the built environment” lack connections between natural and built, suggesting either one can be observed and reflected upon on its own.

While in the STEM subject areas, the EE curriculum suggests a certain level of impartiality in that both the negative and positive interrelationship between humans and natural elements are consistently considered, the impact is described as primarily negative under the Social Studies category. The curriculum text moves from describing the relationship between First Nations and their environment as harmonious, to describing settlers’ activities as “measures” and “responses to the natural environment”, to then using “impact” and often “negative impact” in describing modern

\textsuperscript{11} The topics of decolonization of the social sciences curriculum is beyond the scope of this research.
land and/or resource use. The examples used to support the discussion lack complexity of functions and, once again, suggest some impossible separation of social and natural: “agricultural lands provide us with a variety of foods for local consumption and export; land use for recreation enables people to enjoy the outdoors and to participate in or watch sports and other activities; residential areas have different types of buildings to meet people’s housing needs; conservation lands protect ecosystems and habitat for organisms so that biodiversity is preserved for future generations; untouched wetlands help ensure clean water and healthy habitat”. It is fair to note that this part of the curriculum does mention examples of various environmental remediation strategies, which should contribute to the more complex discussion of impact.

A particularly interesting, though regrettably small textual element for analysis were “Student talk” sections offered under the Social Studies and Health & Physical Education parts of the EE curriculum. As these are educators’ suppositions of what students may be saying in response to a teacher’s prompt, they may offer an insight into the educators’ own positions. To analyse the “Student talk” section, I firstly excluded fact-learning responses and discussions where a third-party subject was clearly identified in the preceding sentences (e.g.: “Water was very important to communities in the late 1700s. They [members of communities] used it to cook, drink, and wash their clothes.”, or “some mining companies have donated their old mines to local regional conservation authorities. They [conservation authorities] are hoping to turn these into parkland”). The remaining responses were analysed, revealing that student responses took a third-party “other” position when enviro-negative behaviours were described and first-person position when enviro-positive behaviours were mentioned.

Consider this example of a student talk: “If I were going to be a farmer, I would want flat land that had a river nearby so my animals had water to drink. I would not want too many trees. It is hard to plant crops between trees.” The first-person narration takes a generally positive outlook on the life of an early settler, suggesting an almost picturesque scene: a wide field with grazing animals who walk to a nearby river for a refreshing drink. Deforestation is not directly mentioned, instead replaced by a wishful and vague “I would not want too many trees”. In contrast, here is another example of a student talk: “In order to farm they had to cut down all the trees. Now the animals that lived in those trees do not have a place to live. Some animals died, and some went somewhere else to live, but the farmers needed to be able to grow their crops to feed their families.” Although the “they” is codified as farmers later in the paragraph, the negative association with an unknown irrational nature-hurting “other” has already been established.
This position is not surprising in so far that I found its reflection in EE policy as well as among considerations for program planning. The latter provided the following examples of students considering the impact of their actions on local environment: “taking part in tree planting at a local park, walking or biking to school instead of riding in the car, packing a waste-free lunch” (p. 5). All were fantastically positive. Similarly, the 2007 report of the working group on environmental education identified “modelling environmentally responsible practices” (p.4) among the education system’s critical roles. This is a terribly hefty goal to place on the shoulders of individual boards across the province, which can hardly be expected to be fulfilled without huge monetary investments and, in practice, results in largely toothless and idiosyncratic propositions like waste-free lunch programs (see Figure 4.1).

The following excerpts from the EE curriculum provide further examples of the first/third person differentiation in impact descriptions:

- Student talk: “I want to work as a farmer, so I will probably need to live outside the Toronto area. It is hard to farm near Toronto because they have built on most of the land.”

- Student talk: “Last spring we almost hit a moose that was crossing the highway. My dad said he hit a deer there before. Why would they build a road where animals live?” “When I was skipping stones on the river, I saw yellowy-brown foam on the water. I wonder where the pollution comes from and how it could be cleaned up.”

- Student talk: “I am writing a letter to our mayor explaining why we should build bridges over the roads so the deer and moose do not get hit by cars.”

(The next two examples are from the Health & Physical Education parts of the EE curriculum)

- Students: ... “We show that we respect the environment by turning off lights when we are not in the room, by not littering, and whenever we can, by walking, wheeling, or biking instead of using a car.”

- Student: “Being active every day helps to make you strong and healthy. I like to do outdoor activities with my friends or family.”
When my daughter asked us for the first time to pack her a “waste-free” lunch, I explained to her that there really was no such a thing, and what the school was asking her to do was to simply relocate waste from school to home. I encouraged her to question this peculiar practice which leaves students feelings good while having no, or very little, larger-scale effect. Since doing so, my daughter suggested, would not make her popular with her classmates, we complied with her request.

Figure 4.1. A waste-free lunch being unpacked in my own home.
There appears to be an unbalance between the positive actions associated with the first-person student respondents and the seemingly irrational (“Why would they build a road where animals live?”) actions of the mysterious and powerful “other”. This binary oversimplification suggests perhaps an intention, on the part of curriculum developers, to preserve ‘the innocence of childhood’. This preconception needs to be challenged as “issues discussions with young children are not only possible—they are also necessary” (Parker, 2016, p.107). The “I do good, they do bad” position is a comfort food that wishes to preserve the emotional well-being of younger students in the short-run but poisons them in the long.

Although analysing the mandated curriculum may be a limiting exercise insofar that it is but bones for the implemented curriculum, it is nonetheless my opinion that the curriculum program does not do enough in guiding teachers to assist children in articulating their personal environmental narratives. Across the three subject categories and two grades, I counted less than two dozen references to students being asked to work with/on their local or personal experiences, with a few of these being very general references to “their community”. While it’s true that students’ answers to the curriculum-proposed questions and classroom discussion are likely to involve some personal positions regardless of whether they are specifically asked for, the curriculum lacks this direction. This may be because while the policy framework acknowledges that EE needs to be, foremost, “locally relevant” and implemented “in a community-centred context” (p.4), its writers understand locality as a socially-hierarchical group-level descriptor, one related to cultural, gender, religious, linguistic or historical identities. The same tone is taken when EE program planning considerations are presented to teachers where students’ “sense of place” (sounds so promising!) is said to be developed when learners explore “structures and their functions in their neighbourhood, <…> different ways in which food is grown in their community, and <…> the impact of industries on local water systems” (2017, p.5). Although the inclusion of the phrase “sense of place” is not surprising considering the recent trend of environmental education programs to include it, “assuming that if children care about one place in particular, they will eventually care about the environment in general” (Derr, 2002, p. 125), what a strangely specific and limiting list of ideas that is! This understanding fails to encourage students to reflect on the deeper meaning and functioning of their personal place, an exercise paramount to fostering student engagement.

Within the context of “place empathy” discussions, “locally relevant” ought to be interpreted as a personal construct that is formed by each individual learner and may (or may not) be shared by others. This is not an alien concept for the EE curriculum, with the framework acknowledging that
personal, as well as social values, are among its key principals. A few nuggets of this approach can be found in the existing curriculum when, for example, students are asked to compare an artist’s representation of winter with their “own experience of winter” (p.27), reflect on something happening in their own home, “make a painting of nature, focusing on a feature of personal interest or meaning to themselves” (p.37), interpret “signs and symbols encountered in their daily lives” (p.38), or simply asked to walk around their neighbourhood paying attention to the surroundings. The latter point in particular should be emphasized more, especially since the opportunity for students to explore EE by venturing “out of the classroom into the world beyond the school” (2017, p.4) is specifically mentioned in the Consideration for Program Planning chapter.

The role that personal place can take in the EE curriculum can and needs to be expanded, for “even if we can locate ourselves [within our places – TZ], we haven’t necessarily examined our place in, or our actual relationship to, that place. Yet our personal relationships to history and place form us, as individuals and groups, and in reciprocal way we form them.” (Lippard, 1997, p.9).

Finally, I wanted to understand the role of perspective taking within the Grade 2-3 curriculum. Note that I am using the term “perspective” as opposed to “empathy”. I am doing so for two reasons. First, this lets me stay within the language of the EE policy (e.g.: the vision for Ontario EE incudes preparation of students “with the knowledge, skills, perspectives, and practices” (Shaping Our Schools, Shaping Our Future, 2007). Second, it allows me to take a broader sweep across the curriculum since I do not need to confirm the presence of every element of empathy (e.g.: cognitive empathic processes, emotional contagion, observer/subject differentiation, etc). Instead, I can gather under the general (and generous) umbrella of perspective-taking all activities where students were asked to take on a role/place of another, or contemplate reasons for others’ behavior from their point of view.12

In accordance with the outcome established by the EE policy of exposing students “to the many points of view that must be considered” (2007, p.4), my analysis shows that perspective-taking is indeed represented throughout the Grade 2-3 EE curriculum. Several expectations and suggested teacher prompts addressed both cognitive and affective aspects (for example, the task to communicate thoughts as well as feelings of a character), or requested that students compare their

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12 This is the broadest definition of perspective-taking, as compared to, for example, Mori and Cigala’s view that perspective-taking encompasses three independent variables: cognitive, visual, and affective (2016). However, as Mori and Cigala also point out many researchers admit difficulties in providing a clear definition of perspective-taking, thus for the purposes of my analysis, the broadest (and perhaps vaguest) definition is not only the most generous to inclusion, but also reflects the multitude of definitions in the fields.
and others’ experiences of a particular phenomenon, including others that were different from students themselves (e.g. home builder, parent). Students were also tasked with taking a first-role view of the lives of others and explaining the subsequent change in their choices. Discussion points involved the need to consider differences as well as similarities between perspectives. I also found a reference to the need to consult primary sources of information when trying to understand actions of historical figures. The benefit of using multiple sources of evidence, including primary sources, is consistent with that documented in other studies involving, for example, historical empathy (Doppen, 2000 and Kohlmeier, 2006 in Endacott, 2010; Endacott, 2010 for own study).

For the EE curriculum in particular, drama-related role-taking exercises in the Grade 2 Arts were particularly prominent, while in contrast, their number decreased in the Grade 3 curriculum. This is unfortunate, since research has shown that drama and drawing, following discussion and reflections, are not only familiar to younger students because they are commonly used in kindergarten, but also allow students to take on roles that are very different from their own (Cigala and Fangareggi 2011 and Guajardo and Watson 2002 as cited in Mori & Cigala, 2016).

Further to this point, while the existing curriculum does occasionally ask students to consider the perspectives of others, the “others” are not sufficiently different from students themselves. As mentioned earlier, the examples for teachers to consider in program planning include parents, children, other community members, home builders, gardeners, nursery owners, and vegetarians. As Christine Parker points out (2016) with reference to several earlier studies (McNeil, 1986; Houser, 1996; Shor, 1992; Parker, 2012), the inclusion of explicitly conflicting perspectives, as opposed to presenting hegemonic points of view, stimulates critical self-reflection and inclusive dialogue which, in turn, contribute to peacebuilding in education. Granted, the EE curriculum is a resource document that leaves room for individual teachers to include a diverse range of perspective-taking activities in their own classrooms, however the curriculum document could be said to promote neutrality when it fails to suggest to educators more conflictual viewpoints. Conflictual refers to “a broader interpretation where conflict can be opened up with any topic or issue” (Parker, 2016, p.106). As Parker’s study shows, a broad spectrum of conflictual issues, not necessarily controversial ones, can be most effective for meaningful reflective discussions. Similarly, Endacott’s

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13 This may be only applicable to the EE curriculum and, overall, role-taking exercises in Arts remained constant or increased throughout the entire Grade 3 curriculum. This was not investigated.
14 Embracing conflictual issues as means for learning discussions is akin to intensifying conflict, not escalating it (Davies, 2004). To intensify conflict means to bring hidden conflictual issues to light, for non-violent ends; for example, “when people are doing well and have enough power and resources and do not notice – or refuse to acknowledge – that others are disadvantaged or marginal” (ibid., p.160). In contrast, conflict escalation has violent tension-building ends in mind.
(2010) study into historical empathy suggests that selecting a difficult issue provides for fuller opportunities for students to engage in empathy. Overall, though, the inclusion of perspective-taking in EE learning expectations provides a solid foundation for further development of place empathy.

In summary, the text/context analysis of the Grade 2-3 EE curriculum revealed the following trends:

- Different representations of the concept of “environment” dominate different subject areas, with nature-centric descriptors being dominant in the Arts and impact-centric descriptors being predominantly referenced in the STEM fields.

- Natural elements are presented in the EE curriculum as separate and exclusive constructs from civic environment; natural elements are also often romanticised.

- Human impact on the environment is described as largely negative, particularly in social studies.

- There is a tendency to oversimplify and categorize the character of environmental effects as split between two groups of actors: enviro-positive students (we do good) and enviro-negative “others” (they do bad).

- The concept of “local” is presented in hierarchical group terms (i.e. cultural, geographic, religious, etc) as opposed to personal terms. The curriculum does not allocate space for students to express and discuss their personal narratives of place.

- Perspective-taking holds a noticeable place in the existing Grade 2-3 EE curriculum. This makes for a good foundation to build upon to encourage empathic actions, but in its current state perspective-taking largely promotes a neutral position.

Since hermeneutics suggests that understanding comes when all parts are interpreted into a single whole (Zimmerman, 2015), I have attempted to integrate the trends into larger themes.

First, as mentioned earlier, I have observed the tendency of the Grade 2-3 EE curriculum to represent natural elements as exclusive from cultural/built environment, to define “environment” differently depending on the subject-context, to describe human impact on the environment as largely negative (particular in social studies), and to assign enviro-negative behaviours to other agents. Compare this with what Lynn Davies writes in the last chapter of the 2004 book Education and Conflict: Complexity and Chaos:
...much formal education is about damaging connectivity – between the wealthy and the poor, between males and females, between different ethnic or religious groups, between the ‘able’ and the ‘less able’. Educational initiatives post-conflict on the other hand can be genuinely about inclusion: trying to heal and reintegrate the traumatised, the child soldiers, the refugees, and trying to build cohesive political and public cultures. We saw that post-conflict education is less about selection and ‘standards’ and more about cooperation and encounters. (pp.158-159)

The aforementioned trends of the EE curriculum put forward a certain degree of "abstraction from life" (Zimmerman, 2015, p.36, with reference to Heidegger’s writings) as damaging the connectivity between students, their places and others within these places.

Furthermore, the observed curriculum trend to represent “local” in hierarchical group terms as opposed to personal terms, the lack of space allocated to expressing and discussing personal narratives of place and the tendency of perspective-taking approaches to stay within a neutral position, in turn, reveal what I would describe as a fear of complexity and conflictual issues, despite the possibility of these being means to deep reflective discussions.

Place empathy then may be uniquely positioned to address both of these concerns. The following section looks at how place empathy can be integrated into the existing Grade2-3 EE curriculum.

4.2. Learning Practices for Place Empathy

So far, I have defined place empathy as a cognitive and affective representation process in which an observer (here, student) simulates another’s interpretations of place in order to deepen her understanding of place, and discussed the five components of the place empathy framework. I have also analysed and interpreted the Grade 2 and 3 curricula and established two larger trends of Ontario environmental education which can be addressed by the integration of place empathy: a lack of connectivity between students, their personal places and others within these, and an avoidance of complex conflictual issues.

By the very inclusion of diverse “others” in empathic processes, we understand that no single technique can meet the requirements of a place empathy framework. Instead, “multiple channels give more opportunity to perceive the opponent realistically’ (Banks 1987, p. 27 in Davies, 2004, p.161). Therefore, in this section, I will identify a number of learning practices and techniques
which could be used by teachers to engage students in place empathy to encourage, as I hypothesize, deeper understanding of and relationship with place.

(i) *Learning outdoors:* The 2007 report of the working group on environmental education positioned outdoor education “as a distinct and critical component of environmental education, concerned with providing experiential learning in the environment to foster a connection to local places, develop a greater understanding of ecosystems, and provide a unique context for learning.” (p. 6). However, the outside-the-classroom portion of the EE has, I believe, much room for expansion where the sense of place can be explored through activities more personal and less abstract than the existing suggestion that “students investigate structures and their functions in their neighbourhood, consider different ways in which food is grown in their community, and explore the impact of industries on local water systems” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017, p.5).

Building upon the experiential approach, students need to explore places *indiscriminately,* investigating their width and depth, walking all paths, drawing them, thinking them, feeling them. To continue with Lippard’s (1997) artistic guidance, students needs to engage in on-site discussion of personal memories, known histories, of “marks made in the land that provoke and evoke” (p.7).

On such experiential excursions, place meaning could emerge from direct encounters of places (Relph 2007 as referenced in Kudryavtsev, et al, 2012). Heidegger maintained (as per Zimmerman, 2015) that “abstraction from life” is not how we perceive our world. Rather, the meaning of things (text, environment, place, relationships, etc) “is disclosed not to the detached or abstract analytical gaze but emerges in the context of our engaging it within a meaningful life context” (p.36). Curiously, John Dewey shares this sensibility, in so far that he saw words as conveying meaning only to the extent that meaning could be experienced through interaction, so “to attempt to give a meaning through a word alone without any dealings with a thing is to deprive the word of intelligible signification” (Dewey 1910, 176, as referenced in Weible, 2015, p.84).

Students could be asked to first-hand attend “to the appearance of place . . . figuring out what is where and how the various landmarks, paths, and so forth all fit together to make one complete place’ (Seamon, 1996 as cited in Kudryavtsev, et al, 2012, p. 239). Afterall, the sense of place is composed of the ideas about actual places we live in (Derr, 2002). The simple act of discovering through walking can permit one to experience place in a poetic way:
The sense of place, as the phrase suggests, does indeed emerge from the senses. The land, and even the spirit of the place, can be experienced kinetically, or kinesthetically, as well as visually. If one has been raised in a place, its textures and sensations, its smells and sounds, are recalled as they felt to a child’s adolescent’s, adult’s body. Even if one’s history there is short, a place can still be felt as an extension of the body, especially the walking body, passing through and becoming part of the landscape. (Lippard, 1997, p.34)

(ii) Developing a personal narrative: Considering the importance that educators place on language, students should be encouraged to discuss, describe, contemplate out loud and share their personal narratives of place, place experiences and meaning (McClaren, 2009 as cited in Kudryavtsev, et al, 2010). To help construct such narrative, ask questions. And the questions need not be complex; start, as Lucy R. Lippard suggests all artists should, with simply looking around where you live now:

What Native peoples first inhabited this place? When was your house built? What’s the history of the land use around it? How does it fit into history of the area? Who lived there before? What changes have been made or have you made? If you’ve always lived there, what is different now from when you were young? If you haven’t, what’s different from where you were raised and from when you moved there? What is your house’s relation to others near it and the people who live in them? How does its interior relate to the exterior? <...> Is there a lawn? a garden? Have you cut down trees or planted them? Is there vegetation local or imported? Is there water to sustain it? Do any animals live there? Have they always been there? Are there more of less of them? What do you see from your favorite window? What does the view mean to you? How does it change with seasons and time? And so on and on. (1997, p.25)

Similar to the way ROE lessons are designed, place empathy within a curriculum needs to focus on sharing observations and opportunities for discussion (Schonert-Reichl, et al, 2012). Explicitly inviting students to examine their experiences of place may help “them question and resist prescriptive models for understanding conflict and their own so-called common sense assumptions regarding prevailing social relations. The way could thereby be paved for democratization” (Parker, 2016, p.108).

When constructing their place narratives, students should be given opportunity to discuss activities that their places afford them, whatever these may be, since activities may be the main determinant in ranking of children’s special places (Derr, 2002).
(iii) Map it, draw it: As a student who attended landscape architecture studio walks later in her life, I am still enamoured with my discovery, three years ago, that sketching and mapping a site was but another way to think about it. As a nod to human geography’s 60s roots, I believe that student ought to partake in map-making in their EE classrooms, whereby children could explore their own “miniature terrae incognitae” (John K. Wright as referenced in Lippard, 1997) by drawing maps filled with personal knowledge and meaning. Victoria Derr of Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies use mapping to kick-start conversations with children about their place experiences (2002): “…the most important place to Terésa [one of the children partaking in Derr’s study] the one that she attaches the greatest amount of pride and value, is the park just across the street from the Boys and Girl’s Club. The park is sandwiched between two roads, and runs lengthwise for a stretch along the sometimes flowing Santa Fe river. Vibrant mural walls stretch along the park, winding down stairs, and extending into the courtyards of Terésa’s uncles’ complex. When I first met Terésa at school, she appeared proud, drawing the park and her family’s barrio on her map, and with this pride was a confidence.” (p.131).

Similarly, young students should be encouraged to sketch their places, as geographer Piece Lewis suggested (1979, in Lippard, 1997, p.6): “to teach oneself how to see, it help to draw – nor ‘arty impressionistic sketches”, but “literal primitive drawings… to force one to notice details that might otherwise go unseen”.

Jensen (2016) provides an example from a classroom where a teacher provided students with “different ways of making meaning” (p.100), including various media art, “and greater awareness of learning processes were gained as students talked about their drawings.” (p.101). Overall, Jensen concludes, the non-linguistic strategies are vital to sustainability education (and in this discussion, to empathic learning), as they “use feeling to communicate” (2016, p.102), offering insights into perspectives through affective empathy.

(iv) Storytelling: Exploration of conflictual viewpoints could not be possible without the use of elicitive pedagogies which, writes Parker (2016, p.108, with reference to Lederach, 1995), a Canadian lecturer in Education and Society Program, “invite participants to make formerly implicit cultural knowledges explicit through storytelling and critical analysis of language, proverbs, and cultural symbols. Such approaches may uncover culturally rooted knowledge resources for critical, creative, and locally relevant conflict learning.” Furthermore, storytelling develops and utilizes a student’s imagination which, in turn, enacts understanding (Jensen, 2016, p.98).
(v) Simulation: Parker (2016) calls role-play, dialogue and simulation activities "peacebuilding pedagogies... [which] can assist the social and academic engagement of immigrant students’ diverse and intersecting identities, and facilitate their inclusion” (p.105). Parker’s position can certainly be expanded to include all students with their diverse place-identities, regardless of immigration status. The vital part of role-play in empathy building is intuitive and has been demonstrated in a number of studies. For example, Wilkes, Milgrom and Hoffman (2002, in Weisz & Zaki, 2017) invited medical students to experience a hospital from a patient’s perspective. Those who partook expressed more interest in improving relationships between doctors and patients.

Within place empathy, as with historical empathy (Skolnick, et al., 2004, p.18 in Endacott, 2010, p.11), students would take on a role of specific “other” and be asked to make a decision or act, within this role, towards the place using whatever evidence and information they’ve gathered about the “other”.

As discussed earlier in this and preceding section of the paper, it is paramount that every attempt is made to identify all other whose opinions, feelings and actions pertain to and affect student-defined places. These others may include persons, animals, corporate entities, advocacy groups, governments at all levels, etc.

(vi) Teacher leads: Whatever empathetic activity students are engaged in, teacher lead is needed to ensure, for example, that rules of dialogue are implicitly stated and observed (Davies, 2004), that thought-provoking questions are asked, or that examination of evidence (cognitive empathy) is completed to the fullest extent possible before any narrative is constructed (Endacott, 2010).

(vii) Inquiry: Other required techniques include learning to work with multiple information sources including primary sources and critical thinking exercises that could accommodate cognitive empathy. Because consolidating others’ viewpoints into student’s own perception of place will, undoubtedly, complicate and contradict their initial understanding, the “purposeful, self-regulatory judgment” (American Philosophical Association, as cited in Ernst & Monroe, 2004, p.508) is necessary yet may be difficult to achieve for younger students considering it includes cognitive maturity, analyticity, and critical thinking self-confidence (ibid.) among its prerequisites. Thus, teachers would need to focus on students developing both the critical thinking skills and the predisposition towards critical thinking. Curiously, however, it appears that both empathy and critical thinking build upon similar concepts: "encouraging students to pose and solve problems, investigate issues, examine alternative perspectives, incorporate thinking skills across subject areas, act on what they are thinking through authentic tasks, and reflect" (Ernst & Monroe, 2004,
p.518 with reference to Berman 1991 and Costa, 1991). Thus, inclusion of one cannot proceed without the other.

It would be fair to question here whether place empathy is rendered impotent if observers are, in fact, unable to fully enter into the minds and cognitive states of others because, as may be the case with younger students, of limits of critical thinking or information processing abilities. I suggest that it is not so. Firstly, the exercise of identification of “others” whose opinions matter, would serve as a moral foundation for recognizing all differences, even if those differences cannot (yet) be fully or truly understood. Secondly, if we as observers acknowledge our “misrecognition” of others’ positions, then, as Anthony Clohesy (2013) puts forward, we acknowledge our own limits, and “this is important because, without this recognition of our violence and finitude, we will be unable to emerge as ethical subjects with a sense of our duties to others” (p. 83).
Chapter 5. Summary and Conclusion

5.1. Summary

To be understood and perhaps appreciated, place needs more from us than simply being there. It needs first-hand experience, acknowledgment, evidence searching, critical thinking, imagination, emotion, and communication. All these requirements I have previously reflected in the place empathy framework.

Having developed a framework, and defined place empathy as a cognitive and affective representation process in which an observer simulates another’s interpretations of place in order to deepen her understanding of place, I have set a foundation for incorporating place empathy into the existing EE curriculum through techniques such as storytelling, student-led walks, mapping, drawing, dialogue, narrative construction, etc.

This study sought to determine how place empathy could be integrated into Ontario’s Grade 2 and 3 curricula. This, I believe, is not only possible but needed, as my interpretation of the existing environmental education curriculum shows fragmentation of the relationship between students, their personal environments and others within these, and a fear of complexity and conflictual issues. In a pluralistic society and in a time of change, inclusion of empathy, and the ability to adopt another’s perspective into environmental education cannot be understated. To paraphrase Zimmerman (2015), by understanding others, “we gain insight into human nature and thus self-understanding, a better sense of who we are as human beings” (p.32).

While my declaration that nature is dead, which I uttered in the early pages of this paper, still stands, it does not mean that I am deaf to the beauty of the world around me. But, to echo American writer and art critic Lucy R. Lippard, I am aware that I am mesmerized indeed by place:

*Place is latitudinal and longitudinal within the map of a person’s life. It is temporal and spatial, personal and political. A layer location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth. It is about connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, what will happen there.* (1997, p.7)

We cannot conserve that which is dead, and nature restoration is an oxymoron in itself. Why not, then, relish in the magnificent of the artificial and the designed? The profession of landscape
architecture is in the position to open the world to what its practitioners have been up to in the last
hundred plus years. Environmental education needs not to focus on assigning blame for the
destruction of nature or drive ever greater the divide between natural and built environments,
between us and "others”. Instead, it can choose to celebrate personal, designed, and different. It can
choose to teach students to be empathic Gardeners.

5.2. Conclusion and Potential Implications

Certainly, the concepts of empathy, place, affective processes and relationship to the environment,
are complex, multidimensional, and highly personal. Thus, one may wish to disregard them because
of these limitations. I would argue, however, that education needs to embrace these ever more
because of these ‘limitations’, for they represent the very uncertainty and elasticity of the process of
growing up, learning, establishing one’s views and changing them throughout life. In fact, in a
paradoxical way, the concept of “place empathy” may have capacity to combine the homogeneity of
a common reference point (a place situated in a specified physical space) and the heterogeneity of
recognition (through empathy) of differing views.

Of course, if our environment is indeed broken (and I’m not one to stand with climate-change
deniers), then environmental education cannot fix it. Neither can place empathy. This paper, in
particular, has also not investigated whether place empathy can increase enviro-positive attitudes
or cause enviro-positive behaviours. It can, however, as part of the EE curriculum, uniquely
contribute to the goal of knowledge acquisition and fostering perspectives. Although not
investigated in this paper, the potential implications of place empathy may indeed be far-reaching.

You may have already noticed that throughout this paper I have largely avoided the topic of climate
change (which I have done to focus on the smaller, personal scale). I do, however, agree with
educators like Hilary Whitehouse who maintain that “climate education, in its many forms will, by
necessity, shortly move towards the centre of curriculum practice” (2017, p.64). Should, or rather
when this happens, the ability to empathize may keep the environmental conversation going in the
face of doom. If Rifkin is right in his deduction that empathic bonds are dependent on mortal
suffering (2009, p.168), then what better time to cultivate them than when faced with the
existential dilemma that is climate change.

More immediately, place empathy encourages dialogue, which educator and philosopher Paulo
Freire claimed as “crucial for democracy and social development” and which, according to another
educator Lynn Davies (2004), can bring “out of new and previously hidden meanings and understandings” (both in Parker, 2016, p.129). These new uncovered understandings can take students beyond the questions of “how” and into the exploration of “why” (Rifkin, 2009, p.16).

Existing research shows (Biles, 1994 and Parker, 2010 in Parker, 2016) that children can develop positive feelings about their identities when, in the classroom, they are encouraged to partake in “culturally sensitive discussions” (p.107). By extension, it is possible that by dedicating room within the EE curriculum for complex and thoughtful discussions about students’ personal places, learners would be encouraged to develop deeper understanding and affection towards local. Certainly, if we follow Wilson, Stigler and Becker’s theory of consumption capital where, very simply, understanding begets appreciation, then understanding place should lead to appreciating it. Further, when students are taught to construct their own narrative, there is an increase in activity and initiated discussions (Weible, 2015, p.100 with reference to Egan 2008).

Moreover, a place empathy framework requires students to engage in creating narratives as well as imaginative mental images. For contemporary educational philosopher Kieran Egan, writes Weible (2015), this overlap “facilitates meaningful retention, enables the concrete embodiment of abstractions and generalities, and, above all, constitutes a fundamental (and not merely subsidiary) modality of information coding and experience management.” (p.100). In a similar line of thought, though without references to exact studies, Rifkin remarks:

*Early evaluations of student performance in the few places where the new empathic approach to education has been implemented show a marked improvement in mindfulness, communication skills, and critical thinking as youngsters become more introspective, emotionally attuned, and cognitively adept at comprehending and responding intelligently and compassionately to others. Because empathic skills emphasize a non-judgmental orientation and tolerance of other perspectives, they accustom young people to think in terms of layers of complexity and force them to live within the context of ambiguous realities where there are no simple formulas or answers, but only a constant search for shared meaning and common understanding.* (2009, pp. 15-16).

As my interpretation of the EE curriculum showed, we have limited ways in which we describe “environment”, which at the end, largely boil down to a nature vs. culture conflict. Places, on the other hand, can be described in limitless number of ways and have infinite layers of complexity, with each such layer having the potential to be deeply and personally meaningful. As a subject of a field of study, place, as an individual perception localized in time and space, has a lot more
exploration potential than environment. Building on this, designed/artificial, too, affords infinite room for investigation, while also being the common language of creativity (Simon, 1968). If a solution to climate change is ever found, creativity will, no doubt, be a contributing force.

I could not help but include here this emotional quote from Jeremy Rifkin’s *The Empathic Civilization*: “When we empathize with another being, there is an unconscious understanding that their very existence, like our own, is a fragile affair…” (2009, p.41). And I could not think of a field more dependent on understanding of our and others’ fragility than environmental education.

Place empathy is uniquely positioned to bring together egocentric and democratic, by taking a self-oriented personal perception (place) and expanding upon it, through understanding others, until place bursts open with colours and patterns and depth and width of perceptions of all.

5.3. Further Research

The obligatory “further research” paragraphs concluding all academic articles sometime seem coy to me, but hermeneutics categorically declares that no interpretation is final. As Jens Zimmerman writes, “…we never arrive at a wholly conclusive statement. We can never bottle the meaning of a text, put it on the shelf, and then move on to the next work. Rather, our construction of meaning is ultimately a hypothesis, that is, a well-reasoned guess” (2015, p. 65). He continues:

*There is always the possibility that a reader with greater experience, a keener eye, and a better imagination can provide a more persuasive reading that integrates more of the textual parts and clues into a convincing whole. This kind of interpretation is no less objective than the scientist’s attempt to integrate all available data about physical phenomena into a theory. As in textual interpretation, the more integrative and elegant the scientific formula, the more convincing it is, but, as every scientist knows, hardly any theory about complex natural phenomena is ever final.* (ibid., p.66)

I would encourage anyone interested in the topics I have touched upon in this paper to pick up, or start over, the analysis, interpretation and contemplation about place, empathy, and environmental education.

Moreover, further research is necessary to better understand the effects of place empathy within the EE curriculum and to see whether place empathy can, in fact, be taught and if so, what may be its consequences.
To accomplish this, further research could include a focus group. Participants, identified as key informants with direct experience in developing or teaching the environmental education curriculum, would be presented with the concept, rational and framework for place empathy and asked to comment on the extent to which inclusion of place empathy into the existing curriculum would enrich the students’ understanding of and relationships with their immediate environments.

I hypothesize that when compared to students who have not been introduced to the concept, the children with experience in place empathy would show positive changes in their ability to verbalize the personal significance of their immediate environments, to exhibit and utilize empathy, and to articulate the relationship between them, and others, and the places they inhibit. To test this, the integrated concept of place empathy would need to be taught in the classrooms, and subsequent dimension of a sense of place be assessed via, for example, Likert-scale surveys, open-ended surveys, interviews and empathy-measuring questionnaires (for example of the latter, see Empathy Quotient in Baron-Cohen, 2011). At the same time, the ability of the teachers to deliver the place-empathy-enriched EE curriculum without support of the researcher(s) would need to be assessed.

Overall, I am certainly not alone in the thought that the implications of teaching (and practicing) empathy may be far-reaching. Simon Baron-Cohen, a University of Cambridge-based clinical psychologist, for example, names empathy “the most valuable resource in our world” (2011, p.103), one able to “resolve conflict, increase community cohesion, and dissolve another person’s pain” (ibid., p.125). If we combine empathy with the concept of design, then perhaps we can dissolve our own pain in understanding our role and the role of other within this small and lovely place.
References


