

The Lost Carpetbagger: Complicating Geographical and Psychological “Place” in the South for a Northern-Born White Teacher

SAGE Open
July-September 2013: 1–8
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DOI: 10.1177/2158244013502493
sgo.sagepub.com


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Abstract

The following discussion highlights the impact depression and anxiety can have on perceptions of psychological and geographical “place” for a Southern, White male teacher studying racism and prejudice in the predominantly White rural high school community he lives and works. The teacher-researcher utilizes autoethnographical and psychoanalytical techniques of critical reflection and self-applied transportation theory, and arts-based research to unravel these perceptions and to enhance his autobiographical findings of both geographical and psychological place. One intent of the nonnative teacher-researcher was to uncover one predominantly White Texas high school community’s actions and thoughts of racism and prejudice through his own eyes while at times suffering from a relapse of Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) and anxiety. Another intent was to give the teacher-researcher further perspectives into his biography, his own attitudes of racism, prejudice, and inequality, and further understandings into the underlying causes of depression that bound his experiences in geographical and psychological place. Findings suggest that this teacher-researcher’s use of psychological techniques while suffering from a relapse of MDD and anxiety can negatively impact his ability to locate physical and psychological aspects of place.

Keywords

educational research, education, social sciences, educational psychology and counseling, curriculum, teaching, diversity and multiculturalism

Introduction

Against the wake of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) declining graduation rates, and gaps in academic achievement because of standardized testing, multicultural and critical scholarship and research has been advocating action of “true change and equity” that merges race with gender, class, and language (Banks, 2004; Pinar, 2004; Gay, 2011; Jupp & Slattery, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Landsman & Lewis, 2011). Aside from the negative impact on students, teachers continue to leave their classrooms no longer able to serve the student even in the name of academic equity and racial harmony.

There has also been little qualitative inquiry into increased teacher mental wellness research, preservice teacher mental health training, and interventions to help treat teachers marginalized and stigmatized by society as psychotic, insane, or out of touch with reality, despite high rates of pedagogical depression. Increased mental wellness research becomes particularly important when depression usually lies quietly boxed in the closets of critical theory and multicultural education research, as illness, disability, and sometimes “other” (Banks & Banks, 2001; Jupp & Slattery, 2010; Sleeter & Grant, 1999).

In the very practice of avoiding a “vacuum of the self,” Tim Wise (2004) claims the notion of lens-forming called on by qualitative researchers seemingly is deemed complete once the researcher’s identity of race, gender, class, and sometimes language is revealed to the reader. These simplistic conceptions further problematize the importance of individual White male hegemonic voices who may have genetic and biological links to mental illness not necessarily caused alone by environmental and sociocultural factors, yet who are enacting equity and antiracist curriculum needed in predominantly White classrooms. This call beckons classroom research that Henry Giroux (1992) says transcends borders, and in what Geneva Gay (2011) calls “affective, humanistic, and transformative” ways (p. 39), by helping teachers and students explore new landscapes of learning, and making individual choices and relativity within the global community (Greene, 1978).

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The following discussion of place has been bracketed from my autoethnographic study titled “Challenging Ghosts in the Hegemonic Closet: An Autoethnography,” which highlights the perceptions of a Southern, White male teacher, at times experiencing bouts of Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) and anxiety in the predominantly White rural high school community of Big Falls, Texas (mythical in name). As the researcher-teacher I utilize critical reflection, self-imposed transportation theory, and arts-based research to unravel these perceptions and to enhance his autobiographical findings.

While one intent of this study was to give a White male further perspectives into his biography and his attitudes of racism, prejudice, and inequality, and further understanding into the underlying causes of depression that bound his experiences in one place, another intent was to uncover one predominantly White Southern high school community’s actions and thoughts through the eyes of someone not born and established in the community. The study reveals that critical reflection and self-imposed transportation theory, while at times dangerous for the teacher-researcher experiencing depression or anxiety, nonetheless, are effective tools for unleashing possible ties that bind both depression and anxiety to original perceptions made within the community and establishment of physical and psychological space.

Place

To say all research is a first-person narrative is not to say that all research is about the heart. The heart pushes the self forward to places it doesn’t belong. I don’t want to go to places where the heart is not welcome. Such places frighten me. “Are you frightened by the truth?” would come the rejoinder. “No, I’m frightened by what poses as the truth” (Pelias, 2004, p. 8).

For a good part of my adult life, I have been navigating through my world, mentally struggling at times to find my emotional place of comfort. I struggle with life, fearfully navigating through what others justify as truths about mental illness and psychological spaces. I understand the need to eat healthy and stay physically fit. I also understand the need to stay mentally fit. What I would give to be mentally healthy is in the subjective negotiation of “passages through social systems and structures” (Greene, 1978, p. 48), the crossing of borders (Freire, 1984) in a hegemonic wilderness whereby traditional empirical research of class and gender tends to ignore such discussions that intersect historically with male teacher illness narratives. Peggy McIntosh (1990) tells us that race and sex are not the only advantaged systems at work. “We need similarly to examine the daily experience of having age advantage, or ethnic advantage, or physical ability, or advantage related to nationality, religion, or sexual orientation” (para. 15).

For place to inform the act of inquiry it must be turned inside out; in other words, its essence must be uncovered

and understood. The raw material of place must be bracketed in such a way that grants insight into the human condition, historical movement, and/or anthropological expression. Joe L. Kincheloe and William Pinar (1991) extend Eudora Welty’s insight by noting that the meaning-making process sets into motion a “synergism” whereby “rhythms of time and fleeting glimpses of the unconscious are integrated with a knowledge and place to reveal hidden designs” where “not only place itself is exposed but also the elusive conversation between place and curriculum theory is audible” (p. 8).

Other writers and artists have also provided explanations and renderings of the significance of place in research, the demand for autobiography, and “working through” place as a symptom of culture. Brian Casemore (2008) notes the understandings of art critic Lucy Lippard (1997), French historian Pierre Nora (1989), and Professor Edward Casey (1993) demonstrate severing lived and embodied relationships to the past can make it difficult to find meaning in the present. But as Lippard argues in Casemore, “The lure of the local connects us to the past we have forgotten.” What we are left with then is the question of how one navigates through “the aspects of ourselves and our relations to others that have been obscured in our experience of place” (as stated in Casemore, 2008, p. 9).

Mary Jacobus (1999) argues in “Psychoanalysis and the Scene of Reading” that what readers do not see in fictional landscapes can give them an “unconscious sense of relating to an inner world” (p. 54, as stated in Casemore, 2008, p. 9). Yet, she adds that these very same landscapes can provide a medium in which the reader can work through personal and historical trauma (Casemore, 2008, p. 9). Furthermore, Mitchell (2002) sees place in terms of Jacques Lacan’s theory that “defines subjectivity as a place in language” that has no “no real physical dimensions, but is the representation of a place as mimeticized in the mind” (Zizek, 1989, p. 155, as cited in Casemore, 2008, p. 10). Mitchell’s psychological framework is applied to place in the South through Lacan’s use of space, by relating his idea of space, place, and landscape to Lacan’s idea of “The Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real” (Mitchell, 2002, p. x). It is in the Lacanian idea of “The Real” signifying a traumatic or historical event that Mitchell argues is interwoven with the imaginary landscape, and helps to expose our transference,” in the psychological sense of place.

Complications

It does not take a catastrophic event to lose oneself in a fictional world. The symptoms of MDD and the application of such psychoanalytical tools as critical reflection and self-applied transportation theory complicated my awareness of not only who I was, but also an awareness of where I was at mentally and physically. Heller (2002) tells us of critical reflection that,

We can understand journaling as the self-in-the-moment speaking of and to a past self, but with a future self in mind . . . The self simultaneously contains the experiences of the past along with the possibilities of the future sees this as the value of going inward to find the proper direction. (as cited in Rossiter & Clark, 2007, pp. 149-150)

Furthermore, self-applied transportation theory is a tool for travel through song, film, television sitcom, art, medical records, school records, and life history memorabilia, including photos, art, texts, for symbolic interactions between the object and self, then return to the present reality, whereby one can be entertained or informed, or seek clarification (Green, Brock, and Kaufman, 2004).

While geographically I have traveled hundreds of miles from Iowa to Texas, to Colorado, and back to Texas, my use of psychoanalytical tools in themselves did not hamper my awareness of my "inner" place. The very symptoms of MDD and the search for identity also threw off my compass. A few of the most common symptoms of MDD are deep feelings of sadness, marked loss of interest or pleasure in activities, insomnia, increased fatigue, restlessness, feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate guilt, and difficulty thinking, concentrating, or making decisions. Neither thoughts of death nor suicide entered my mind during the Major Depressive Episode (MDE) I suffered during my study. In other words, MDD can "color" or "inform" your perception of reality.

Quite often when I was not suffering from these symptoms, I asked myself, "Am I a middle-aged White male high school English teacher stuck in a predominantly White rural school district in Central Texas, culturally and psychologically isolated, yet historically connected to the people I was studying?" During the study, I discovered instances of racism and prejudice that reminded me of my racist and verbally abusive stepfather. One morning after the 2008 election of Barack Obama, I found a tattered American flag lying in the street outside of my home. It was my stepfather's death on my birthday in 1998 that triggered my initial episode of MDD and brought forth unanswered questions from my past, and now in the current context of racism, I found compelled to have answered in an eerily familiar landscape.

The following findings from my study show the difficulties and lessons I experienced locating my place.

I love peacefulness of the mind generated by the absence of human sound. That's why I would explore a 200 acre wood near our house by myself many times. It didn't matter the season. In fall, after raking the fallen burnt orange brown maple leaves into a pile at the bottom of a hill and then jumping into it, or after a strong mid-January snowstorm smelling air you swear God created just for you while skating down your small frozen ravine . . . Later I would come to find out that is ozone . . . Or spring watching the different colored finches, and squirrels . . . And there I was. So when we would take a long trip to our cabin in Northern Minnesota through Bemidji (Paul Bunyon country) to Woman Lake, all I did was absorb my surroundings . . . wasn't

sure why, maybe the virgin images were calming. (Author, personal correspondence, November 5, 2011)

Every time I hear Pearl Jam's "*Small Town*," as it is nicknamed, I am reminded of why I dislike living in such communities. It reminds me of my faded days growing up in a small Northwestern Iowa town that mammoths the rural speck I now live in by a 12-fold population. But it is not so much its size, or population that is reminiscent. It is who the population consists of . . . mostly White, mostly church-going, mostly blue collar, spare the stench from meat-packing plants filling the air. I didn't want to be stuck in my childhood town working construction the rest of my life only to be visited years later by old friends. I wanted to get the hell out. Only now I am in nearly the same spot I was back when I graduated from college in 1984. I never looked back when I left in a December snowstorm in my orange 1968 VW Beetle with an Iranian American student via Colorado Springs before heading to my television reporting job in South Texas. Now it is 2012, PhD in sight, job hunting in sight, and now another possible escape from a small town in White America where everyone knows my name, but who does not want to say hello because I am not from here. (Author, personal correspondence, April 9, 2011)

Big Falls is the type of community that is prejudice against outsiders more than the color of your skin. If your family was a part of the community you were granted more access to than someone that moved into the community. There were times prejudice was reflected due to the color of your skin. African Americans that grew up in Big Falls knew their place. As long as (African Americans) were participating and doing well in athletics, things were fine. Our parents only came to the school if there was a problem or maybe to see us play. They did not "rock" the boat and neither did their parents. (Author, personal raw data, June 2012)

Big Falls reminds me of my Iowa heritage. I am a 52-year-old male of German, Bohemian, and French decent. Whites alone account for about 93% of the population, while Hispanic or Latino accounts for about 4% and African Americans about 3%. People of German ancestry represent the largest portion of the Iowa population. My grandfather's great grandfather left the far southern village of Mettenburg, Germany, around 1840 and moved to a small Irish settlement in Minnesota. Grandma's great grandparents were from France. Both families were strong Catholics and had little wealth.

In Texas, the Czechs apparently brought with them the ancient friction between Protestants and Catholics, which deterred efforts for Czech national unity. Czechs were not only Catholic, some were Protestant, Presbyterian, Moravian, yet shared similar interests in agriculture and celebrated Czech customs, but they did not share "a common goal for building a unified Czech community" (Apperson, 1969, p. 43). It was Presbyterians and Moravians who were more inclined to associate with the American Protestants than the Czech Catholics with American Catholics. Furthermore,

Presbyterians with Calvinistic Reform theology were more inclined to communicate with mainstream American religious groups than did the pietistic Moravians. Thus, it was the Czech Presbyterians who served as leaders to Americanize the Czechs.

Czechs and Germans apparently displayed common courtesies between each other, although the immigrant-majority Catholics “were admonished to stay away from Protestants” (Karlik, 1972, p. 60).

Struggle between, Czech, German, and Anglo-American cultures increased markedly in the 1920s and erupted into manifestations against each other. “Name calling, fights, and prohibitive use of languages other than English in schools was common” (p. 62). The discord between the two ethnic groups was said to have contributed to the appearance of the Ku Klux Klan in Texas and a local Klan group was formed in Big Falls. It was Protestant in sympathy and “professed a program against crime and corrupt officials” (Karlik, 1972, p. 84).

A group of over 200 Klansmen were allowed, despite requests against it, a short parade through the business district in January 1923. Apperson, Karlik, and the town paper claimed, based on “informed sources,” that most of the Klansmen were not from Big Falls. These three sources reported that most of the Klansmen were from outside of the community and the number was far less than expected. But today one can find the remains of the local Klan’s old meeting place next to a bird sanctuary about two miles from the Knights of Columbus Hall. After the parade, an anti-Catholic movement was fought with almost equal passion by a small group of Czech Catholics. The resulting friction between the two cultures destroyed much of the unity established during the war. Catholic Czechs began to feel unaccepted because they were of foreign birth or parentage. The conflict helped to renew their isolation. (Karlik, 1972, p. 84)

Depression’s Impact on Perception

As the historical pattern of racism and prejudice began to emerge, my agnosticism and my increasing sense of isolation magnified my anxiety and depression. The following emails were hastily sent to my superintendent, assistant superintendent, principal, and assistant principal during what seemed a euphoric sense of what turned out to be a false sense of reality. The emails note further conflicts with issues of trust. During this time, I was in a sense reaching out to even people in the hegemonic circle, needing to talk. However, my depression and anxiety may have colored my view of reality, on one hand distorting the public view of depression in a way that people would accept it, particularly my bosses, and on the other, masking the confidentiality of my research of this very community that they were vaguely aware of.

Teachers face anxieties and fears every day in the classroom . . . society does not care, administration does not care, kids do not care . . . I have learned how to manage major depression

throughout my life . . . look where I am at . . . I was ranked 150th out of 220 in my class . . . yet today, I am a successful teacher and role model . . . I propose a short motivational performance presentation for teachers who suffer the same fears in the school community and high school I do.

Thanks so much for the advice, especially about keeping it simple. I am just going to focus on my life as an English teacher here. Throwing in too many expectations beyond what I can reasonably handle while I am still teaching. The classroom and the kids are still my responsibility, and my responsibilities will not change wherever I go. (Author, personal correspondence, June 18, 2011)

While struggling with distrust, isolation, and loneliness, welcoming and creative realizations were emerging from my perceptions that would soon assure my return, the realization that dominant cultures perpetuate prejudice, and the realization of inner healing transpires through such journeys:

The story, “A Lesson Before Dying” mentioned divorce, but in Earnest Gaines’s sense it was a separating of our physical selves. If we do divorce (separate) you take your role and responsibilities with you. But while you are with these kids, you show them how to form their own view of the world and frame themselves. A person’s time is short on this earth, at least physically. It is teacher’s mission, my mission to serve as a facilitator of method and tools of knowledge building so they can construct their own lens. I have to remember that, hate begets hate, even if I don’t agree, we need to talk about ways of bridging gaps together through knowledge we call experience. (P. Slattery, personal correspondence, June 10, 2011)

One bitter, but again, healing realization about society and myself was that of hypocrisy, both of a private and public nature. The following journal entries further support the hypocrisy of Big Falls desire for self-sufficiency and isolation and my conflicting desire for peace and belongingness while criticizing their desire as negative:

This struggle is one of my realities . . . not being able to show my empathy, or gratitude to others at times of depression. So, if I am a role model as a teacher, a person who has impact, and I do not do anything about my lack of assertiveness to enact change on their behalf, I feel like a coward. (Author, personal correspondence, June 11, 2011)

It’s hard to find a spot without humans . . . and that seems to be my story. I like being alone. Not all the time. Just during My time. People see me and ask, “Is everything all right?” I say, “Yes.” But really it’s not. I am melancholy. It seems I always have been. I used to smile a lot. Not anymore. (Author personal correspondence, June 11, 2011)

The ability to realize how depression and anxiety can both color and inform one’s current struggle for meaning-making came down to one question: If I could run through the

predawn streets of Big Falls at 5 a.m. without incident, where is the danger? The euphoria I felt from a 24-min, 2-mile run through the streets of Big Falls began seeping through my soul . . . So I ran the next day, and the next day, until by summer's end I was running four early-morning jaunts through what was once scary territory. I began to feel safer, and to a large degree at peace with what I was experiencing. Some people would say I lived an existential experience, others might say it was just runner's high. Yet all I remember is that "feeling" you get when you feel this was not your doing . . . something or someone was at work in the greater scope of things.

In my psychological space, my depression revealed personal prejudices, current and past, of race and religion. My perceptions during this time also reveal my hypocritical nature, criticizing people of religious faith while speaking of religious tolerance. This impacts how I have viewed the subjects of this community. However, this also gives me greater understanding of how religion has played out through history in terms of the negative consequences of prejudice such as isolation.

Considering the amount of research I conducted about MDD and anxiety through numerous sources, I am not surprised that my journal entries and personal correspondence written during my relapse revealed I was fighting against hegemony. I was fighting against hegemony in terms of treatment of my mental illness through medications against local community powerbrokers, school district officials, principals, and parents of students with power who I could have actually have benefitted from. But this sensitivity informed me to be wary and critical of small, rural high school community members. It also reaffirmed my desire to move on to a place I felt was home.

Value for Others

This morning, I cut the remains of a 15-foot branch from a 100-year-old pecan tree now lying before me. The drought of 2011 sucked it dry, cutting off a constant source of life . . . and as the pecans formed and matured, the weight of the nuts plus a windstorm was all it took to down it atop the hard concrete patio. Someone told me one time that divorce is worse than death. I am not sure I necessarily agree, because I have experienced divorce twice, and the deaths of my mother, father, stepfather, and others, as well as my own death experience. The tree that had provided my family with a healthy nut in the late fall and a protective shade in the hot Texas summer was beginning to realize its once metaphorical winter. Death, divorce . . . they do share one thing in common, and that is the overriding sense of physical loss of the living. I could extend those losses to include experiences that keep us at least psychologically connected to physical beings by memory.

I noticed other pecan trees heading for their downfall as well. The trees in my neighbor's yard, the Catholic church's

community center across the street, the trees planted at the former high school built in the early 1900s, and some of the hundreds of trees scattered in the more than 100 square miles of the Big Falls Independent School District. I paused and thought of the great pines of Northern Minnesota and blazing ashes of the Rocky Mountains near my parent's tombstone, and the very fallen branches my mom would climb while motorcycling through the sparse Iowa woods.

The trees served as my mother's messenger, and my protector of most things I have come to know as a White male. I admired her fearlessness, fortitude, respect, empathy, and love for nature and mankind. Through her, and later my stepfather (yes the White Irish bigot), I acquired growing respect for women. It was not uncommon for us siblings to put on the boxing gloves and settle a fight with the rest of the family laughing through the picture window. But later, as a teen, my stepfather warned us that if we ever picked a fight with a woman, we would not see the light of day. I still have great respect for my older sister Patty who can still lay me down with a good punch.

More than that, as a married man, I watch with care and understanding how my wife, two daughters, and female students who have navigated a male-dominated world sometimes with success, and other times with defeat. But with my mother's guidance, I am learning the impact such marks can make in the physical aspect of one's place and the psychological. As a White male educator in a predominantly White rural high school community, introducing curriculum that focuses on race, ethnicity, class, gender, and mental ability, can be risky. It was not that I felt I was the next "great White hope." I actually felt like a White, Northern carpetbagger having difficulty selling his goods in a predominantly White, rural southern community, not feeling any need to necessarily redeem myself (Remillard, 2011) or write a conversion narrative commonly found among Southern Whites (Hobson, 1999).

More so, my narrative speaks to the underlying ecological underpinnings of autopoietic narratives (Denzin, 1997) that exposes a Peliasian (2004) "empathetic connection, [and] a body that takes as its charge to be fully human" (p. 1) in our personal and professional lives. I would research the community again, and I will still promote pedagogical action with possibilities that ignite educative experience-making in these communities (Washington & Humphries, 2011). Despite rejection by some students from, and who were assimilated into the White rural Southern high school mentality, others expressed their gratitude.

I cannot concur more strongly with Pinar's view that some Northerners wrongly tout a moral superiority when it comes to a discussion of racism in the South. Little do Midwesterners remember their ancestral treatment of Native American tribes during the early history of the plains, and the disparaging of African Americans seeking economic refuge and freedom up the mighty Mississippi River after the Civil War, only to find themselves embroiled in an economic battle stirred by White farmers and businessmen.

In keeping with memories and thought structures, I channel my mother's muse by nurturing those very places I share with my wife, my children, my students, my neighbors, and everyone else. Within those spaces, places, or landscapes (Greene, 1978), it is now time to ask ourselves, "How will we navigate through such a complex world that is at times impatient, harmful, intolerant, disrespectful, inconsiderate, and self-centered towards nature and others, yet also seeks patience, tolerance, respect, protection and empathy for nature and others?" It is time we call on our own muse to guide efforts toward a physical and psychological reconceptualization of the educative place we call the high school. With our muse at our side, we will be guided from an educationally inclusive place to expanded spaces, not just new spaces within the high school, but also spaces venturing into the land that first brought our ancestors yearning for the tolerance, respect, and physical and mental well-being they once sought.

My call beckons classroom research that Henry Giroux (1992) says transcends borders, and in what Geneva Gay (2011) calls "affective, humanistic, and transformative" ways (p. 39), by helping teachers and students explore new landscapes of learning, and making individual choices and relativity within the global community (Greene, 1978).

Slattery (2006) accentuates the perpetuated problems surrounding attitudes in open discussion of issues involving gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity, while further defending the need for postmodern curriculum developers to, "aggressively and consistently include lessons and experiences that will ameliorate the divisions and hatred we face in the world today" (p. 144). In the spirit of John Dewey (1916/1944), Maxine Greene (1978), Giroux (1985), James A. Banks (2004), and Gay (2011), this call is a call for urgent restructuring of the high school as we know it, not only in the curriculum, the objectives, and the physical architecture, but also in continued research supporting endeavors advocating cultural and academic equality among all students. As such, I ask other researchers to join with me in reigniting further research into

1. The restructuring of schools and other educational institutions that accommodate student-centered learning of the community spaces they inhabit, including further student control in curricular decisions that consider their inner psychological spaces and awareness of physical surroundings impacting their sense of well-being, interpretation of their place in the community, local environment, and within a multicultural world that transcends our comfort zones, and
2. The inclusion of community members, such as architects, artists, doctors, counselors, scientists, and spiritual leaders working with schools in nurturing an interactive communal atmosphere that invites students and educators out of the classroom and into the local environment.

The lack of educators equipped to address these problems has added to, "the frustration, anger, and violence that threaten to destroy civilization" (Slattery, 2006, p. 186). The practices of "irrelevant or inadequate" (Slattery, 2006, p. 188) local school district philosophy and mission statements can perpetuate divisions between philosophers and educators in curriculum development and theory, "unless we see philosophy of education as a vehicle for engendering justice, compassion, self-exploration, empowerment, critical thinking, and ecological sustainability" (p. 198). As Levin (2009) notes, "Educators can't for a moment be complacent about our place in public's hearts and minds—consequently in their wallets" (p. 94).

Aside from calls for further research, there is a need for continued emphasis on student, educator, and community involvement in school redesign, curriculum delivery, and school climate. Inherent in reconceptualized high schools in the design should be facilities that provide spaces for physical and artistic expression that allow for a greater sense of well-being. Pilar Marin and Brett Brown (2008) argue that beyond the academic development of students, school environment also encompasses "student physical and mental health, safety, civic engagement, and social development" (p. 1). As such, they suggest that school policy and activities should be viewed through the larger context. Schools have to affect student physical, mental, and nutritional help through teaching health classes, changing school lunch menus, physical education classes and sports activities, programs addressing mental health issues of bullying, drug abuse, and stress, and mandated medical services.

Further reconceptualization entails a curriculum that allows opportunity for students to interact with their environment. Aside from student field trips, community and environment-based student projects can be offered which would allow student interaction with community members, experiential knowledge-building (Dewey, 1916/1944; Pinar, 2004; Slattery 2006) and historical, autobiographical understandings of their environment (Pinar & Grumet, 1976; Slattery, 2006). Furthermore, as Spears et al. (1990) discuss in Oliver and Howley (1992), multiculturalism "can only be made sense of when rural schools make sense of them in their own circumstances" when "rural students can understand other cultures best when they understand their own culture well" (para. 9).

Walls are only reserved for utility rooms, offices, and gyms, while instructional areas utilize an open plan with both large and small subareas. Reconceptualized high school communities could further provide greater access for expressive spaces through expanded offerings of art, music, and physical activities not normally available to students due to course requirements and schedules.

Some design experts and schools are taking the lead in discussions that include the involvement of students and community in school redesign efforts. The Chicago Architecture Foundation and its "DiscoverDesign" Internet

tool for high school students teaches school design and construction, and also provides a forum for input from other students, teachers, and design professionals (Discover Design, 2011). Also, The School Planning Section of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction assists school districts, architects, and designers in its state in the planning and design of high-quality school designs. Other websites, such as web Urbanist, also provide coverage of educational, and creative works of culture from around the world that recently displayed 15 “cool high school, college and university building designs” such as the Austrian-designed Modern High School in central Los Angeles, and Orestad High School in Copenhagen.

Reconceptualized high schools could also cultivate student and educator opportunity for spiritual and emotional development within their environments (Slattery, 2006, p. 71). Becoming more prevalent are schools based on such ideas of Buddhist leader Daisaku Ikeda’s curriculum of Soka, or value-creating, education. The value-creating focuses on “cultivating individuals capacity to create values of gain, good, and beauty” and also “the spirit to foster individuals who create wisdom, courage, compassion, and other human virtues through dialogue, global citizenship, and human education” (Goulah & Takao, 2012, p. 60).

Just as “Christianity cannot be separated from Paulo Freire’s educational philosophy” (p. 60), they add Buddhism is inherently tied to Ikeda’s educational philosophy. But it’s clear religious doctrine is not taught in any class. In addition, Goulah and Takao Ikeda assert schools promulgate humanism, spirituality, totally and virtues of wisdom, courage and compassion because “they will enable students to enjoy personal growth and contribute to society” (p. 61). While separation of religion from schools is necessary, an atmosphere that does not hinder student choice in development of their spiritual well-being should be a cornerstone of our efforts. As such, Slattery (2006) argues “we must find an appropriate way to teach theology, textual hermeneutics, cultural diversity, and critical analysis without cross the line of separate between religion and government” (p. 77).

The thoughts of such reconceptualizations, whether in the dreams of a 52-year-old White male high school teacher in the South or in any other teacher’s memory will just remain inside, unless researchers, educators, and other community members actively pursue such ventures with their muses as their guide.

I know all too well the value of a tree.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

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