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Intersections between place, sustainability and transformative outdoor experiences

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Engaging students in positive experiences in and for the natural world is perhaps one of the most pressing issues for educators today. The challenges presented by unsustainable practices require reflection on how transformation, of individuals and of communities, might lead to a more sustainable future. In this article we explore intersections between transformation, sustainability and place, and we examine outdoor learning experiences that might assist in the promotion of sustainability. The paper is framed by three guiding questions: what are the goals of transformation and which/whose standards determine such goals; how can principles of sustainability act as a guiding framework for transformation; and what types of outdoor experiences might meaningfully contribute to such sustainability-focused transformation? This article draws on teachers' perspectives concerning the value of place(s) in outdoor learning. The authors suggest that the use of a framework of sustainability may facilitate greater intentionality, on the part of place-responsive educators, thus improving the opportunities for improved human–nature relations.

Keywords: transformation; sustainability; outdoor experience; place

Introduction

In a recent speech,[1] Dr Bob Brown, a well-known environmentalist and former leader of the Australian Green Party, reflected on how his early experiences of natural beauty and awe profoundly impacted on him. These formative experiences, on the Franklin River in Tasmania, led to a lifelong commitment to protect the environment. Dr Brown's reflections provide a catalyst for us to further explore the role that experience of place might have in transformative educational endeavours that work towards the goals of sustainability. Payne and Wattchow (2008) suggest that conceptualisations of the environment as a site for personal and social transformation in outdoor education continue to underpin much contemporary practice. Meanwhile, shallow environmental approaches such as minimum impact or 'green' practices within outdoor education have been criticised for being rooted in 'broader cultural and social contexts of an all-embracing and seductive consumerism' (Payne & Wattchow, 2008, p. 26). A number of writers (Cosgriff, 2008; Payne & Wattchow, 2008; Zink, 2003) have argued that the emphasis given to personal and social development outcomes, through adventure activities, has inhibited opportunities for outdoor educators to broaden participants' awareness and knowledge of the environment. We concur with Payne (2002, p. 17) that a 'reflexive turn' is needed if the

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field is to move beyond objectified or instrumental approaches to the environment that shape the experiences which are provided in many outdoor education programmes.

The call for a reconceptualisation of people's relationship to the environment is not new. As Aldo Leopold (1966) has stated: 'it is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value' (p. 261). Drawing on reflections as varied as observing the tracks of a skunk in mid-winter to a saw blade slicing through 80 years of 'good oak', Leopold powerfully advocated for an experiential and emotional land ethic that sought to reconnect people with their biotic community. In doing so, he was critical of social and economic systems that he considered undermined people's connection to, and care for, the natural world. Almost 50 years later we find ourselves using different language to talk about the same fundamental issues.

Engaging students in positive experiences in and with the natural world in western societies is perhaps one of the most pressing questions for educators today (Brookes & Dahle, 2007). Issues of place, sustainability and transformation are at the forefront of debates concerning the types of outdoor learning experiences educators might provide for students. Leopold was neither the first nor the only voice to critically examine industrialised western societies and the associated social, economic and ecological relationships. Stemming from the work of John Dewey (1938, 1958) and Paulo Freire (1970), education has become a space where questions surrounding the role of experience, the place of justice and the transformative potential have been evoked repeatedly. Within outdoor education, growing bodies of literature have engaged with critical theory/pedagogy (e.g., Bell, 1997; Humberstone & Pedersen, 2001; Martin, 1999; Payne, 2002; Warren & Loeffler, 2000); human nature relationships and deep ecology (e.g., Nicol, 2003; Preston, 2004; Sandell & Öhman, 2010); sustainability (e.g., Higgins, 2009; Hill, 2012; Irwin, 2008; Lugg, 2007); and place-based approaches (e.g., Stewart, 2004; Wattchow & Brown, 2011). As the editors for this issue have identified, there is 'much more work that needs to be done to broaden and deepen thinking in this area' (Nicol, Higgins, & Ross, 2012, p. 267). This paper contributes to the discussion by exploring what might be meant by the phrase 'transformation of self and society' (Nicol et al., 2012, p. 267); the role of sustainability in this process, and a consideration of how place-responsive outdoor experiences might contribute to achieving these goals. Our intent is to provide a theoretical basis for conceptualisations of transformation and sustainability in education whilst 'grounding' these insights in research with secondary school outdoor education teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Our starting point begins with a discussion of transformation. This is particularly pertinent given outdoor education's emphasis on personal and social development as a primary focus for transformation (Cosgriff, 2008; Zink, 2003). We believe that consideration of the possibilities offered by a 'wider reading' of the literature relating to educational/social transformation may provide outdoor educators with different ways of positioning transformation within a larger social movement.

Transformation

Transformation, according to Sterling (2001), involves change for the better whilst stressing democratic and participatory principles. Wrigley, Lingard, and Thomson (2012) argue that transformational change requires the consideration of 'structures as well as cultures' (p. 102). Drawing on these perspectives, we contend that any call for transformation of self or society carries with it a number of pertinent questions. Why is

transformation needed in the first place? What is to be transformed? What principles or frameworks determine or guide that transformation? And who decides what those principles or frameworks are? A consideration of, and appropriate response to, such questions needs to be contextualised because there will seldom be a universal solution. The focus of this section is on addressing these questions within the social and historical milieu of the twenty-first century whilst maintaining contextual integrity in outdoor learning experiences.

The guiding question for this themed edition—'In what ways can experiences in the outdoors contribute to the transformation of self and society that environmental sustainability calls for?' (Nicol et al., 2012, p. 268)—contains a number of statements that are worthy of further consideration. First, there is the proposition that environmental sustainability calls for transformation of self and society. Second, there is an assumption that transformation of self and society contributes to environmental sustainability, or indeed sustainability more broadly. Third, there is the belief that experiences in the outdoors somehow contribute to the transformation of self and society. Whilst we do not necessarily disagree with these statements, we believe it is necessary to examine what is meant by transformation and to consider how (environmental) sustainability is understood if we are to frame an appropriate response concerning the types of experiences that might be offered.

Transformation within outdoor education

The historical foundations of outdoor education practice in English-speaking countries have been well documented and critiqued (e.g., Brookes, 2000; Lugg, 2004; Payne, 2002). Central to some of the critiques has been the need to reappraise notions of individual learning outcomes (i.e. the transformation of the autonomous individual) arising from participation in outdoor programmes (e.g., Brookes, 2003; Brown, 2009; Seaman, 2007). Central to these arguments is the acknowledgement that learning is situated within a broader social context and what counts as valued knowledge and legitimate action is contingent on the social context. Thus, the long-term efficacy of behavioural changes exhibited by an individual during an outdoor programme, without support post experience, is questionable (Brown, 2010). Claims about personal transformation within outdoor education, and the more recent critiques, can be considered an opportunity to reconsider what we mean by transformation in contemporary society. In this way, contributions from influential figures such as Kurt Hahn can be seen in a historical context. Hahn's concern with the transformation of self and society can be viewed as an appropriate response to the political and social conditions in early–mid-twentieth-century Europe. He saw outdoor challenges and adventures as an excellent way to achieve the required transformation in young men deemed necessary following the Depression and the outbreak of war. Thus, their response was influenced by the political and social context of this period. The need for personal transformation—the development of fortitude, resilience and perseverance in the face of conflict—was paramount. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, these characteristics may be of no less importance but the end goals of developing such qualities have changed. For the majority of young people, preparedness for armed conflict or foreign service to support a colonial empire has been replaced by different challenges arising from globalisation and technology. For over two decades there have been growing calls from authors such as Bowers (2001), Orr (1992, 2004) and Sterling (2001) for a transformation of self and society that will fundamentally adjust the basis of economic, social and political structures with a

focus on achieving sustainability. The scientific evidence supporting these calls for sustainability is robust (see, e.g., United Nations Environment Programme, 2012). It is clear that the need for transformation is as relevant as it was 100 years ago—the central issue is what do we mean by transformation and how can it be fostered and advanced?

Transformation: a socio-ecological imperative

Many readers will be familiar with environmental, social and economic sustainability issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, waste and pollution, global poverty and malnutrition, rising social and economic inequality in many developed western nations, and trends of production and consumption that are outstripping the resources of the planet. Substantive reports such as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005), the IPCC *Fifth Assessment Report* (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2013) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2012) *GEO5 Global Environment Outlook Report* point to the significant negative impact of industrialised nations on the planet and its ecosystems. Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP, states that the findings of the GEO5 report are 'sobering and cause for profound concern' (UNEP, 2012, p. xvii). Plumwood (2002) describes such ecological issues as a failing of reason and culture. She argues that cultures influenced by global capitalism and the underlying rationale of constant growth are incapable of adapting themselves to the finite limits of the planet. Moreover, she argues that western societies demonstrate aspects of denial in continuing to promote patterns of thinking and behaviour that are ecologically irresponsible and unsustainable. Kahn (2010) argues that whilst there has been a powerful and popular rise in the demand for planetary sustainability, this is undermined by expansion of unsustainable economic practices and modern development strategies under the guise of globalisation. What is clear is that environmental sustainability cannot be separated from issues of social justice. In light of these social, cultural and environmental insights, we concur with authors such as Bluhdorn (2011), Hamilton (2010) and Orr (2009) in advocating for transformative change at all levels including systems, institutions, organisations and individuals (e.g., public transportation, education and personal choices about consumption of goods and services).

If evidence of the need for transformation is substantial, it is necessary to ask what is to be transformed and what constitutes transformation? The underpinning question for this themed edition was premised on the need for environmental sustainability. We believe we need to extend the discussion here to include social, cultural, economic and political aspects integrated with environmental sustainability. Although various forms of outdoor education clearly have connections with the environment, we would argue that their relationship to environmental sustainability is less than transparent. Many critical and ecological writers in education, such as Bowers (2001), Gruenewald (2003) and Kahn (2010), argue for holistic, critical and culturally sensitive approaches to address ecological, social and economic sustainability or justice issues as a complex whole rather than disparate parts. We contend that to consider only environmental aspects of sustainability without regard for social issues of class, gender, race and ethnicity, sexuality and economic concerns such as employment and stable financial systems is problematic. We thus adopt a socio-ecological approach to sustainability that necessarily includes political, economic, social and environmental transformation.

Education as transformation and the transformation of education

A broad view of transformation for sustainability, as encapsulated by a socio-ecological approach, places a challenge to the 'industrial' model of education that exists in many western nations. The ability for education to be transformative, as an existing structure within an unsustainable system, is problematic and it has been argued that it is education itself that needs to be transformed (Orr, 2004; Sterling, 2001, 2010).

There is a strong case for the transformation of education across western capitalist nations. Authors such as Gruenewald (2003) and Breunig (2005) suggest that the dominant theme of education in many western countries is based on neoliberal assumptions of individualism and self-interest, competition and free market economics, where the primary purpose of schools is to prepare people for a growing and changing workforce. The critique of neoliberal influences on education continues through the writings of Apple (2009), Giroux (2003) and McLaren and Kincheloe (2007), who all argue that the dominant educational paradigm, characterised by high-stakes testing and a prescriptive curriculum, predominantly serves the interests of the economy and corporations while failing to embrace more progressive forms of education that attend to issues of injustice and inequality. Furthermore, Wrigley et al. (2012) argue that the prevailing educational response to the dominance of economic greed has been to work with and actively service it. They contend that dominant educational policies fail to engage with the complexity of schools whilst maintaining traditional practices that, 'simply do not meet the needs of individuals, communities or nation in the twenty-first century' (2012, p. 97). We are strongly persuaded by these arguments and concur with Sterling (2001) who argues for a transformative re-visioning of western educational paradigms, suggesting:

> ... most mainstream education *sustains unsustainability*—through uncritically reproducing norms, by fragmenting understanding, by sieving winners and losers, by recognising only a narrow part of the spectrum of human ability and need, by an inability to explore alternatives, by rewarding dependency and conformity, and by serving the consumerist machine. In response, we need to *reclaim* an authentic education which recognises the best of past thinking and practice but also to *re-vision* education and learning to help assure the future. (Sterling, 2001, pp. 14–15; original emphasis)

The re-visioning of an authentic education as described by Sterling implies both the transformation of education and transformational education. Although many educators operating in the schooling system may legitimately feel they have little or no influence over the systems within which they work, this does not negate the possibilities for educators to engage students in transformative educational experiences. Sterling (2001, 2010) and Kahn (2010) suggest that transformation of individuals should help them to develop attitudes, skills and knowledge to be active and political citizens in the transformative project of working towards a sustainable future. This of course raises some critical questions. If the long-term sustainability and well-being of planetary ecosystems and social communities is the key goal of transformation, then there must be robust frameworks by which this transformation can be both guided and practiced. We believe the exploration of how such frameworks might intersect with pedagogical practice, such as place-responsiveness, is important. We recognise here that sustainability and sustainable development are subject to conceptual debate and we intend to provide a necessarily brief overview in order to explore how outdoor learning experiences might contribute to the broader transformative project.

Sustainability as a guiding framework for transformation

In considering how sustainability can act as an action-oriented guiding framework for transformation of self and society we draw on the work of Christen and Schmidt (2012), who proposed a formal theoretical framework for conceptions of sustainability. This framework sits within a plethora of perspectives regarding sustainability, sustainable development and sustainability education. We recognise these are contested concepts with competing and sometimes contradictory definitions (Jacobs, 1999; Räthzel & Uzzell, 2009; Williams & Millington, 2004) that are symptomatic of the post/late modernities reflexive turn (Best & Kellner, 1997; Giddens, 1991). Postmodern viewpoints recognise the multiplicity of social interactions and epistemologies, the importance of diversity of perspectives, and the plurality of socially constructed cultural norms, behaviours and patterns of thinking. The 'one-size-fits-all' perspectives of modernity are less appropriate today as they fail to recognise the complexity of the world we now live in. However, an 'anything goes' approach to social transformation and sustainability is problematic. As Christen and Schmidt (2012) argue: 'if sustainability is conceptualised randomly, it cannot orientate our actions in a justifiable way. As long as a concept is used to validate whichever action, it does not serve to justify any action at all' (p. 401). Consequently, we are interested here in exploring how sustainability might be conceptualised in ways that avoid inflexible concrete definitions whilst providing a guiding framework for transformation.

Christen and Schmidt's (2012) framework moves beyond the problematic aim of defining sustainability, by employing a meta-approach that takes into account questions such as 'What is to be sustained?' and 'How can it be sustained?' This approach 'reflects the general conceptual elements that any theory of sustainability must contain and concentrate on the concept instead of a concrete conception or theory explaining this idea' (2012, p. 402). There are five key organising ideas (modules) in Christen and Schmidt's (2012, pp. 403–406) formal framework of sustainability. The first, 'The Sustainability Problem', emphasises the need to recognise that human development since the industrial revolution has become largely unsustainable (and inequitable), as evidenced by reports such as GEO5 (UNEP, 2012). The second module is 'The Normative Principle of Justice'. This principle recognises that 'sustainability is grounded on a normative foundation' (Christen & Schmidt, 2012, p. 404), which emphasises the rights of distributive and political justice and quality of life at both intra-generational and inter-generational levels. In practice, this principle suggests that sustainability should guide ethical decisions by correcting present and future injustices through ensuring equitable distribution of goods and the right to participation in political and democratic process. Moreover, this principle claims 'universal validity; it counts not only for every living human being, but also for every human being in the future' (2012, p. 404).

The third module is 'The Descriptive Principle of Integration', which recognises the systemic and holistic foundation of sustainability through stressing the integration of socio-cultural, economic and environmental/ecological aspects. In Christen and Schmidt's (2012) view, this conceptualisation of the 'nature–society system' (p. 405) provides the conditions upon which the normative principle of justice should be achieved. With regard to the issues central to this special edition, we are convinced that the principle of integration implies not only that sustainability should be integrated into all aspects of human endeavour but that social, economic and environmental dimensions need to operate in an integrated fashion to address the sustainability problem.

In the fourth organising idea, Christen and Schmidt (2012) discuss 'The Criteria for Sustainability' by which we might respond to the central question; what is to be sustained? They suggest such criteria 'indicate minimal requirements that sustainable development has to satisfy' (2012, p. 405), whilst ensuring that sustainability criteria balance competing or conflicting agendas and are viewed holistically. The fifth organising idea, 'Transformation into Practice', is guided by the question of how the criteria and principles of sustainability are evident in practice at both individual and institutional levels. Utilising Christen and Schmidt's framework, practice becomes less about following a 'recipe book for sustainability' and more like localised action that is guided by key principles and criteria for sustainability.

Sustainability and place-responsiveness

Key questions arise for us at this point with regard to how Christen and Schmidt's (2012) framework for sustainability might inform place-responsive pedagogies to provide a theoretical platform for considering the relationships between outdoor learning experiences, transformation and sustainability. Place-responsive pedagogy and its relationship with outdoor learning/education have received significant attention from Wattchow and Brown (2011), among others. Drawing on the work of Relph (1976) and others, Wattchow and Brown contend that, 'place is suggestive of both the imaginative and physical reality of a location and its people, and how the two interact and change each other' (2011, p. xxi). Place therefore moves beyond just the physical environment and comes to having meaning through the interactions that people have with it. Furthermore, much scholarship in place-based education (see, e.g., Gruenewald, 2003) is grounded on deep concern about the degradation of environments and injustices within communities brought about through unsustainable social practices.

In a recent theoretical contribution, Mannion, Fenwick, and Lynch (2013) suggest that the core of place-responsive pedagogy, 'involves explicitly teaching by-means-of-an-environment with the aim of understanding and improving human–environment relations' (p. 803). Here the work of Christen and Schmidt can help to unpack and illuminate possibilities for enacting place-responsive pedagogy.

Educational aims of 'understanding and improving human–environment relations' imply that there is currently something awry with human–environment relationships ('The Sustainability Problem') and that something needs to change (be transformed). We would argue that the process of educating to improve such relations might be enacted through place-responsive pedagogies in conjunction with the sustainability framework of Christen and Schmidt. Normative and descriptive 'Principles of Justice and Integration', embodied through 'Criteria for Sustainability' and 'Transformation into Practice' can help us to better understand how aspirations of place-responsive pedagogy might be enacted. Moreover, the notion of a nature–society system, central to Christen and Schmidt's framework, has much in common with culture–nature interactions so central to place-responsive pedagogies (Mannion et al., 2013).

From another angle we are further persuaded about the nexus between place, outdoor experience and sustainability through the work of educational philosopher Michael Bonnett (2013). Whilst problematising education for sustainable development at semantic, ethical and epistemological levels, Bonnett sees much potential in the opportunities afforded by embodied experience in place. Bound by notions of 'presencing'—that is, the simultaneous experience of the presence of nature and being human—and 'place-making'—that is, the sense of nature shaping us as we make meaning with places—Bonnett argues that a deep

sense of respect, wonder, connection and care for places can engender a responsiveness to the well-being of all natural things that may give meaning to the way we comprehend and express sustainability (2013, pp. 264–268).

We therefore see much promise in seeking to further understand how intersections between place, sustainability and transformation might be embodied in outdoor learning experiences and pedagogical practices. The following sections draw on empirical data from two research projects to further discuss these intersections.

Teachers' voices

In considering intersections between place, transformation and sustainability, we are particularly interested in how outdoor experiences might be designed to encourage students to think beyond themselves and help them to understand the complex relationships within a 'nature–society system' (Christen & Schmidt, 2012). That is, what types of learning experiences are teachers offering that might transform students' understandings of their place in the world, from consumers to active agents of change? Drawing on two separate research projects that worked with outdoor education teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand to explore sustainability and place-responsive pedagogies (Hill, 2011; Brown, 2013), one of the central themes that appeared to emerge was teachers' desire to encourage students to develop connections with environments and thereby develop an ethic of care. In the following sections we draw on excerpts from interviews to highlight how some outdoor education teachers perceived the fostering of connection to places/land/environment as being central to the work of place-responsive pedagogy and sustainability.[2]

The importance of connections

All of the teachers in the two studies (n = 12) valued the contribution that outdoor education provided for students to gain first-hand experiences in, and with, the environment in a multitude of ways. Teachers recognised the importance of structuring direct embodied experiences in the outdoors. As Josh stated:

> The direct experience of nature, I think is a very powerful one . . . People come back from an outdoor education experience having had a closer connection with a particular area with a kind of affection. I suspect that without that affection, umm, further progress [towards sustainability] is going to be impeded.

Another teacher spoke of facilitating learning experiences that:

> bring the curriculum alive . . . allowing kids to experience their learning in a way that they can hear it, they can smell it and they can describe how it feels, and they can consider their relationship with it [the land]. (Aroha)

For both Josh and Aroha, direct experiences in nature were seen as vital to developing a connection or relationship with places. Moreover, Josh explicitly drew links between experiences, connection and helping students make progress towards sustainability. Sophie's perspective furthers this idea in suggesting that connection is necessary for commitment—a commitment that is a precursor for action:

> If you have a, if you have some kind of connection with the land, I think you are more commitment to, to looking after it as well.

Rachel extended the concept of connection to the land to include the learner's understanding of the interplay between people and places and how this shapes a sense of belonging and potentially impacts on sustainability:

> The whole idea with, you know, being bonded with a place, you know, your people and your place, I think is really crucial [for sustainability].

The comments above reveal important beliefs teachers have about the role of direct embodied experience in the outdoors that is both place-responsive and linked to learning about sustainability. The following excerpt from Aroha extends the discussion of environmental connection to the interconnection between people and places, and situates these relationships within a Māori worldview:

> I love that it is more than just a one-off experience, it's about building relationships, showing reciprocity to not only the people but to the land and building a relationship with the land that they can take with them forever . . . and one of things that place-based asks us, or challenges us to do is actually speak with the people that the river or that place belongs to and ask them what matters as learning, and when I asked that question to one of the *kaumātua* [old man, elder, adult] from this area . . . he said the river has its own *mauri* [life principle, special character],[3] its own identity and if we nurture the river, it will nurture us, so that's what drove learning . . . So for me that is what outdoor education is about, it's about developing that relationship, not only with the people but with the land.

As a Māori educator, working in a school with a high percentage of students who are Māori, Aroha has described connection within her cultural context. A place-responsive approach requires educators to be cognisant of the cultural and non-human world that constitutes the learning environment. The inclusion of Māori perspectives (e.g. acknowledging the *mauri* [spirit] of the river and the concept of *kaitiakitanga* [guardianship]) illustrates how outdoor learning experiences can incorporate an ethic of care that draws on, and connects to, the knowledges residing in local communities. The sense of responsibility and care was also evident in other, non-Māori, teachers' beliefs. This was apparent in Sophie's earlier comment and it was also a feature of Bryn's practice as reflected below:

> I personally like to encourage a sense of ownership of a frequently visited area. With 'ownership' comes a responsibility to look after it—put something back into it—to maintain and improve it.

The development of an ethic of care through building an ongoing relationship is different from utilitarian perspectives, which see the outdoors as a testing ground or blank canvas upon which personal or group development outcomes are achieved. Aroha shared an example of how 'traditional pursuits focussed' programmes had been problematic for her school and had led to behavioural issues:

> One of the big issues was that we had kids that were just not respecting the environment you know, like just not respecting the place. They came in, they were visitors to it, they had no connection to it, no stories, they just had no idea, . . . so a lot happened there that it was straight out and out disrespect for property, for the people of that place and they just weren't connected. And one of things I find with place responsive and Māori and culturally

> responsive education is that kids, once you learn about a place and in Māori culture there is a lot of personification that occurs. Any time personification occurs and there is an identity to a place or to a mountain, or to a river, or to a ocean or whatever there is this inherent respect that comes from those kids because it's a living entity … and that is one of the best things about place responsiveness, if you share those stories.

The disrespect referred to by Aroha occurred during a rock-climbing/abseiling session at a disused quarry site that had been chosen because it had suitable features for the selected activities. Whilst we recognise that old quarries are often used for climbing activities, the one in this instance was characterised by abandoned buildings and machinery and a despoiled environment. In choosing this site for climbing/abseiling, presumably to achieve personal and group development goals, there was little thought given to the stories and histories of the quarry as a 'place'. The students' behaviour and acts of 'disrespect' (e.g. spray-painting disused buildings) reflect broader societal attitudes to the environment so vividly portrayed by the decay and degradation of the quarry site. We are less concerned here with critiquing the instrumental and anthropocentric utilisation of the environment for narrow conceptions of learning (i.e. personal and social development through climbing activities). Rather, the focusing question here revolves around how experiences of such places may be facilitated to contribute to students' connection to and care for place. Clearly the climbing experience in question failed in this regard. As argued by Hill (2013), not all experiences of place afforded by outdoor education necessarily work towards the goals of sustainability. If outdoor learning experiences are an important part of developing connection to and care for place, as advocated by teachers in this section, then how might such experiences be constructed and facilitated to more effectively foster a transformative relationship with the environment?

Experiences designed to foster positive relationships with the local environment

Several of the teachers were explicit about their desire to assist students in acquiring skills that allowed them to feel comfortable in, and to meaningfully interact with, place (outdoor environments). For instance, some teachers revealed the potential for 'slow' simple activities or repeated visits to a site that might contribute to the skills and knowledge to be comfortable and connected to environments. As Bryn so aptly stated:

> We need to make a transformation from being a visitor in a foreign place to being comfortable, 'at home'. Spend time, simple journeys, becoming familiar with surroundings & nature, rather than an outdoor pursuits focus.

Ongoing involvement was considered more likely to foster an 'appreciation of the environment' (Sarah) than short one-off experiences. Tom also realised that, 'in order to connect to land and place we need to have some history with that place, familiarity, prior experience, stories etcetera'. We argue, then, that place-responsive outdoor programmes which seek to contribute to transformation and sustainability should be designed to sequentially build skills and competence so that students would be confident and be able to integrate and utilise their learning beyond the school context. Therefore it is important that the types of activities chosen reflected the environment in which the school community was situated and the expertise of the school staff.

These teachers were conscious of the pedagogical choices that helped to foster appropriate skill development, in local places that were readily accessible and which extended engagement beyond the immediate concerns of learning objectives associated

with the school curriculum. In this way, 'schooling becomes an extension, or complement to, the life of the broader community' (Wattchow & Brown, 2011, p. 153).

Developing an affective relationship was deemed to be important by a number of teachers. As Josh indicated, a skilful educator should encourage a 'valuing and gratitude and gratefulness of a moment or of a place'. He strongly believed that the affective aspects of positive experiences encourage an ethic of care for the particular places in which experiences occurred. Sarah contrasted a place-responsive approach, which seeks to connect students to their local community and place, with the 'boot camp type mentality' (Sarah) that pervaded some outdoor education provision she had observed. For her, the problem with this style of programme is that the students:

> never want to go into the bush again, yeah they are just going to have one experience of hardship and learn in the deep end type of environment and they are not going to make it part of their lives.

Sarah sought to facilitate experiences that encouraged students to learn about themselves, their community and their environment by engaging in slower-paced and less 'thrilling' activities. These local journeys permitted students to build skills and take responsibility for their decisions in places that are easily accessible and can be revisited without specialist equipment or advanced technical skills. Building connection to and care for place lies at the heart of this approach.

Aroha described how a focus on fostering a sense of connection with place(s) had altered her approach to designing outdoor learning experiences. When the aim of an experience is to encourage a connection to place the activities follow a more coherent process rather than trying:

> to fit a random activity into the curriculum and make it meaningful . . . I have found that when the place is the focus of the learning then the activities fit into that place, in fact the activities are defined by that place.

These teachers were actively resisting efforts to fill an outdoor trip with lots of busy activities. By concentrating on the environment (physical, cultural and social), teachers are providing a counter to the dominant adventure narrative in outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand (Boyes, 2012). Moreover, Aroha's integration of Māori cultural concepts and seeking advice from elders is a small example of taking seriously the students' cultural background and engaging more deeply with localised cultural concepts of place in the face of globalised and decontextualised images with which students are so often confronted.

Discussion

The key themes in the previous sections centred on how outdoor learning experiences could foster a connection to, and care for, place that might in turn contribute to moving towards a sustainable future. It is at this nexus of place-responsive pedagogy and sustainability that we find significant potential for transformative outdoor experience. As demonstrated by the teachers in these studies, the development of connections to place, and learning about one's relationship with place, can help students to understand the nature–society system within which they operate and how their worldview, attitudes and actions impact upon that system. This can potentially lead to deeper reflection and

understanding about how one's relationship with place is contingent on both current (intra-generational) and future (inter-generational) justice and how sustainability-based ethics might guide action towards solving the sustainability problem (Christen & Schmidt, 2012).

We suggest that notions of place-responsive pedagogy (Wattchow & Brown, 2011; Mannion et al., 2013) can be enriched through considering principles of sustainability as enunciated by Christen and Schmidt (2012). Place-responsive outdoor learning experiences may be enhanced by thoughtful integration of sustainability principles and criteria such as intra/inter-generational justice and the integration of social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainability. For teachers in this research, the provision of embodied affective experiences of place, coupled with the opportunity for students to develop deeper understandings of and connection to place, was both desirable and achievable. However, not all teachers draw direct links to sustainability from such place-based connections. How, then, might such links be made more explicit?

Here the works of Bonnett (2013) and Nicol (2014) are useful. Bonnett suggests that, 'in experiencing the presencing of things in natural places we can become aware of the integrity of nature … and be struck by the "rightness" of some natural thing' (2013, p. 268). Conversely, experiences of degraded places can evoke 'a sense of disruption of nature's integrity and perhaps experience a sense of outrage' (2013, p. 268). The teachers in this research seem to be aware of the powerful potential of affective experiences to foster learning. Perhaps what is lacking here is 'intentionality' (Nicol, 2014). We contend that the promotion and utilisation of a sustainability framework, such as that of Christen and Schmidt (2012), to intentionally frame and help constitute place-responsive learning, might lead to greater transformative potential to work towards the goals of sustainability.

This has significant implications for educational experiences under the guise of outdoor education. In some contexts, notably Aotearoa New Zealand, some conceptions of outdoor education have departed from pedagogical approaches related to environmental and sustainability education (Boyes, 2012). As supported by the teachers' perspectives, we contend that pedagogically sound, student-centred outdoor experiences, which are responsive to the lives and places of learners and are guided by principles of sustainability, need to be thoughtfully framed and facilitated to have the potential to be transformative.

One of the strengths of direct embodied experiences of the natural world is engaging learners in a learning process that has meaning for them, whilst helping them to understand their place in the world. The teacher perspectives in this article have highlighted the value of providing experiences that connect learners with places/environment/land in an affective manner that may assist in the development of an ethic of care. Although complex, this association between connection to and care for the environment is supported by literature in the fields of deep ecology, eco-psychology and place-based pedagogies (see Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Nicol, 2003; Roszak, 2001; Roszak, Gomes, & Kanner, 1995). Gruenewald and Smith (2008) argue that, 'education in connection to place must also inspire in learners an appreciation of beauty and wonder, for it is through the experience of beauty and wonder that we risk opening ourselves to others and the world' (p. xx). Furthermore, Chawla (1998, 1999) suggests that experiences of nature are one of the most significant life experiences that contribute to positive environmental attitudes. Whilst we acknowledge that the issue of influences on pro-environmental behaviour is complex and that environmental knowledge, connection or positive attitudes are no guarantee of environmentally sustainable actions (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002), we contend that affective embodied experience of the outdoors comes to hold significant promise for educational transformation guided by a sustainability framework.

We are conscious of not overstating the claims of the transformative potential of the approaches outlined above. Transformation is a process leading to change rather than an easily measurable and quickly achieved outcome. The data we have drawn from highlight teachers' perspectives about how they perceive learning experiences to impact on their students. Data relating directly to the influence these types of pedagogical approaches have on students are sparse within the outdoor education literature, and are in need of significant future research.

Notwithstanding these cautions, we remain convinced of the potential for appropriately framed and facilitated outdoor experiences to contribute to the transformation of self and society and work towards the goal of a sustainable future. The perspectives of the 12 outdoor education teachers in these studies also supported this vision.

Concluding thoughts

Through this article we have considered the role that embodied, place-responsive outdoor experiences might play in the transformation of self and society as guided by principles of sustainability. Scientific evidence such as the GEO5 report (UNEP, 2012) points to the need for transformation relating to sustainability at all levels of society including education. We believe that conversations about transformation need to be situated within broader discourses concerning change, social justice and sustainability, particularly as they pertain to education. In our exploration of teachers' perspectives on outdoor experience and place in this article, we have drawn on Christen and Schmidt's (2012) Formal Framework for Conceptions of Sustainability to guide and articulate a broader vision of sustainability. We believe that the theoretical enrichment provided through the intersections between place-responsive pedagogies and Christen and Schmidt's framework can be of utility to educators who seek to engage outdoor experiences to develop attitudes, skills and knowledge related to sustainability. The 'shape' of place-responsive and sustainability-informed programmes will inevitably be influenced by local conditions. We recognise there is still a substantial challenge for both researchers and educators in this field to further explore how our educational endeavours might be more focused on the transformational task called for by sustainability. We believe there remain significant future research opportunities further investigating the nexus between place, connection and sustainability, particularly related to the impacts on student learning, transformation and actions. Education has many challenges but also has significant opportunities in meeting and addressing issues raised by current unsustainable practices. The role that outdoor experiences can play in this educative process should be of interest to all outdoor educators. The teachers in these studies have demonstrated that it is possible to provide outdoor experiences grounded in holistic understandings of place and sustainability.

Notes

1. Students of Sustainability Australia National Conference, Launceston, Tasmania, 5 July 2013.
2. Further details of the two studies and the analysis are detailed in Hill (2011) and Brown (2013).
3. Māori definitions as in Ryan (1994).

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