

BOOK REVIEWS

Bringing School to Life: Place-Based Education Across the Curriculum

By Sarah K. Anderson

2017 Paperback

200 pages £22.95

ISBN 978-1-4758-3061-3

Published by Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham

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Place-based education is often regarded by educators in the field as an alternative form of learning in schools. It is antithetical to the textbook learning model. This model is where teachers introduce geography or science through pretty pictures of faraway places, but ignore the tangible beauty of the material world, at times even as it is locally located in the school yard or community environment (Sobel, 2004, p. 5).

Unlike the traditional text-book method of learning, place-based education emphasizes hands-on experiences while connecting children to their neighbourhoods, communities, and ecologies (Anderson, 2017, p. 1). The work of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze is cited and often interpreted in the field of education as a way of enhancing or justifying alternative curricula in art in particular, as well as other classroom subjects. Many of Deleuze's concepts are applied to the classroom in reference to how they should function, how curricula should be organized, and how children and teachers should interact. Whilst art education in particular is saturated with Deleuzian themes and concepts, I have found through my own research that place-based educational texts, albeit extensively practical, lack any mention of Deleuze or his ideas to either enhance or justify the use of it in schools.

This surprises me. Deleuze's writings theorize many of the concepts that make up place-based education—such as map making—as ways to navigate and represent the world around us. In Sarah K. Anderson's (2017) book *Bringing School to Life: Place-Based Education Across the Curriculum*, the author argues for the use of map making in schools, and the development of empathy through play in place-based learning (pp. 13-145). In this review, I argue that Anderson's philosophy of place-based learning, and even practical examples given in her chapter on "Mapping,"

could be further enhanced through the application of Deleuze's (1997, 1990) ideas in the areas of mapping and milieu in elementary and middle school children. I consider her book is weakened by omission of Deleuzian references.

Deleuze's (1997) concept of the map and his notions in regards to how children map their milieu both emotionally and cartographically could enhance how map making is approached in the classroom. Anderson's book provides an extension to the field of education by outlining her own, real-life practical examples of how a place-based curriculum changed the way charter school students in Portland, Oregon connected to their local businesses and environment (pp. 1-145). Anderson makes the case for place-based education as a form of learning which can be used to teach any subject, thematic unit and incorporate curriculum for students ranging from kindergarten to middle school (pp.1-29). One of the major tenants of place-based education echoed by Anderson in this book is map making, because one of the goals of place-based education is for students to know and understand the land and communities around them, with the making of maps helping ground students in finding their sense of place in the community where they live (p. 129). "What is where, why there, and why care" are leading questions which the author deems can help children better understand intimate relationships between people and the land on which we live (p. 15).

The examples Anderson provides in this book demonstrate real life evidence that place-based education incites real change in schools, including how to modify activities according to different age groups (pp. 1-45). In this way, I would argue that this book works as a practical manual for teachers seeking to implement place-based curriculum in their classrooms. While I believe this text provides an extensive array of examples as an attempt to further the use of place-based education in charter schools, I would argue the use of Deleuzian concepts in children's map making can further the claims made for and in place-based education. The book by Anderson then is missing a wonderful opportunity to enrich her presentation. Deleuze's (1997) concept of mapping adds another dimension to the mapping exercises and activities from Anderson's classroom which grounds place-based education in a deeper, ontological sense of ecology. The use of map making, through Deleuzian eyes, can be seen as more than just a re-telling or representation of geography.

In the field of place-based education, map making and map using are tools used to represent place and community. The author relays this importance in her second chapter titled, "Mapping." Anderson writes that making pictures of where we are and where we live creates a more intimate relationship with the places where we live, work and play (p. 14). She begins her discussion on mapping in the classroom by justifying why maps act as a great tool for children learning different subjects. Maps are used as a way to answer questions in regards to history, who we are, where we came from, and who comes before us (p. 15). One of the curricular

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activities from the Cottonwood Charter school shared by the author in this chapter is one which asked the students to answer these questions by drawing maps of their neighborhoods. Anderson shares accounts in this chapter, of how the students responded to the assignment by making connections to other students in their class (pp. 15-25). While the author advocates for the use of maps in her classroom as a tool for connecting place, identity, and community relationships, the field of place-based education fails to take into account the map as dynamic, multi-relational, and constantly changing zone of becomings (Deleuze, 1997, pp. 61-66).

In his essay "What Children Say," Deleuze (1997) offers a conception of mapping that goes beyond accurately representing the cartographic space. He argues children are constantly mapping, and in doing so they are always already attempting to make sense of the world (pp. 61-62). Deleuze (1997) does not mean here that children are always utilizing the mapping blueprint or physically drawing everything they see around them as was the practical exercise from Anderson's class. Instead, I would argue Deleuze (1997) is using the map to describe the ways in which children make sense of their cartographies. Instead of representing spatial relations, children's maps express their sense of the world. He goes further with this idea by arguing that children are not only attempting to understand the physical world around them, but also the imagined, the emotional, and the intangible—what Deleuze (1997) describes as intensities (pp. 62-63).

In his book *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze (1994) defines intensities as the necessary condition of possibility for sensation. By this he means that we need intensities in order to feel temperature, speed, emotion, and even pressure, and while we can certainly measure speed or temperature in relation to an identifiable object, we cannot quantify or measure temperature or speed (Deleuze, 1994, pp. 222-237). The immeasurability of intensities is not limited to the application of temperature or speed, but it can also be applied to invisible forces in the classroom. For example, in *Bringing School to Life* Anderson claims specific places are particularly important for children in comparison to others. While she gives examples of playful locations such as a mountain top, or a play-fort having a bigger role in the lives of young children, the author does not take into account the reasons why such places appear this way to students (p.13). Deleuze's (1994) intensities are useful here, as we can assume that specific places appear to children as sensorially denser (overflowing with intensities) than others, and thus contain more value/sense.

The main component of Anderson's chapter on mapping encompasses real world examples of how map making was used in the author's classroom as a way to bridge cultural differences, and family dynamics (pp. 17-18). In one example, Anderson shares that a socially awkward student was able to connect with others in the class by sharing two different maps of his parent's different neighborhoods. His presentation to the class yielded a positive discussion on how his parents were

divorced, and so he lived in two different homes. This point caused other students in similar situations to reach out and share their common experiences, connecting to the boy in a way that was friendly and compassionate (p. 17). The second example was a map created by a young boy who had been recently adopted from Liberia. He created an intricate map of the village where he used to live. In his presentation, the boy connected with the classroom by telling stories of his experiences playing soccer barefoot, and learning to cook outside with his grandmother (p. 17). These presentations shared by the author depict the different ways in which children attempt to make sense of, or “map,” their environments (pp. 17-18). According to Deleuze (1997) children are not living isolated or acting only through their subconscious outside the environment, they are already plunged into it (pp. 63-66). Similarly, to the maps they shared in the classroom, children are not fixed or stagnant, but are always becoming. This Deleuzian term is often misused in the field of art education, to describe everyday events. Deleuze (1997) uses the infinitive of the verb to be “becoming” to describe children because they are never fixed beings, they are an action which is constantly happening without end (Deleuze, 1997, pp. 61-66).

A clear example of this can be found in Anderson’s story of the young boy from Liberia, and the mapping activity where he drew out and described his village. Although his map was a physical drawing of the space he remembered, the map ceased being just a visual representation of his village when he began articulating his experiences there. Through his words the boy infused the drawing with meaning, as he attempted to describe the movement and milieu which he could not get across through the map’s design alone. In this manner, I would argue that the boy engaged in what Deleuze (1997) calls “exploring milieus, by means of dynamic trajectories” (Deleuze, 1997, p. 61). In his essay *What Children Say*, Deleuze (1997) describes the milieu as the space or setting made up of qualities, substances, powers and events. In the psychoanalytic example of little Hans, Deleuze (1997) defines the street as the milieu of the child, with its paving stones, noises, animals and dramas (p. 61). Milieus and place are distinct here in that according to Deleuze’s (1997) definition, milieus are active, and constantly changing events. I would argue that understanding the milieu is vital to how children understand place. Deleuze’s (1997) milieu is essential to place-based education, because it allows for educators to presuppose milieu as the condition of possibility for place. The child’s understanding and care for the place in which they live comes out of their abilities and experiences of “mapping the milieu.”

The children in Anderson’s class map out their milieus by presenting their maps as more than just drawings of the physical place where they live, but as a collage of experiences that encompass sounds, emotions, textures, and scents. This way of mapping is relevant to Deleuze (1997) because it relates to how he conceptualizes life as a montage and collaging of different pathways (p. 63). If we

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apply this concept of life to Anderson's classroom, it becomes clear how each student's map not only exists in isolation from one another as individual experiences, but as dynamic becomings that fold into one another, in a way that "each map finds itself modified in the following map" (Deleuze, 1997, p. 63). Each story and experience of place is connected to another. This is clear in the way in which the classroom children related and connected with the boy's experience of having divorced parents (Anderson, 2017, p.17).

I would argue that these Deleuzian concepts and ideas around map making and becoming only work to enhance the field of place-based education. They allow for a deeper theoretical understanding of how children perceive place. Deleuze's (1997) ideas on mapping and milieus offer an understanding of place that is dynamic, un-fixed, and constantly changing. The use of Deleuzian concepts in place-based education would further improve the field by challenging educators to think about maps as more than just drawings to help children's spatial awareness. Maps are much more than this, they are a way in which children are attempting to articulate and express the intensities present in their milieu.

While the field of place-based education has used maps as a way of categorizing and representing the cartographic environment, in her "Mapping" chapter, Anderson does demonstrate how her students used maps in a more creative and non-traditional way. The third grade class at the Cottonwood school engaged in a similar mapping exercise as the other students, only they were asked to map out the trajectory of a regular school day using only sounds (p.21). Anderson describes how the students formed groups, identified sounds heard in school throughout the day, and recorded their own iterations of those sounds using onomatopoeias (p. 21). This map is interesting, and was the example in the mapping chapter which predominantly grabbed my attention, as the students were not using instruments to create sounds, but were trying to describe sounds using words (p. 21) Anderson confirms that this example of mapping, although it was not to scale like other traditional blueprints, was probably the most accurate representation of the school (p. 21). The example reveals to us that Deleuze's (1997) ideas and concept of mapping are not unreachable or completely outside the scope of place-based education. They are practical, creative, and more dynamic representations of mapping which students can engage with.

At the very end of the chapter, Anderson outlines a list justifying the use of maps in other subjects. She writes that mapping is a truly interdisciplinary undertaking, and as with the majority of place-based projects, teachers can connect mapping to several different curricular topics. A traditional artistic approach to mapping is mentioned as the fourth subject on the list after Science and Ecological Studies (p. 29). While the author advocates for the use of maps in art, I would recommend that art be used in mapping as a way in which children can represent

how intensities appear to them in the environment, but also as a way of adding value to their communities.

It is my hope is that educators in the field of education and, especially where place based education is being employed, would look to the work of Giles Deleuze and directly apply it in their classrooms.

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