

## Place-based citizenship: Is it just a walk in the park?

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*This paper explores the connections between place-based learning and opportunities for fostering multidimensional citizenship and recognition of difference. The paper is based on longitudinal research exploring the kinds of field sites selected for children's learning. Findings suggested that these selected places tended to be high status sites chosen as places unlikely to raise contentious issues. The paper draws upon research and literature in the fields of cultural and social geography as well as civic and citizenship education in considering the ramifications of such decisions for multidimensional citizenship in the contemporary world. Some of the reasons shaping these choices are introduced; the limitations of such fieldwork choices are also highlighted. The paper suggests an alternative vision for place-based learning which is associated with recognition of place and space as contested, globally connected and always being negotiated. The implications are discussed in connection with specific sites in a regional Australian city. The locations considered in this paper are selected as generic kinds of places and spaces. The pedagogical potential for learning in similar kinds of sites in other contexts is considered.*

### Introduction

This paper draws on longitudinal research (Johnston, 2003), which explored the field sites pre-service teachers (PSTs) selected as the basis of an assignment completed as part of their study towards a Bachelor of Education degree course. The assignment, a compulsory assessment task which I describe in more detail in the next section, was completed in the second year of the course. With reference to this research, I discuss the limitations and potential for fostering spatial and multidimensional citizenship through place-based learning.

In this paper, I draw on several components of the study which involved data collection in the naturalistic context of teacher education along with data gathered from a survey questionnaire and interviews with PSTs who volunteered to be participants in more formal phases of data collection. The research findings, overall, suggested that pre-service teachers tended to select particular kinds of sites. These places were largely high status, publicly valued locations which formed the basis of a hegemonic curriculum constrained by three dominant curriculum discourses of which

I have written elsewhere (Johnston, 2007 forthcoming). The sites tended to be selected with high level concern about what was appropriate for children's learning.

As I discuss in this paper, the kinds of sites selected and the learning that was planned in connection with the chosen sites were limiting in their potential for children to build a "spatial dimension" of citizenship. Cogan, Grossman and Liu (2000) suggest that this dimension is one of the components of multidimensional citizenship. These authors (Cogan, Grossman and Liu, 2000) suggest that to attain this dimension of citizenship, "citizens need to see themselves as belonging to several overlapping communities—local, regional, national and multicultural." In the first part of the paper, I discuss findings from the phase of the research exploring the kinds of sites selected for children's learning. I then introduce an approach through which a spatial dimension of citizenship may be fostered, even through the choice of an iconic site, frequently visited by groups of school children. This example highlights the opportunities for a citizenship education which focuses on diversity and the recognition of difference as well as the silences that exist in public places such as quintessential urban parks in Australia.

### **Background to the research**

Thus, the research on which this paper is based emerged from action research conducted in teacher education. The fieldwork study originated in personal experience of teaching Social Education 1, a compulsory curriculum studies unit within the first year of a four-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree course at the University of Tasmania in 1997. The curriculum studies unit was primarily concerned with preparing students of teaching as early childhood and primary educators of Studies of Society and Environment, more commonly designated by its acronym, SOSE—a learning area linked with Australian, nationally produced curriculum documents and state-based interpretations of them. Given the prominence of fieldwork in the teaching of geography, it is envisaged that the findings from this study may be relevant also for thinking about new curriculum frameworks such as the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) (Victorian curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2005). In this curriculum framework, geography is one of the components of the Humanities curriculum domain.

Students responded to the following Social Education assignment topic (University of Tasmania, 1997) in which they were required to plan hypothetical field-based learning experiences for early childhood or primary children:

Consider a site which is both significant to you and suitable for Social Education fieldwork. It may be (for example), a street, a place in the city, a beach, town, village, a particular house, building, suburb, a stream or mountain.... Based on the site you select, develop a plan for teaching and learning that incorporates field experiences designed to encourage a class of children to thoroughly investigate the site.

According to my observations, students of teaching tended to select field sites from a restricted repertoire which tended to overlook peripheral, everyday locations, thus contributing to unwitting curricular bias. Yet, the assignment description implied that the parameters for the choice of sites remained fairly open. The task took PSTs to the broader and social contexts of schooling and teacher education and incorporated the choice of sites on the basis of personal and professional considerations. The assignment topic encouraged PSTs to focus on familiar sites. Therefore, I reflected on “the significance of the local and the everyday” (Pain, Barke, Fuller, Gough, McFarlane & Mowl, 2001, p. 3) to social geography, one of the components encapsulated within SOSE.

### **Some theoretical considerations**

Much has been written on the various ways in which place and space are experienced and understood (Buttimer, 1980; Jacobs, 1996; Jacobs & Fincher, 1998; McDowell, 1999; Stratford, 1999). On the significance of the local and everyday to social geography, Pain et al. (2001, p. 3) state that the

focus of social geography is on people’s everyday daily living spaces. Events and process at different social scales cannot be discussed in isolation from each other; for example, global processes shape local places and processes. However, the starting point for social geography is everyday experience, and therefore analysis is usually of events and phenomena at a *local* scale—the neighbourhood, the home, the local park, the workplace, and the body. Different meanings of place, and their relation to power have a central interest.

This viewpoint suggests that the meanings of place and space are multidimensional and complex. Places may be unbounded in the sense that they are to varying degrees interconnected (Anderson, 1999; Massey, 1993) but also they may be bounded through relations to power and access. In a study of Redfern, an area known in Australia as an inner city zone of profound disadvantage, Anderson (p. 84) concludes that places considered to be discrete entities may be both bounded in various ways but may also exist within “networks of sociability.” As Massey (1993, p. 148) argues, “places are best thought of as nets of social relations.” In the contemporary context, place tends to be recognised as encompassing many realities (Rose, 1995, as cited in Pain et al., 2001, p. 4). As these authors indicate (p. 4),

a place has locational properties—it may occupy a particular portion of space or occupy an imaginary location conjured by listening to music or reading a novel. A place also has subjective meaning to people—a “sense of place.” Notions of place are not fixed or universally shared, and social geographers have shown how dominant forms of power and social identities affect what places mean to different individuals and groups. These relationships to power, and access to place, define the boundaries which include and exclude certain people.

This understanding of place underpins my enquiry about the choices PSTs seemed to be making for particular kinds of locations for children’s fieldwork and is integral to this research. This multi-dimensional view of place also has raised awareness of the highly variable ways in which children experience places and the possibilities for children’s place experience to be unbounded, particularly in the contemporary global context through access to media, travel experience and family relocations (Robertson, 2000a). It is argued that the impact of such overwhelming and pervasive global interconnections may lead to a sense of retreat such as seeking refuge in the celebration of place through narrow interpretations of heritage (Duncum, 2000). Through memory, however, places are created in the mind, which adds to “complex and multi-faceted” meanings of place and space (Stratford, 1997, p. 217). The two terms, place and space, are interconnected rather than separate entities. These understandings of place and place experience underpinned the impetus for my research.

The literature suggested that the propensity to select particular kinds of places for fieldwork was raised by early childhood and primary educators of geography (Bale, 1987) as well as geography educators in higher education (Gold et al., 1991). Added to suggestions of potential bias through the narrow choice of sites were reports that SOSE has little appeal for children (Education Department of Western Australia, 1994; Reynolds & Moroz, 1998); likewise, civics and citizenship—a closely related area of the curriculum—is described as having little attraction for students (Williamson & Thrush, 2001). In combination, these findings suggested that enquiry into the education of B.Ed. students, as teachers of SOSE, was a matter of some urgency.

### **The sites selected and factors shaping these choices**

In choosing sites for children's learning and as the basis for their assignment task, PSTs took account of a range of competing factors. As the following statement indicates, the PSTs thought deeply about the kinds of sites they would select for children's learning. Practical matters were considered as were curriculum considerations such as cultural hegemony and diversity:

*Originally I thought of an Aboriginal midden—I remember Dad telling me about it but there were ethical problems. I think it's up to me to bring Aboriginal people but I didn't know they were not really happy to publicise the sites. And they are mainly ones on the North West coast and—there was a cost.... The places were not in the children's immediate environment and so I got back to the local environment. I was in a bit of conflict.... I think not a historical house—I wouldn't want to look at colonial history or to glorify that. I remember that on a prac we went to a (historical house) and it was a fairly uncritical view. But at the same time I would want to make sure it was not glorified—or looking from one point of view.*

Other participants focused, quite explicitly, on diversity and global interconnections inherent in any place. One participant noted the connections through shipping in the past, another commented on multiculturalism and yet another mentioned interconnections and change in the contemporary world: *Yet, briefly it's a country town that seems to be, at the moment, in the death throes of people feeling like it's going to close but developing attitudes that are more city like, maybe with the emergence of the global village mentality through the Internet...*

Despite such depth of thought and awareness of the interconnections between places on the part of some PSTs and despite the range of locations selected, most of the sites were publicly valued, high status and well-defined sites; they tended to be selected in preference to everyday places of less public visibility and perceived significance. Of the 31 different places selected, 89% were within close reach of the three major population centres of Hobart, Launceston and Burnie. Only one location, a local suburban creek, was not identified as a named location of some public status. As indicated in the following table (see Johnston, 2003, p. 127), many sites were connected with the promotion of tourism.

Table 1: Publicly valued sites

Tourism attractions/civic properties	National Trust/historic properties	Picturesque locations	Niche industries
Cataract Gorge	Clarendon House	Supply River	Ashgrove Farm
City Park, Launceston	Franklin House	Mill	Cheese
Cradle Mountain	Low Head Pilot Station and		
Duck Reach Power Station	Museum		
Inveresk Railyard	Richmond/Richmond Gaol		
Development Site	The Shot Tower		
Launceston Civic Square	Wybalenna, Flinders Island		
Tamar Island			

Moreover, in interview, the sites tended to be talked of as bounded locations without connections with other places and spaces: of the places named as sites considered for the assignment, two were city parks, 10 recreational reserves, 5 historic houses or properties and 4 historic precincts which are “jewels in the crown” as tourist attractions—Port Arthur, Evandale and Richmond. The sites tended to be bounded sites of high culture.

In interview PSTs commented also on sites that they would not consider as the basis of the assignment and for children’s learning. As would be expected there were concerns of safety, the actual group of children and the qualities of any staff at a commercial site. These kinds of concerns are exemplified in the following participant statements;

*So safety was probably my upper thought... also keeping costs down... And parents may not be able to afford it so not all the children might be able to go and so the main theme or main area was to take them somewhere where all the children could participate without a cost barrier.*

*Like well for starters your class ... if the staff wasn't as friendly or willing to accommodate the class I suppose you wouldn't take them there. I guess you'd look at the economical site of it—you know the cost of getting there.*

*Well firstly when you pick a field site you really need to have objectives related to the Profile and all of that. To prove to other people that it has significance... I guess accessibility as well. I guess you can't have it too far away.*

*I don't know it really depends on your class. On the children.*

Fascinating insights emerged when the participants talked of the sites they would not select and their reasons for doing so. Two participants mentioned a cemetery as inappropriate for children. Another site was excluded as being too “touristy”. One participant mentioned “community institutions like a mental hospital” as inappropriate for children to visit. A church was excluded for its strong social justice platform with its potential to raise issues that were thought to be too complex for children to appreciate. There appeared to be a concern to protect children. Yet, debates surround the construction of childhood—a construct characterised spatially by great diversity (Roberts, 1998). As Roberts (1998, p. 4) explains, children are a group distinct from adults but this does not mean that childhood is a notion about which there is universal agreement:

This does not mean that human beings do not start out small and young and get bigger and older, but the way human life is divided into phases—each with its own “proper” characteristics is uniform neither historically nor geographically nor socially (across classes or genders, for example). (p. 4)

As Roberts (1998) also suggests, the notion of childhood varies according to the age at which a young person begins work. Valentine, Skelton and Chambers (1998, p. 3) argue that childhood as “a time of innocence and freedom from the responsibilities of adulthood” is, in many respects, a myth. Yet, as Luke and Luke (1995) point out, taken-for-granted notions of the child originating during the Enlightenment are perpetuated in the discourses of schooling. Moreover, it appeared that such schooling discourses influenced PSTs' choices. When it came to selecting sites for children's learning, there was evidence that certain sites were excluded for their propensity to raise controversial issues. There appeared to be a fear of managing difference, and

particularly in the context of Tasmania with its highly divisive environmental political polarities, anything concerned with ‘the environment’.

*I guess the North Forest thing maybe seemed a little bit more daunting because of the issues that would come up are more current and maybe a little bit more—maybe more confronting in a classroom ... That you know the disagreements that might come up in the classroom. You know the different children’s family backgrounds ...*

*but the only thing I was worried about there was—because we’re still tippy-toeing on ground as far as creation and those sorts of things ... I don’t know how we’d stand as far as bringing in fossils and things into the classroom and how you’d sort of get around talking about those sorts of things yet.*

Surprisingly, history was seen as a safer option and in the words of one participant, *one much less likely to be contentious*. On the survey questionnaire, PSTs were asked to categorise the kinds of sites selected. These locations were publicly visible in a bulletin board/poster display of the fieldwork locations. History/historical was cited as a category more often than any other. Of 36 survey participants, 16 listed history/historical compared with 6 for geography, 7 for sociology/social, 8 for economics or commerce, and *one only* for politics and culture. Further, both of these latter terms were used by the *one* PST participant.

Given the kinds of limitations posed by a restricted fieldwork repertoire, it would seem that as teacher educators we need to highlight the need to expand the fieldwork repertoire. Such an approach seems imperative if we are to promote a curriculum in which children have the opportunity for inquiry in varying kinds of locations as seems appropriate for fostering a rich, spatial notion of citizenship. Similarly, I suggest that there is a need to foster fieldwork approaches that recognise locations as unbounded and interconnected with places beyond the immediate locality. In the next section, I refer to a case study of my own teaching in City Park, one of the high status sites selected by PSTs for their assignment but excluded by some PSTs for its overuse as a site for place-based learning.

### **Fieldwork in City Park**

Incorporating global perspectives appears to be one way that a rich form of spatial citizenship may be fostered through place-based learning. Global education is

described as involving critical reflection based on several skills—one of those listed is critical thinking, further described as “The ability to evaluate the quality, relevance and priority of information, to distinguish between fact and opinion, and to recognise perspective and bias” (Fien & Williamson-Fien, 2001, p. 136). In addition, in drawing on the educational principles of Freire, global education also involves a stance to reflection which is grounded in critical theory: “a process of cooperative critical reflection to reach an awareness and understanding of the oppressive structures, their origins, the interests they serve, and the means by which they are maintained” (Fien & Williamson-Fien, 2001, p. 134).

On one particular field visit, early one Monday morning, a group of PSTs discovered that the South African War Memorial had been vandalised during the weekend and statues decapitated. There was a sense of outrage and absolute anger. The transformation of the monument was seen not only as desecration of public property but also desecration of a sacred monument. It seemed that through such desecration, the monument was no longer merely a memorial characterised by what Denning (1998, p. 1) describes as “rhetorical signs of heroics and reverence.” For me, the act of vandalism posed other questions about the nature of heroism, cultural hegemony and civic and citizenship education. I questioned whether vandalism, however abhorrent, was always wilful and committed for no purpose? While an analysis of this monument could have been conducted by considering it as a primary source reflecting the “age in which it was produced” (Hutchinson, 1988, p. 28), the very act of vandalism served to not only highlight such a perspective, but also to question the unproblematic acceptance of the lessons that the semiotics of such a monument were designed to convey.

In reflecting on such questions, I was drawn to question the relevance of memorials such as the South African War Memorial in City Park as a form of civic education. Few PSTs appeared to understand “the classical iconography of statuary” (Davison, 2000, p. 54). Yet, as a monument commemorating military sacrifice it was considered sacred. In expressing such an attitude the PSTs tended to reflect the celebration of heroes so evident in the *Primary Social Studies Guidelines* (Education Department, Tasmania, 1985) and dictates in the SOSE Statement to care for and “conserve local places” and for finding out about past achievements (Australian Education Council,

1994, p. 21)—so very similar to the curriculum and pedagogical impetus suggested by interview data for this study. As Davison (p. 41) reminds us, monuments such as the South African War Memorial in City Park not only reflect the civic culture of their time but are also likely to be valued in a time when “The revival of hero-worship is both a lament for a lost world of moral certainty and a cry for its return.” Tellingly, the statue has now been restored and physically enclosed with a high vertical iron fence topped with arrowhead finials. Somewhat ironically, the monument “in remembrance of Tasmanian lives lost for throne and empire” is located alongside a monkey enclosure housing Macaque monkeys, a gift from Japan. This juxtaposition raises questions about imperialism, particularly in the local and more recent context. Ironically, the South African War memorial, as a monument to lives lost in a contest over place, was testament to the contested nature of place and space; yet, PSTs did not acknowledge that likewise, the destruction of the memorial might be read as evidence of a contest *over place*—in this case, described as vandalism. How, I wondered, should we read the imperial impulse and its public celebration?

Yet, the PSTs expressed a view that children should be taught to value monuments such as this, a view of citizenship education reflected also in the dominant discourses of the official blueprints and in interview data. With this prevailing attitude, I wondered what opportunity there was for inclusion of gender, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, global and multicultural perspectives to the SOSE curriculum as well as directives to implement a curriculum *inclusive* of all PSTs. What meaning would notions of empire have for those students who identify as Aboriginal? Although a female figure adorns the South African War memorial and another memorial in City Park is an elaborately housed drinking fountain celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, the monuments tend to honour male heroism. How would the monuments be read from a gender perspective? Like questions why public monuments tend to represent the lives of powerful white men and exclude women and Aborigines (“Too few female achievements are set in stone”, 2003, p. 19). As Davison (2000, p. 41) says, “Public statues were an honour reserved for men (seldom for women) of conspicuous fame or public service.” I question whether there are monuments to Aborigines who lost their lives in Tasmania’s black war (Breen, 2001). Surely these were lives lost, if not *for* empire, *to* empire.

When local places are recognised as unbounded and inclusive of the global, it is more feasible to incorporate global perspectives even when the curriculum prioritises the local. In addition, the stance to critical thinking described by Fien and Williamson-Fien (2001) can be applied to *any site*. Global education, according to this explanation, offers a platform for critiquing a site such as City Park. In rethinking the possibilities for conducting fieldwork in City Park, I adapted two questions from the *Tasmanian Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) Planning Grid* (Department of Education & the Arts, 1995), both of which were subsumed under the overarching question of whose stories are represented (or not) in the monuments and artefacts of City Park: *What images and stories are reflected in the monuments and artefacts to be found in City Park?* and *In City Park, what evidence can you find of the contribution of immigrants, the working class of the 19<sup>th</sup> century... to the community?* In thinking of City Park as an open-air museum, I also prioritised the kinds of questions suggested by Moore (1997) for interrogating artefacts. To supplement the kinds of observation and data recording suggested for participants in the first pedagogical moment, I highlighted the asking of questions such as those recommended by Moore.

What is this for? Why does it look like this? Why is it decorated this way? Why do you think it has its particular colour, texture, size and weight? Is it in good condition, or damaged in some way? What exactly do we mean by these terms? (p. 59)  
 What does it make you feel like? Do you like it or not? (p. 60)  
 When, where, how, why and by whom was the object made? This would reveal the technology, commerce, labour and social history of the time. (pp. 60–61)  
 What has been the significance of the object, in its time of construction, in its subsequent history and for us today? (p. 63)

I also wished to challenge PSTs to think of City Park as a symbolic environment reproductive of “cultural norms and establishing the values of dominant groups across society” (Cosgrove, 1989, p. 125). My aim was to not only highlight the way that the “symbolism of landscape” may contribute to cultural reproduction, but also to point to the way that educators may unwittingly add to such tendencies.

### **Discussion and conclusions**

During the tutorials that followed this fieldwork in City Park, many PSTs commented that the fieldwork enquiry had prompted them to see City Park through a new lens,

that it was no longer such a taken-for-granted site. PSTs were drawn to consider the symbolic meaning of landscape:

All landscapes carry symbolic meaning because all are products of the human appropriation and transformation of the environment. Symbolism is most easily read in the most highly-designed landscapes—the city, the park and the garden—and through the representation of landscape in painting, poetry and other arts. (Cosgrove, 1989, p. 126)

From reading maps dating from the early nineteenth century at the Community History Museum (Launceston), PSTs were able to trace the evolution of the site. Along with photographic evidence, these images helped to challenge their taken-for-granted acceptance of the site—this was indeed a constructed site. Analysis of a range of sources helped to underscore the symbolic reading of an urban park such as this: “Despite the passage of time, these characteristic slices of English urban landscape still symbolise ideals of decency and propriety held by the Victorian bourgeoisie” (Cosgrove, 1989, p. 126)—although in this instance, the park included local bird life such as black swans and was set against a broader landscape of Eucalypt forest visible on hills along the horizon. These features situate the park very much within its locale. More recently, stories of place highlight the varied experience of any location such as City Park. A collection of Indigenous stories document experiences of place not previously published. Such stories highlight the multi-layered nature of any site and suggest that as teacher educators we should encourage our students to seek out such stories in an effort to enhance the fieldwork repertoire. In talking of *A place of change*, Glen Shaw (Breen & Summers, 2006, p. 102) says:

Sometimes old fellas would shelter from the rain in the rotunda in City Park, or they’d drink there sometimes. You’d go there and you’d hear this laughing and joking at the back of a tree, and there’d be a few old fellas having a drink and a bit of a dance. Somebody would have a cassette player with some country and western playing, slim dusty or Charlie Pride, and they’d be having their own little party. Sometimes they’d call to you to come in and sit down and have a yarn. That’s not there anymore.

The Band Rotunda is still there located centre stage within the park, as it would have been at the Chinese Carnival of 1891 (Walden, 1991); yet, like the use of the park as an Aboriginal community place, there is no evidence of this event in the park itself.

Thus, City Park, a quintessential urban park, is an exemplary site for delving ‘below the surface’ and exploring the interconnections that cohere in one place; its very existence as an urban park along with its many structures and monuments are tangible evidence that even as an island Tasmania is not, and has not been, immune from influences operating within and beyond its boundaries.

In addition, a site such as this, rather than being a settled site publicly valued for its civic value, was also a contested site (Jacobs, 1996)—a point only too clearly conveyed by the vandalism of the South African War memorial and in the eventual loss of the use of the site for a gathering place for the Aboriginal community. However, PSTs seemed to *fear* the differences which may exist within any group of children. There was a trend to homogenise the group in an attempt to establish harmony and untroubled learning. Thus, I aspired to foreground a mode of enquiry that prioritised difference and was “directed at attempting to adjust older notions of justice based around equity for a universal citizen so they are more responsive to difference” (Young, 1990, cited in Jacobs & Fincher, 1998, p. 15).

The monuments of City Park, for example, are representative of racial and gender bias in their celebration of achievement; yet, neither of the research participants who selected City Park as a field site commented on—and perhaps were unaware of—such inherent bias. Along with highlighting a global perspective to fieldwork in City Park, I would now include discussion of the power of theories of cognitive development and the social construction of childhood in shaping curriculum and pedagogy for children. I suggest that in teacher education we need to confront all of these theoretical tensions in selecting *any fieldwork sites* in our efforts to foster a rich, spatial dimension of citizenship as defined by Cogan, Grossman and Liu (2000).

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