

PLACE-BASED EDUCATION: A REVIEW OF HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS IN THEORY
& PRACTICE

by

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(Under the Direction of William G. Wraga)

ABSTRACT

Placed-based education, or *PBE*, is a contemporary educational term which refers to those forms of pedagogy that seek to connect learning to the local ecological, cultural, and historical contexts in which schooling itself takes place. As a formalized, named pedagogy, place-based education represents a relatively new field of exploration. This study sought to invigorate the historical conversation surrounding place-based educational theory and practice through the identification and exploration of historical precedents that were fundamentally similar in type. Three essential questions guided the research. First, utilizing a three-part filter which evaluated the extent to which curricular reform efforts maintained as core educational considerations the local, the learner, and the community, the study searched through a wealth of primary source materials to identify historical antecedents to modern place-based educational thinking. Secondly, the study also explored the sociopolitical contexts in which curricular reforms that were essentially place-based grew up historically. And thirdly, the study sought to identify the ways in which historical considerations of curricula might inform contemporary practice in the field of place-based education. Major findings include: (1) a clear determination that the core principles of place-based education are indeed quite mature, (2) recognition that

historical place-based reform models often enjoyed wide institutional support as critiques of academic formalism, (3) an understanding that historical models addressed multiple disciplines across the curriculum, (4) a realization that local and non-local considerations were not mutually exclusive, and (5) an appreciation for the notion that successful negotiation of mainstream practice and curricular/pedagogical innovation were often essential to the widespread adoption of reforms historically.

INDEX WORDS: Place-based education, pedagogy of place, local education, rural education, outdoor education, nature study, community education, curriculum history, curriculum theory, educational history

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the long line of thoughtful and devoted educators whose life work has been lost, overlooked, or ignored in subsequent efforts geared toward school reform.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
CHAPTER	
1 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY	1
Introduction.....	1
Background of the Problem	2
Significance of the Study	12
Statement of Purpose	19
Research Questions.....	21
Scope of the Study	21
Methodology.....	22
Assumptions.....	28
Limitations of the Study.....	28
Organization of the Report.....	29
2 EARLIEST ROOTS FOR PLACE-BASED EDUCATIONAL THEORY & PRACTICE	32
Introduction.....	32
Aristotle.....	33
John Amos Comenius	36
Jean-Jacques Rousseau	44

	Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi	49
	Friedrich Wilhelm August Froebel	59
	John Freidrich Herbart	70
	Colonel Francis Wayland Parker	73
	John Dewey.....	80
	Chapter Summary	91
3	THE NATURE STUDY MOVEMENT	95
	Introduction.....	95
	Social & Political Contexts.....	96
	Early Roots in Nature Study	98
	Nature Study as Localized Curricula	115
	Nature Study & the Learner	137
	Nature Study & the Community	173
	Chapter Summary	184
4	THE NEW GEOGRAPHY	187
	Introduction.....	187
	Social & Political Contexts.....	188
	German <i>Heimatskunde</i>	190
	American Home Geography	196
	New Geography as Localized Curricula	197
	New Geography & the Learner.....	218
	New Geography & the Community	242
	Chapter Summary	249

5	THE COUNTRY LIFE MOVEMENT.....	252
	Introduction.....	252
	Social & Political Contexts.....	253
	The Country Life Commission	256
	Country Life Reform as Localized Curricula	260
	Country Life & the Learner	286
	Country Life & the Community.....	296
	Chapter Summary	304
6	OUTDOOR EDUCATION.....	309
	Introduction.....	309
	Social & Political Contexts.....	311
	Roots of a Formal Educational Strategy	313
	Outdoor Education, the Learner, & the Local.....	318
	Outdoor Education & the Community	347
	Chapter Summary	362
7	COMMUNITY EDUCATION	367
	Introduction.....	367
	Unaffiliated Illustrations of Community Education	368
	African American Experiences	390
	Community Education as a Named Approach.....	403
	Chapter Summary	417
8	SUMMARY & CONCLUSION	421
	Introduction.....	421

Historical Precedents of Place-Based Education	423
Social & Political Contexts of Place-Based Education.....	432
Informing Contemporary Practice	437
Implications for Future Research.....	451

CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Introduction

As a formalized and named pedagogical approach, *place-based education* represents a relatively new field of exploration. In efforts to locate origins, some look to the work of David Sobel and his early attempts to define explicitly the parameters for a place-based approach to teaching and learning.¹ An equally likely candidate is John Elder of Middlebury College. Middlebury, Vermont is home to one of the oldest environmental studies programs in the nation and through his collaboration in the early 1990s with the Massachusetts-based Orion Society, the first named place-based literature program was born.² David Orr's seminal contribution in *Ecological Literacy* points to yet another foundational source.³ But years before the contributions of prominent place-based proponents such as Orr, Sobel, or Elder, other initiatives, such as Georgia's Foxfire Fund, exemplified place-based ideals in practice. John Dewey, Colonel Francis Wayland Parker, and a number of educational progressives outlined similar approaches nearly a century earlier. Going further still, the attention to the lived experiences of the learner and the recognition that student experiences often grow out of local contexts, core themes represented in the writings of such famed educational figures as Comenius, Pestalozzi, and Froebel, suggest a deeper lineage which stretches back centuries. In short, even a brief

¹ David Sobel, *Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms and Communities*, Nature Literary Series No. 4 (Great Barrington, MA: The Orion Society, 2004); *Mapmaking with Children: Sense of Place Education for the Elementary Years* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998).

² John Elder, "Teaching at the Edge," in *Stories in the Land: A Place-Based Environmental Education Anthology*, Nature Literary Series No. 2 (Great Barrington, MA: The Orion Society, 1998).

³ David Orr, *Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World* (New York: SUNY Press, 1992).

consideration of place-based reform initiatives reveals a curricular and theoretical repertoire far more expansive than the notable efforts of educators across the past two decades.

Despite the recent proliferation of place-based educational research, conversations surrounding this promising area of study remain confined largely within the sciences and the field of environmental studies in particular. This narrowness may be at least partially the result of the somewhat ahistorical nature of place-based educational research as a whole which has arguably worked to limit understanding over time and across disciplines. While David Hutchison's broad consideration of the role of *place* and *space* in education and Paul Theobald's historical work in the area of rural education stand as notable, but partial counterexamples, there is, to date, no comprehensive historical consideration of place-based curricula in publication.⁴ Modern theorists and practitioners alike, appear to operate in isolation, with little recognition of the successes and failures of place-based initiatives historically. Place-based education, though perhaps young as a formal pedagogical approach, is based upon much more mature, more well-established educational traditions and historical consideration of those traditions, it stands to reason, may offer valuable insight for contemporary teachers and students. The study outlined below attempts to expand the historical conversation surrounding place-based educational theory and practice.

Background of the Problem

Placed-based education, or *PBE*, is a term which refers to those forms of pedagogy that seek to connect learning to the local ecological, cultural, and historical contexts in which schooling itself takes place. Participatory and active, PBE frames the learning process around the unique experiences, situations, and events of the places in which schools are located. In his

⁴ David Hutchison, *A Natural History of Place in Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2004); Paul Theobald, *Call School: Rural Education in the Midwest to 1918* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995).

comprehensive review of place-based education, one of only two that exist to date, Sobel offered the following formal definition:

Place-based education is the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and other subjects across the curriculum. Emphasizing hands-on, real-world learning experiences, this approach to education increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students' appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens. Community vitality and environmental quality are improved through the active engagement of local citizens, community organizations, and environmental resources in the life of the school.⁵

In the most general sense, then, place-based education is a reference to those pedagogies that emphasize the “local” in the educative process. In many cases, contemporary PBE initiatives seek the dual purposes of providing a more worthwhile educational experience for young learners while simultaneously working to improve the political, social, ecological and/or economic quality of local communities. Scholars have referred to the approach variously as *place-consciousness*, *pedagogy of place*, *community-oriented schooling*, and *bioregional education*, yet all versions, and there are surely even more still, share a fundamental commitment to the places in which learning is situated, the nature of the learner, and to the stakeholders maintaining positions in the process (i.e., the community).⁶ The discussion below highlights the recent origins of the phrase *place-based education*, and, through a review of the relevant literature, offers definitional criteria to identify the key aims of the approach. The review is not exhaustive, but instead emphasizes foundational contributions and seminal works.

Modern Origins. In an account of his tenure with the Bread Loaf School of English at Middlebury College in Vermont, Elder revealed that the phrase *place-based education* grew out

⁵ Sobel, *Place-Based Education*, 7.

⁶ David Gruenewald, “The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place,” *Educational Researcher* 32, no. 4 (2003): 3-12; Paul Theobald and Paul Nachtigal, “Culture, Community, and the Promise of Rural Education,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 77, no. 2 (1995): 132-35; Janice Woodhouse and Clifford Knapp, “Place-Based Curriculum and Instruction: Outdoor and Environmental Education Approaches,” *ERIC Digest*, ED448012 (2000).

of his own collaboration with Laurie Lane-Zucker and the Orion Society in 1992.⁷ Middlebury is home to one of the oldest environmental studies programs in the United States, a major the college introduced as an “applied ecology track of the biology department”⁸ in 1965. The initial course in place-based education, established nearly thirty years later, was experimental for the most part and consisted primarily of secondary-level English teachers in the college’s summer MA program. The Orion Society, a Massachusetts-based environmental organization committed to “interdisciplinary environmental education models”⁹ has sponsored ten fellows each year since their initial and successful start in the early 1990s. This collaboration between the Orion Society and Middlebury College, between Elder and Lane-Zucker, marked the source of the place-based heading as a named approach to teaching and learning. With that in mind, place-based education as a named approach for teaching and learning is roughly twenty years old.

A concern for the health of ecological systems is one that modern proponents of place-based education typically share. This was certainly true of Elder and Lane-Zucker’s work together. But while it is generally the case that the PBE has grown out of desires for environmental quality, sustainability objectives extend beyond the natural environment. In an article intended to highlight the connections between place-based education and Aldo Leopold, a noted literary figure and conservationist, Clifford Knapp provided clarification. Knapp suggested that place-conscious educators have much to learn from the conservationist and his call for more intimate connections to natural landscapes. He went on to note, however, that “Although Leopold used the terms conservation education and ecological education, he employed many key

⁷ Elder, “Teaching at the Edge.”

⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁹ Laurie Lane-Zucker and Jennifer Sahn, “Stories in the Land Fellowships,” in *Stories in the Land: A Place-Based Environmental Education Anthology*, Nature Literary Series No. 2 (Great Barrington, MA: The Orion Society, 1998), 16.

characteristics of place-based education.”¹⁰ Knapp’s suggestion was revealing in that it set environmental education apart from the place-based approach; that is, Knapp did not view the two as synonymous. At the same time that Knapp called on PBE advocates to “empathize personally with nature” and to “observe seasonal changes,” as Leopold had suggested in *A Sand Country Almanac*, first published in 1949, the conservation pioneer also highlighted the importance of “knowing local history.”¹¹ The natural environment is important to contemporary place-based educators and theorists, but their concerns extend further than the seemingly narrower focus of environmental education, at least rhetorically.

A recent dissertation by Michael Duffin lends further credence to the notion that while PBE seeks, in part, to maintain and improve the integrity of ecological systems it is an approach with potentially broader educational goals. Duffin remarked that “Place-based education can be seen as a refinement of environmental education.”¹² He explained: “The key difference is that place-based education focuses on all aspects of the local environment by including dimensions of culture, history, social and political issues, and the built environment, as opposed to focusing more exclusively on the non-human natural world...PBE presumes that a person who knows and cares about the place they live is best prepared for taking better care of the local and global environment.”¹³ Though stewardship remained the end result, Duffin extended his philosophy of place-based education beyond environmentalism alone. Commitments to a broader sense of community responsiveness, one that includes yet moves past the ecological and into the cultural landscape, is a feature that distinguishes much of the recent writing produced by place-based

¹⁰ Clifford Knapp, “The I-Thou Relationship, Place-Based Education, and Aldo Leopold,” *Journal of Experiential Education* 27, no. 3 (2005): 280.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 281-282.

¹² Michael Duffin, “Portrait of an Urban Elementary School: Place-Based Education, School Culture, and Leadership” (doctoral dissertation, Antioch University, McGregor, 2006), 26.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 27.

advocates. At the same time, however, it is nonetheless the case that so much of modern place-based educational theory and practice is at least partially ecologically-focused with a strong emphasis on the sciences, conservation, and sustainable development.

The Local & the Learner. Place-based education typically contains an experiential element and honors the nature of the learner in the educative process. Orr, one of several of modern place-based education's original leaders in scholarship, has linked place-based education and the importance of experience in his seminal, field-defining work entitled *Ecological Literacy*, published in 1992. He explained: "The integration of place into education is important for four reasons. First, it requires the combination of intellect with experience....The study of place involves complementary dimensions of intellect: direct observation, investigation, experimentation, and skill in the application of knowledge."¹⁴ Although scholars have more often recognized Orr for his argument that place-based education is critical to ecological sustainability and to the task of "reeducating people in the art of living well where they are,"¹⁵ the passage above nonetheless approached a recognition of the experiential function that place-based education sometimes serves. Orr was not alone in that regard and for many observers, in fact, place-based education "is inherently experiential."¹⁶

Gregory Smith, another leading figure in the field, also appeared to support the notion that place-based education is characteristically experiential and that the nature of the learner must be appreciated. Smith characterized place-based learning as that which "adopts local environments – social, cultural, economic, political, and natural – as the context for a significant share of student's educational experiences."¹⁷ By incorporating the *familiar* into the educative

¹⁴ Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 128.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁶ Woodhouse and Knapp, "Place-Based Curriculum and Instruction," 2.

¹⁷ Gregory Smith, "Going Local," *Educational Leadership* (September 2002): 30.

process, greater engagement was the result. Smith went on to suggest the following: “By locating learning in the lives and concerns of students and their communities, place-based education takes advantage of students’ natural interest in the world and their desire to be valued by others.”¹⁸ Smith’s concern for the “natural interests” of the student suggested an affinity for the nature of the learner and his or her present understandings of the world.

Smith has argued elsewhere that place-based education often contains experiential elements as well. He identified “cultural studies, nature studies, real-world problem-solving, internships, and induction into community processes,”¹⁹ as categories around which educators might frame learning opportunities. As Smith concluded of these models and of the approach generally, “a critical characteristic of place-based education is its emphasis on learning experiences that allow students to become the creators of knowledge rather than the consumers of knowledge created by others.”²⁰ Like other place-based proponents, Smith’s conception contained an appreciation for both active, experiential learning and the lived experience of the student. Of course, both of those concerns he framed locally and within the context of the school and neighborhood, a characteristic feature of place-based education.

Community Responsiveness. Another nearly unanimous sentiment contained within contemporary place-based educational writing is the desire to generate a deeper sense of community. Generally speaking, however, this elevated community sense is linked ultimately to other, more specific and tangible social, environmental, and educational objectives. Paul Theobald and Paul Nachtigal have contributed greatly to the discussion surrounding community and place-based education. Theobald and Nachtigal expressed, for example, their concern for the

¹⁸ Smith, “Going Local,” 30.

¹⁹ Gregory Smith, “Place-Based Education: Learning to Be Where We Are,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 83, no. 8, (April 2002): 584-594.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 593.

perceived loss of a community-school connection once believed central to rural education in America. As Theobald and Nachtigal lamented: “Traditionally, rural schools have been tightly linked to their communities, and the process of schooling has reflected local values, mores, and ways of life...An inherent assumption, that bigger is better, was promoted as the way schools should be. Today, this assumption continues to influence the ‘one best system’ for educating children.”²¹ Through a return to local context in educational planning, Theobald and Nachtigal concluded, the nation’s schools, particularly rural ones, could potentially undo some of the deleterious effects that “institutionalization and bureaucratization”²² have reportedly brought about. In their words, “...[to] appreciably attend to the ‘needs’ of students, schools must contribute to the recreation of communities.”²³ A more place-based reform strategy was not only central to educational quality generally, but also believed to have the effect of producing more engaged citizens. They noted further: “The more students understand their community and its environs – its social structure, its economy, its history, its music, its ecology – the more they become invested in that community...The promise of rural educational renewal is that it can start us all on the road to a more sustainable future.”²⁴ Theobald has reiterated and expanded a similar position in subsequent texts, most notably *Teaching the Commons*, published in 1997, and *Education Now*, his most recent volume published in 2009.²⁵ Proponents have echoed the perceived connection between community, educational quality, and civic action throughout the place-based educational literature. In many ways, it is characteristic of place-based teaching and learning.

²¹ Paul Theobald and Paul Nachtigal, “Culture, Community, and the Promise of Rural Education,” 12.

²² *Ibid.*, 8.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.* 9.

²⁵ Paul Theobald, *Teaching the Commons: Place, Pride, and the Renewal of Community* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997); Paul Theobald, *Education Now: How Rethinking America’s Past Can Change Its Future* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2009).

Critical Theory & Place-Based Education. In recent years, critical theorists, generally defined as those who seek to identify and correct social inequalities and injustices, have found new utility in place-based education. A part of “the new localism,” many critical theorists allied with the field hold the perspective that “...economic globalization, however inevitable and beneficial it may be to some, is far from the unconditional good that it is often claimed to be.”²⁶ It may be the case that place-based education has maintained an orientation toward social action since its inception. The general commitment to conservation and sustainable development, for example, is perhaps something of a value-laden concept. While place-based education as a modern approach has preserved a dedication to certain progressive ideals of education, one that begins with the learner, it has at the same time become characteristically change oriented. Nonetheless, *critical* place-based education, as it might be termed, intensifies the call for change.

David Gruenewald (now Greenwood) is perhaps the father of critical place-based education as he has done much to outline the theoretical boundaries of the approach. Drawing on a neo-Marxist perspective and Paulo Friere’s notion of “situationality,”²⁷ Gruenewald reasoned that status and power are ultimately tied to place. He noted: “Place, in other words, foregrounds a narrative of local and regional politics that is attuned to the particularities of where people actually live, and that is connected to global development trends that impact local places.”²⁸ To say it another way, place always has a great deal to do with the manner in which social, political, economic, and cultural forces take shape, not to mention how groups and individuals perceive and experience the world.

²⁶ David Gruenewald and Gregory Smith, “Making Room for the Local,” in *Place-Based Education in the Global Age: Local Diversity*, ed. David Gruenewald and Gregory Smith (New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2008), xiii.

²⁷ Gruenewald, “The Best of Both Worlds,” 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Gruenewald asked place-based educators to search for the means by which to challenge schools in ways that could encourage reflective action towards the spatial and historical factors he perceived to produce inequality. “One of my purposes for naming this convergence,” between critical pedagogy and place-based education, Gruenewald recalled, “is that place-based education, in its diverse incarnations, is currently less a pedagogy per se and more an alternative methodology that lacks a coherent theoretical framework.”²⁹ Elsewhere in the text, he added: “A critical pedagogy of place deepens the challenge by bringing cultural and ecological politics into the center of place-based discourse. It would be difficult to underestimate the messy complexity of these politics.”³⁰ For Gruenewald, then, a “coherent theoretical framework” was one that emphasized particular social and cultural critiques.

Claudia Ruitenberg’s reconceptualization of place-based education built on the critical writing of Gruenewald. Disillusioned by the romantic views of rural education and nature that she perceived place-based educators to hold, Ruitenberg called for reappraisal. She explained that “...the uncritical celebration of rural over urban and nature over culture reinscribes old dichotomies and does nothing to help an examination of the role of place in education.”³¹ Ruitenberg challenged the notions of *community* and *experience*, terms the present discussion has established as central to place-based educational thinking. Ruitenberg worked to problematize the common understanding of community by insisting that the term implied exclusion; that is, where there are community members there are almost necessarily non-members as well. She offered the following conclusion: “One central feature of the constructed character of community, as I have previously mentioned, is that the identity and coherence of

²⁹ Gruenewald, “The Best of Both Worlds,” 9.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

³¹ Claudia Ruitenberg, “Deconstructing the Experience of the Local: Toward a Radical Pedagogy of Place,” in *Philosophy of Education*, ed. Kenneth Howe (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 2005), 213.

community are structurally incomplete and imperfect. A second central feature is the community's reliance on those who are excluded from it. The sense of community shared by members of a community, the sense of belonging together, is possible only because there are others who do not belong, who are outside the community."³² Again, for Ruitenber, community implied members and non-members, insiders as well as outsiders.

Regarding *experience*, Ruitenber drew on the writing of Jacques Derrida and his conception that all experiences are somehow mediated. "There is no such thing as direct, unmediated experience," Ruitenber insisted, and "No experience is fully present to the consciousness of the experiencing subject."³³ For place-based education, this translates to a recognition that "All people bear the marks of the places where they have lived, no matter how long or short a time they have lived there."³⁴ In Ruitenber's mind, a self-termed *radical pedagogy of place* would build on such a conception. As she suggested: "In a radical pedagogy of place, students are taught to see the meanings carried by the place in the past, the openness to future interpretation and meaning-construction...It encourages not entrenchment in one's locality and community but rather hospitality and openness."³⁵ While it is not entirely clear that her theoretical prescriptions have gained momentum within the wider community of place-conscious theorists and practitioners, Ruitenber's efforts to link critical and postmodern theory to place-based education represents a popular trend.

Throughout the literature, then, observers find commitments to first-hand experience and the unique attributes of the learner, and, in some instances at least, to community responsiveness and to cultural critique. Although each of these attributes have been emphasized to varying

³² Ruitenber, "Deconstructing the Experience of the Local," 218.

³³ *Ibid.*, 214.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 215.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 219.

degrees from one author to the next, these themes together do much to define the aims of place-based education as a modern reform agenda. Of course, each of these elements, it is critical to add, are oriented around the local. It is the incorporation of locally available phenomena into the learning process that inspires the entire approach, a characteristic which absolutely cannot be overstated. Yet none of these educational themes are new, not even when packaged together. More importantly, as a number of scholars have begun to recognize, the objectives that define place-based education have a lineage that extends far deeper than the newly termed approach might imply.

Significance of the Study

Duffin recently remarked that “...place-based education is such an open and flexible proto-theory of education that it flows into a million different connections to other theories of education and society.”³⁶ If Duffin’s assessment was even modestly accurate, it is somewhat surprising that so few place-based educational proponents have ventured to adopt an historical lens in their writing. While an exhaustive exploration of those million different connections might be overly cumbersome, the near absence of historical evaluations of place-based educational theory, let alone historical representations of practice, is difficult to understand.

In reviewing the contemporary place-based educational literature, what readers typically find is a casual respect for the theoretical overlap that exists between modern versions of place-based education and elements of educational progressivism of the early to middle twentieth century. In their introductory comments to *Place-Based Education in the Global Age*, published in 2008, Gruenewald and Smith pointed out that “...all education prior to the common school

³⁶ Duffin, “Portrait of an Urban Elementary School.” 24.

was place-based.”³⁷ They went on to note that: “Reformers such as John Dewey and William Heard Kilpatrick in the early 20th century spoke to the importance of incorporating student’s experiences of particular communities and places into their formal education, but the tendency toward centralization and standardization in the broader society marginalized their perspective and the practices they advocated.”³⁸ From this short passage, it seems reasonable to suggest that Gruenewald and Smith recognized the existence of historical antecedents to modern place-based educational efforts. At the same time, however, Gruenewald, Smith, and few other place-based researchers have sought to explore the historical domain in depth.

As is perhaps true of American educational literature generally, references to the work of John Dewey have not been infrequent in the writing of place-based educators, as the Gruenewald and Smith selection above might suggest. In no small part, this is due to Dewey’s wide and consistent discussion of local context as a primary source for educational objectives. In their discussion of diversity and place-based education, Theobald and Siskar built on this argument and credited Dewey for his position on the social nature of learning. They remarked: “The dynamic between the development and welfare of the individual and the community creates an opportunity for a checks-and-balance system that would well serve learners whom Dewey, in the tradition of Montesquieu, rightly defined as *social individuals*. Dewey’s individual, like Vygotsky’s child, can only grow in and through social interaction.”³⁹ Theobald and Siskar successfully linked place-based education to social constructivism and, in doing so, went further than some in engaging Deweyan and other theoretical precursors.

³⁷ David Gruenewald and Gregory Smith, eds., “Making Room for the Local,” in *Place-Based Education in the Global Age*, (New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 1.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Paul Theobald and John Siskar, “Place: Where Diversity and Community Can Converge,” in *Place-Based Education in the Global Age: Local Diversity*, eds. David Gruenewald and Gregory Smith (New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2008), 212.

Woodhouse and Knapp, too, have recognized the historical linkages to Dewey and to educational progressivism. In a digest entitled, “Place-Based Curriculum and Instruction,” Woodhouse and Knapp reported that “...progressive educators have promoted the concept [of place-based education] for more than 100 years.”⁴⁰ They noted further that “Place-based education usually includes conventional outdoor education methodologies as advocated by John Dewey to help students connect with their particular corners of the world.”⁴¹ More recently, Knapp added: “Today the field of place-based education has established itself a paper trail of thousands of pages in its young life as an educational movement. This doesn’t mean that place-based education has never before been tried in schools and other educational institutions. In fact the idea of learning from the local surroundings predates the formation of formal schooling;...”⁴² Knapp went on to report that “Newman and Oliver [in 1967] thoroughly outlined an educational plan that linked formal schooling with the community context without inventing a specific label for it.”⁴³ Orr found a similar historical connection in Lewis Mumford’s call for regional surveys in the 1940s.⁴⁴ Again, however, aside from the general recognition that historical antecedents do exist, Woodhouse, Knapp, and Orr, like many other thoughtful proponents, have typically stopped short of in-depth historical consideration, be it descriptive or analytical, of theory and practice.

A well-known advocate of place-based education, Smith’s numerous works point again to the somewhat incomplete engagement with the historical dimensions of the field. In an article entitled “Going Local,” published in 2002, Smith reiterated the connections observed by many to

⁴⁰ Woodhouse & Knapp, “Place-Based Curriculum and Instruction,” 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴² Clifford Knapp, “Place-Based Curricular and Pedagogical Models: My Adventures in Teaching through Community Contexts,” in *Place-Based Education in the Global Age: Local Diversity*, eds. David Gruenewald and Gregory Smith (New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2008), 6.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 7.

⁴⁴ Orr, *Ecological Literacy*.

exist between John Dewey and place-based education. He explained: “By focusing on students’ local context, proponents address one of John Dewey’s (1899/1959) major concerns about 19th century public schools that still applies to this century: the lack of connection between formal schooling and students’ lives, a disconnect that makes learning an imposed chore rather than an opportunity to explore questions that arise from students’ innate curiosity and desire to become competent and contributing members of their families and communities.”⁴⁵ In the same year in *Phi Delta Kappan*, Smith framed a similar argument where he pointed out that “John Dewey noted [the] disconnection between school and the world and sought to overcome it in the University of Chicago Lab School that he and his colleagues created at the end of the 19th century.”⁴⁶ And finally, in a more recent publication, Smith again referenced Dewey’s *School and Society*, published in 1915, to highlight the following: “Over a century ago, Dewey similarly recognized that a failure to alter [the behavioral regularities of school] prevent the widespread adoption of progressive educational practices aimed at integrating schools and their communities and inducting students into patterns of civic engagement essential to the maintenance of democratic institutions (Dewey 1915).”⁴⁷ Smith has done a great deal to draw connections within the confines of singular articles, yet there is considerably more historical investigation to be completed. While John Dewey, and to a far lesser extent, William Heard Kilpatrick, have found their way into the writing of modern place-based researchers, there is virtually no in-depth consideration of their work, let alone evidence of practice. The connections between modern place-based education and certain dimensions of early nineteenth century educational

⁴⁵ Smith, “Going Local,” 31.

⁴⁶ Smith, “Learning to Be Where We Are,” 586.

⁴⁷ Gregory Smith, “Place-Based Education: Breaking through the Constraining Regularities of Public School,” *Environmental Education Research* 13, no. 2 (2007): 189.

progressivism may in fact run deeper than the thoughtful, but incomplete literature that represents the field today might suggest.

Theobald's continued efforts to investigate rural education have positioned him as a key figure in the contemporary field. More importantly for the present discussion, the depth of his historical perspective offers at least a partial rebuttal to the claim that place-based educational research lacks in-depth historical perspective. Following *Call School*, his first extended historical publication exploring the demise of the rural school in the American Midwest to 1918, Theobald developed his interest in rural schools into a deeper advocacy for the renewal of a sense of community through localized education. As he explained in *Teaching the Commons*, published in 1997: "This book is premised on two assumptions....First, rural schools ought to have a place in the educational landscape of this country....Second, schools ought to attend more consciously to their physical place on earth and the social, political, and economic dynamics that surround it. Doing so would render the entire school experience more meaningful and, in the process, would contribute in a small, though not insignificant, way to a cultural healing desperately needed in American society."⁴⁸ The notion that a rural, place-based education might provide hope for the establishment or restoration of a community-focused ethos, both locally and throughout the nation, is a theme that has come to characterize much of Theobald's writing. It is also the case that his work, particularly his early work on rural schools, has contained a solid commitment to historical analysis. Not only has Theobald explored rural Midwestern schools, the notion of community, and the significance of cyclic time from an historical perspective, he has also considered the contributions of John Dewey, William Heard Kilpatrick, and George S. Counts in greater detail than many other place-based researchers, although the author's discussion of the latter was not introduced in the context of place-based education. Rather than a history, in part or

⁴⁸ Theobald, *Teaching the Commons*, 1.

in full, of place-based educational theory or practice, Theobald's valuable historical work stands as a critical analysis of American schooling and the notion of community, which ends with advocacy and a call for a shift toward a more place-conscious education. The challenge to explore more deeply the historical terrain of place-based education, particularly in the context of practice, remains unmet.

Hutchison's comprehensive evaluation of the role of *place* in education also illustrated somewhat of a counterexample to the claim that place-based educational research is bereft of historical analysis. Although *A Natural History of Place in Education*, published in 2004, presents itself as a holistic appraisal of the variety of meanings that the notion of place might hold in educational contexts, Hutchison also included discussion of what he referred to as the "pedagogy of place," which links the text, albeit somewhat indirectly, to place-based education. In a chapter bearing the same name, Hutchison discussed a range of educational philosophies and the manner in which each utilized the concept of place in the process of determining what and how students should learn. Hutchison's effort to deliver an organizational scheme is useful for place-based educators in that it provided a clarifying function. At the same time, however, Hutchison centered the bulk of his historical considerations on educational *spaces* and school and classroom environments. The notion of place-based education as that which incorporates the historical, ecological, and cultural particularities of a given locale as sources for curricular choices exists, for the most part, outside of the historically-focused portions of Hutchison's text. No doubt a seminal contribution, Hutchison's *A Natural History of Place in Education* cannot be viewed as more than a partial history of place-based education as it did not emphasize the development of the strategy over time.

In its current form, place-based educational reform remains largely within the domain of science education, or to be more precise, environmental and ecological education. Although professional journals such as *Phi Delta Kappan*, *Educational Leadership*, the *Journal of Experiential Education*, and the *American Educational Research Journal* have accepted place-based educational research for publication, environmentally-oriented publishers, *Environmental Education Research* for example, have been far more common sources for such work. This is not altogether surprising given the origins of contemporary place-based education noted at the outset of this discussion and the broad concern for environmental conservation and sustainability that has permeated much of the literature to date. In a recent dissertation, Daniel Greenfield attempted to link the ecological consciousness of several early environmental thinkers to modern environmental education. Exploring the work of key figures such as Henry David Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, and Edward O. Wilson, Greenfield concluded that “place-based learning, critical thinking, and the interconnectedness of knowledge characterized these individuals’ naturalistic philosophy toward learning.”⁴⁹ In the same year, Knapp drew a similar connection between Leopold’s “I-Thou” relationship and place-based education. Before concluding that “[if Leopold] were alive, he would be speaking, writing, and teaching about place-based education,” Knapp insisted that a deeper consideration of other naturalists, “such as John Muir, John Burroughs, Henry D. Thoreau, Gilbert White, Edwin Way Teale, Rachel Carson, Annie Dillard, Sally Carrighar, Virginia Eifert, and Anne Morrow Lindbergh,” might reveal similar valuable lessons for place-based educational researchers.⁵⁰ Together, Greenfield and Knapp appear to represent

⁴⁹ Daniel Greenfield, “The Land as the Forgotten Teacher: How a Naturalistic Land Ethic, as Exemplified in Thoreau, Leopold, and Wilson, Informs Environmental Education” (doctoral dissertation, Kent State University, 2005), 1.

⁵⁰ Knapp, “I-Thou Relationship,” 284.

the only two historical considerations of the linkages between place-based educational theory and the American environmental pioneers of the twentieth century.

To be sure, place-based educational research is not entirely ahistorical.⁵¹ There have been, in fact, hints and glimmers of the past scattered throughout the literature. There is a general recognition, as the discussion above has revealed, of the theoretical connections that place-based education shares with early twentieth century progressive educational thinkers. Few place-based proponents have argued that the approach is entirely new.⁵² Place-based educators have also begun to consider the more recent past and the kinship that sometimes exists between American environmentalism and certain place-based educational scholars. But the historical work within the field of place-based education is far from complete and it is within this assumption that the present study grounds itself.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to rigorously and systematically document historical precedents of place-based educational theory and practice. In doing so, this study provides a more solid foundation upon which the contemporary field which might ground contemporary conversations regarding the idea and practice of place-based education. While place-based education as a named pedagogy appears to be a relatively new term, even a cursory examination reveals that the fundamental principles of the approach have a much deeper lineage. By at least the early twentieth century, for instance, many progressive educational scholars were writing about the importance of maintaining a commitment to local contexts, the student experience, and,

⁵¹ Two further examples of historical work in the context of place-based education can be found in Jayanandhan, "John Dewey and a Pedagogy of Place," and Canniff, "On Living Well in Our Place." Each is cited later in the discussion as appropriate.

⁵² Knapp, "Place-Based Curricular and Pedagogical Models," 6; William Hug, "Learning and Teaching for an Ecological Sense of Place: Toward Environmental/Science Education Praxis" (doctoral dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1998).

in many instances, community engagement. As outlined through the discussion above, these three elements have come to represent defining criteria for modern place-based educational initiatives. Although place-based educators have generally recognized their progressive roots, little in the way of comparative or historical research is currently available and most historical engagements have been ephemeral at best. In short, beyond casual considerations of educational progressivism, place-based educational researchers have done little to consider linkages with other place-conscious reform efforts historically or across disciplines.

It may be the case that place-based education is unique primarily in name. Rather than a wholly new idea, place-based education's recent call for a return to the local as the center of the educational experience is but the latest revisioning of a number of older reform efforts. This study moves beyond the formal phrase of *place-based education* to consider other educational reforms that were fundamentally similar. This includes, but is not limited to the following: outdoor education, nature study, Progressive Era geography education, and Country Life education. Of course, there are other initiatives, perhaps the most notable of which is the Foxfire program, which exemplified place-based learning, yet were not historically affiliated with larger reform efforts. In addition, the work of such thinkers as Johann Amos Comenius, Johann Pestalozzi, Friedrich Froebel, Louis Agassiz, and Colonel Francis Parker, among numerous others, has been largely ignored, but nonetheless deserves consideration in the context of place-based education. The study serves three primary purposes. First, this study attempts to provide an historical perspective of place-based educational reforms throughout the past few centuries, beginning with the work of prominent educational and philosophical figures as far back as the seventeenth century and extending through the era of educational progressivism to the founding of the phrase place-based education in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Secondly, the

study also endeavors to provide commentary on the wider historical contexts that have contributed to an emphasis on the local in the educative process. And finally, the study seeks to serve the indirect purpose of informing current practice by highlighting successes and failures in place-based curricular reforms historically.

Research Questions

The following questions will serve to guide research:

- A) What are the historical precedents of modern place-based education?
- B) How have sociopolitical contexts influenced calls for place-focused pedagogies?
- C) How might past experiences with place-focused educational initiatives inform contemporary efforts to reform schools?

Scope of Study

This study will consist of the following:

- A) a review of progressive educational thinking and some its most influential precursors and the extent to which thinkers of the era were conscious of the local in their educational philosophies,
- B) a review of curricular theories, practices, and educational reform movements since the era of educational progressivism and the extent to which associated thinkers and advocates were conscious of the local in their educational philosophies,
- C) a general discussion of the historical contexts in which place-based educational reforms of the twentieth century have developed,
- D) an examination of the practice of place-based educational initiatives where data is available,

- E) an evaluation of primary source texts relevant to the educational movements discussed in A through D,
- F) a consideration of the implications that the study might hold for contemporary reform efforts in the area of place-based educational practice.

Methodology

This project is historical in nature. More specifically, this study stands as somewhat of a curriculum history of place-based education from the mid-seventeenth century to the present. Laurel Tanner has described curriculum history as the “cumulative experience of the curriculum field” and has broadly subdivided the field’s subjects of study into *historical products* and *historical processes*.⁵³ Whereas historical products might be characterized as curricular “facts and principles,” Tanner regarded processes as the “experiences” associated with curriculum development and implementation.⁵⁴ This historical study investigates both processes *and* products with the intent of clarifying and better understanding past and present place-based educational reform initiatives. The historical lens adopted in this project is critical to answering a powerful question posed by Dewey and others; that is, “What does our ‘old experience’ tell us about ‘developing a new and improved experience.’”⁵⁵

As Lawrence Cremin remarked in *The Transformation of the School*, “...reform movements are notoriously ahistorical in outlook.”⁵⁶ The criticism is one that has plagued American education for some time. Frederick M. Hess’ *The Same Thing Over and Over*, published 2010, represents but one of the latest reiterations of the general claim that

⁵³ Laurel Tanner, “Curriculum History and Educational Leadership,” *Educational Leadership* 41, no.3 (1983): 39.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 42. Tanner’s citation of John Dewey comes from *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, published 1920.

⁵⁶ Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 8

contemporary educational reform efforts lack historical consciousness.⁵⁷ But calls for a more robust historical outlook in educational work and curriculum making are not simply gratuitous. Instead, as Tanner has argued, historical investigation may yield “useable knowledge” for contemporary practitioners and reformers.⁵⁸ In fact, Tanner has concluded that “...curriculum history is more than useful; it is essential for improving the character of curriculum reform efforts.”⁵⁹ Although Tanner has sometimes directed her advocacy for curriculum history specifically at a professional curriculum field, much of her rationale for historical study applies equally well to other reform-minded educators generally, where modern place-based education serves as one relevant example. In other words, aside from adding to the professional knowledge of a specialized field of curriculum study, an important and related outcome to be sure, the “objective...to build on earlier practical and theoretical knowledge”⁶⁰ also benefits those who do not necessarily identify as curricularists, as such endeavors provide potentially invaluable insights into the problems surrounding educational reform. Following Tanner, this study is organized around the notion that identifying and building upon past knowledge of formal pedagogy is an important dimension of contemporary place-based educational reform.

O.L. Davis remarked that “Curriculum history, whose subject is the practical field of curriculum, nevertheless is a member of the family of historical studies.”⁶¹ With that connection in mind, this historical review of place-based education has followed the established principles that underlie historical research more generally. In the first place, historical writing tells a story. As Richard Marius and Melvin Page conceived it: “As important as both making a point and

⁵⁷ Frederick M. Hess, *The Same Thing Over and Over: How School Reformers Get Stuck in Yesterday's Ideas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), ix.

⁵⁸ Laurel Tanner, “Observation: Curriculum History as Useable Knowledge,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 12, no. 4 (1982): 405-411.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 410.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ O.L. Davis, “Historical Inquiry: Telling Real Stories,” in *Forms of Curriculum Inquiry*, ed. E. Short (New York: SUNY Press, 1991), 79.

providing clear descriptions, narratives tell stories, and stories are the bedrock of history. Without narratives, history would die as a discipline.”⁶² This study adopts a narrative style of presentation and, on the whole, presents itself as a *story* of place-based curricula and its successes and failures over the last few centuries. It is not, however, a story in the traditional sense given the scattered nature of place-based reforms over time. The story of place-based educational reform is in many ways disjointed as reform efforts have not typically been connected directly or explicitly across time and space.

Davis developed a number of criteria to guide historical investigations in the curriculum field. Among other important attributes, Davis pointed to *interpretation*, *significance*, *representativeness*, and *perspective* in his evaluation of high quality historical inquiry. With regard to interpretation, Davis suggested that historians must be “mindful” and that historical knowledge must be “neither eliminated, muted, nor given undue emphasis.”⁶³ Interpretations must remain consistent with the evidence which supports them without being either overstated or undeveloped. Significance, too, involves balance on the part of the historian and her/his writing. Davis insisted: “Major turning points, events, and people in the curriculum story are treated in-depth sufficient to the development both of their importance to the story and its interpretations and of a realistic portrayal of the times. Significance may be asserted, but it is also developed.”⁶⁴ Davis went on to discuss the related principles of representativeness and perspective as well. The former ensures that “...the curriculum story is not romanticized.”⁶⁵ Perspective, by comparison, “emphasizes both continuity and change” with the understanding that historical inquiry in the

⁶² Richard Marius and Melvin Page, *A Short Guide to Writing about History* (New York: Pearson, 2007), 61.

⁶³ Davis, “Historical Inquiry,” 80.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

curriculum field must not assume the “inevitable progression of events.”⁶⁶ Together, *interpretation, significance, representativeness* and *perspective* represent key attributes of quality historical investigations.

Like Davis, Marius and Page also identified a number of key characteristics to define historical research and writing. Among those characteristics was the obligation of the historian to base purported claims on the full range of available evidence, rather than merely a personal belief. Davis concluded the same in his discussion of *authority* as a central component of historical inquiry in the curriculum field. He insisted that “The curriculum story told is supported by and traceable to valid historical evidence.”⁶⁷ For historical work in any field, primary source texts, be they manuscript or published, are the “raw materials” from which scholars construct their investigations.⁶⁸ Sources incorporated in historical analysis should also, to the extent possible, be corroborated with other primary source materials, as well secondary texts and arguments put forth by other historians. Among the numerous texts supporting the present study are primary source works from the following sources: John Dewey, William Heard Kilpatrick, Johann Amos Comenius, Colonel Francis Wayland Parker, *The Report of the Commission on Country Life*, L. B. Sharp, and archival materials available for such initiatives as The Berry School and the Tuskegee Institute. This list is far from exhaustive, but nonetheless a reflection of the commitment to primary source data inherent in this study. This commitment exists despite Davis’ regretful claim that “...a serious impediment to penetrating historical studies [in the area of curriculum study] is the continuing paucity of collections of primary curriculum documents

⁶⁶ Davis, “Historical Inquiry,” 80.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁶⁸ Anthony Brundage, *Going to the Sources: A Guide to Historical Research and Writing* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1997), 16.

and records.⁶⁹ While it is nearly always difficult to find quality examples from practice (e.g., lesson plans, diaries from educators about successes and failures within the classroom, etc.), it is nonetheless a goal of this project to locate and to report on those sources that are available.

Secondary sources also play a critical role in this investigation. In the first place, secondary accounts of particular place-based initiatives are in some instances the only readily available texts for consideration. The study utilizes available secondary texts in order to first identify fields related to place-based education (e.g., outdoor education, project-based learning, problem-centered learning) and, ultimately, to locate primary source illustrations of theory and practice. Secondary texts such as the most recent version of *Curriculum Books* and the *Handbook of Problem-Based Learning* serve as two relevant examples.⁷⁰ Bibliographies and reference lists from these and other books, articles, and dissertations also serve as useful preliminary sources which the researcher uses to identify additional primary source texts. The study also incorporates a collection of those invaluable secondary texts that work to provide large scale analyses of major social, political, economic, and pedagogical trends in American educational history. A sample collection of such texts includes the following: *The Transformation of the School, American Education, Tinkering toward Utopia, "Schools of Tomorrow," Schools of Today, and The Struggle for the American Curriculum.*⁷¹ Similarly, other secondary texts relevant to particular areas of study, such as the "new geography," The Country Life Movement, or outdoor education, also provide important clarifications regarding the unique

⁶⁹ Davis, "Historical Inquiry," 83.

⁷⁰ Jocelyn Rankin, *Handbook on Problem-Based Learning* (New York: Forbes Custom Publishing, 1999); William H. Shubert, et. al., *Curriculum Books: The First 100 Years* (New York: P. Lang, 2002).

⁷¹ Cremin, *The Transformation of the School*; Wayne J. Urban and Jennings L Wagoner, Jr., *American Education: A History*, 3rd ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2004); Susan Semel and Alan Sadovnick, *Schools of Tomorrow, Schools of Today: What Happened to Progressive Education?* (New York: Peter Lang); Herbert Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge Falmer, 2004).

social, political, and educational contexts for reform. Date of publication was an additional criterion, as the study extended from the late seventeenth century to the present.⁷²

Aside from the nature of sources incorporated, be they primary or secondary, of great significance in the design of this study is the manner in which theoretical perspectives and reform initiatives are selected as illustrations of place-based education. The study incorporates texts based on the extent to which each represented an educational domain comparable to the core themes evident in modern place-based educational theory and practice. Consistent with the discussion above, three criteria are used to determine inclusion as historical antecedents to modern place-based education. In part or in whole, the educational ideas and practices evaluated in this study (1) utilized local contexts and phenomena as educational stimuli, (2) oriented instructional strategies around an appreciation for the lived experiences of the learner and/or the value of first-hand, observational work, and (3) demonstrated some form of community engagement or responsiveness. In that community responsiveness is not always foregrounded in modern place-based educational writing, it does not represent a delimiting criterion in the study. Unlike the emphasis on the local, for instance, community responsiveness is not inextricable. Nonetheless, because community responsiveness is clearly a significant motivation for many contemporary place-based proponents it certainly receives close consideration.

Lastly, context is important element of historical research and writing. For Davis, context equated to an avoidance of *presentism*, or the tendency to read the past through the present. As Davis noted of sound historical work, “Contemporary interpretations and judgments of curriculum practice and issues are not imposed upon events, individuals, and actions of the

⁷²The study actually begins with Aristotle, but the bulk of the developments considered date from the seventeenth century onward.

past.”⁷³ While a curriculum history of place-based pedagogy may ultimately inform contemporary educational practice, this study does not interpret educational reforms through a contemporary lens. Instead, the study is committed to understanding the unique historical and social circumstances that may have prompted or prevented, over time, reforms that were fundamentally place-based and recognizes that those motivations may likely be quite dissimilar from the present. Less so than current practice, this study emphasizes the development of place-based curricula historically. Similarly, although the modern place-based educational literature has naturally influenced the establishment of the criteria incorporated in this study used to determine historical antecedents, such a framework has not overwhelmed the possibility or responsibility to maintain the integrity of the ideas and initiatives reviewed.

Assumptions

The study is grounded in the following assumptions:

- A) Primary source documents relevant to the area of study are available.
- B) The primary source documents reviewed in this study are authentic.
- C) The primary source documents reviewed in this study accurately portray the thoughts and meanings of their original authors.
- D) Historical work in the area of curriculum can hold value for contemporary practitioners.

Limitations of the Study

Following Davis, one of the greatest limitations of this research is the availability of primary source documents representing practice. While the study intends to evaluate both *processes* and *products*, the ability to do so thoroughly and across the historical time period under study is determined largely by the availability of resources. Certain historical eras, reform

⁷³ Davis, “Historical Inquiry,” 80.

initiatives, or scholars will be more completely represented than others and this is a feature of the study beyond the researcher's control.

Another potential limitation in the study surrounds the criteria used to determine which reform initiatives represent antecedents to modern place-based education. The criteria developed emerged from a rigorous investigation of the contemporary literature relevant to place-based theory and practice. As noted, the study recognized an educational program as place-based where it (a) emphasized the local contexts surrounding the school itself, (b) designed instruction with the unique needs of students in mind, and (c) was responsive to the wider community served. Some readers will likely take exception to the criteria established and offer alternative definitional conceptions of place-based education which would potentially alter the selections discussed below in this particular historical review.

Organization of the Report

Chapter 1 is a general overview of the study and includes the following: introduction, background of the problem, significance of the problem, statement of purpose, scope of the study, research questions, methodology, assumptions, limitations of the study, and organization of the report.

Chapter 2 considers the longevity of core themes contained within place-base education by tracing place-conscious theory and practice prior to the twentieth century. This chapter provides strong evidence for the claim that place-based education is essentially a recycling of long-lived educational ideals and works to demonstrate the antiquity of the core elements of the approach, specifically the pedagogical emphasis on local contexts, the nature of the learner, and the relationship of the school to the improvement of the community. Among the influential figures considered are Johann Amos Comenius, Johan Pestalozzi, Freidrich Froebel, Colonel

Francis Parker, and John Dewey. A summarizing section considers the connection between these early writers and the persistence of place-based notions in the era of educational progressivism.

Chapter 3 moves beyond the early educational writers to examine what came to be known as the nature study movement. The chapter begins with the experimental work of Louis Agassiz and traces the development of nature study teaching and learning throughout the Progressive Era.

Chapter 4 evaluates developments in the area of geography education in the latter decades of the nineteenth century to the development of the expanding horizons curriculum. Emphasis is concentrated on the connection of American home geography with the German precursor in *Heimatskunde*, as well as the longstanding efforts of the early Herbartians to reform geography education in the American public school.

Chapter 5 addresses the educational dimensions of the Country Life Movement. The outcomes of the targets identified by the County Life Commission and the place-based themes embraced by the movement's foremost spokesman, Liberty Hyde Bailey, are evaluated.

Chapter 6 considers the development of outdoor education in the late 1940s and 1950s and the philosophies of pioneers in the field. The motivations for outdoor education and camping as well as an evaluation of the successes and failures of highlighted illustrations of practice are provided.

Chapter 7 addresses initiatives and rationales supportive of community-based learning and community schools, all under the broad heading of community education. The first portion of the chapter considers the Penn School, the Tuskegee and Hampton Institutes, the Berry School, and Foxfire as illustrations of place-based community education initiatives that arose outside of larger educational reform movements. The second portion of the chapter evaluates the

community education movement that gained momentum in the mid to late 1950s in post-war international contexts.

Chapter 8 is a concluding chapter which provides a summary of the findings produced through this research and identifies several areas fruitful for future research. Chapter 8 also addresses the third guiding research question which considers implications for contemporary place-based initiatives.

CHAPTER 2

EARLIEST ROOTS FOR PLACE-BASED EDUCATIONAL THEORY & PRACTICE

Introduction

A central theme of this investigation pertains to the longevity of the core themes underlying modern place-based educational theory and practice. A deep respect for the nature of the learner in the educative process, a concentration on community improvement or service, and, perhaps most importantly, a peculiar attention to the utility of local, familiar contexts in the learning process, are not concerns unique to twenty-first century pedagogies. But not only are these ideas not new, they were in fact represented throughout the educational writings of philosophers since antiquity. The discussion below is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to highlight the work of several notable educational philosophers who, over time, have been recognized as foundational figures in the development of educational theory and practice. Guided by the three criteria highlighted above, this introductory chapter identifies several of the earliest historical antecedents for modern place-based education. The investigation begins with the translated work of Aristotle and ends with a consideration of the early progressive influences of Colonel Francis Wayland Parker and John Dewey. Given the vast amount of historical time covered, the social and political contexts that might have influenced each of the scholars considered below receive less attention than that found in subsequent chapters where the educational initiatives reviewed represent more consolidated calls for reform. Nonetheless, contexts for reform are highlighted where suitable evidence was available. Although the format and focus are somewhat distinct, this chapter provides an important background discussion relevant to subsequent chapters in the

sense that many of the ideas introduced by Froebel, Pestalozzi, Herbart, and others, anticipated the thinking and writing of educational scholars in later years.

Aristotle

Among the most recognizable Western scholars, this historical evaluation of modern place-based educational theory and practice begins with none other than Aristotle. The son of a prominent Macedonian physician, Aristotle was born in 384 B.C. in the town of Stagira. Perhaps the most memorable student to attend Plato's famed *Academy*, Aristotle became a renowned scholar and educator in his own right. Remembered most for his foundational philosophical work in metaphysics, epistemology, and politics, Aristotle was a talented educator as well, as evidenced, in no small part, through his endeavors in the *Lyceum* in Athens and his tutelage of Alexander the Great. Though Aristotle did not write an independent treatise to address educational theory and practice directly or in extended form, he alluded frequently to teaching and learning throughout his lifetime and across his many works. Despite the absence of an independent educational text, modern scholars have launched numerous investigations into Aristotle's perspective on teaching and learning.¹ The brief commentary offered here highlights the connection between Aristotle and the principle features of place-based pedagogy and is based largely upon those investigative efforts.

Familiarity. In *Aristotle on Teaching*, a comprehensive appraisal of Aristotle's writing on education, Mary Spangler discussed the close attention the scholar paid to the importance of familiarity in the learning process. According to Spangler's interpretation, much of which she derived through commentary provided by Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle suggested a practice of teaching and learning whereby the creation of new knowledge should be oriented around existing

¹ See Richard W. Bauman, *Aristotle's Logic of Education*, vol. 9, (New York: Peter Lang, 1998); Patrick L. Lynch, *Aristotle's School: A Study of a Greek Educational Institution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); Thomas Davidson, *Aristotle and Ancient Educational Ideals*, The Great Educators (New York: Burt Franklin, 1969).

understanding. In Aristotle's *Analytica Posteriora* ("Posterior Analytics"), for instance, he noted that "All instruction given or received by way of argument proceeds from preexistent knowledge."² Those understandings and experiences familiar to the student, Spangler went on to explain, were of central importance in the student's development and learning. She wrote:

[Aristotle] holds that the teacher cannot instruct pupils if he proceeds from ideas unfamiliar to them. If the instructor wishes to clarify, for example, the principle *fungi are plants which obtain their food from an external source*, he must do so by utilizing particular kinds of fungi which are familiar to the students, such as mushrooms, puffballs, and molds. Only in this way can the teacher lead his students to new knowledge. In the words of Aristotle's commentator, Aquinas: "Anyone who teaches, leads the disciple from things known by the latter, to the knowledge of things previously unknown to him; according to what the Philosopher [Aristotle] says (*Poster*, il): *All teaching and all learning proceed from previous knowledge.*" [emphasis in original]³

Spangler's conclusions were important for several reasons. In the first place, she did much to clarify the role that the student's lived experiences might play in the educational philosophy of Aristotle. The familiar, as indicated in the excerpt of Aristotle's original work, was the starting point for learning.⁴ An important, if somewhat commonsensical conclusion, scholars of education have reiterated this sentiment time and again since Aristotle. Perhaps more importantly, Spangler, and arguably Aquinas as well, inferred something about the nature of educational work based in familiar contexts and experiences. To clarify, Spangler took the extra step in her investigation to ask where, pedagogically speaking, Aristotle's emphasis on the familiar might have led. What she found in his writing was a plan remarkably consistent with the general notions outlined by modern place-based educators; that is, the familiar experience is often, and naturally so, a local experience. The terms *place* and *local* apparently found no direct mention in Aristotle's conception of education, yet the description offered by Spangler clearly implied a similar meaning. If Spangler's assessment was accurate, modern scholars might look

² Mary M. Spangler, *Aristotle on Teaching* (New York: University Press of America, 1998), 4.

³ Ibid.

⁴ For a critique of this aspect of Aristotle's educational philosophy see Bauman, *Aristotle's Logic of Education*.

directly to Aristotle in an effort to locate the deepest historical antecedents for modern place-based pedagogies.

Sense-Experience. Another characteristic feature regarding educational theory and practice that Spangler extrapolated from Aristotle's writing was his emphasis on experience through the senses. "...Aristotle holds that sense experience is the starting point in any investigation we might make,"⁵ she noted. And Aristotle stated as much explicitly himself, as exemplified in the following excerpted passage: "The sensible qualities are what we know first and...no matter how far investigation may lead us away from this familiar realm, it continues to be the indispensable starting-point of all our knowledge about nature, and one to which we must always return. Unless anchored in sense experience, the study of nature [and of any other subject] can never keep to the right track, nor lead towards the truth [brackets in original]."⁶ In the remainder of her analysis, Spangler went on to discuss in great detail the processes of induction and deduction in Aristotle's philosophy of education, a complete discussion of which is well beyond the scope of this present investigation. At the same time, while recognizing that Aristotle's notion of teaching and learning was perhaps more complex than represented here, the fact remains that his preference for the familiar and for direct experience were critical components of his overall understanding of the learning process and the manner in which ideas and principles came to be known. His plan for learning and teaching also pointed in some sense to what might today be termed an inquiry-based approach.⁷ More importantly for the purposes outlined here, these features of Aristotle's work are to some degree similar to several

⁵ Spangler, *Aristotle on Teaching*, 47.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Bauman's *Aristotle on Logic* uses Dewey and Popper to challenge the role and type of inquiry demonstrated in Aristotle's writing. For whatever differences that may exist in the notions of inquiry held by these various thinkers, the connection to inquiry-based learning suggested here is based upon Spangler's investigation and description of Aristotle's conception of inductive and deductive processes.

components frequently cited in modern literature surrounding educational theory and practice.⁸ Place-based educational writing within the past two decades represents but one of many of such reiterations. Interestingly enough, while modern place-based educators have made casual reference to Aristotle's anticipation of the concept of *place*, little mention has been made of his educational ideas.⁹ Of course, Aristotle was but a singular case, as there were other early philosophers and educational thinkers whose work anticipated the central tenets of place-based pedagogies.

John Amos Comenius

Born in Moravia, modern-day Czech Republic, in 1592, Jan Amos Komensky, generally referred to through the Latinized translation of "Comenius" by Western readers, adds further to an investigation of historical precedents in place-based educational theory and practice. A teacher and pastor, his seminal work, *The Great Didactic*, has long been recognized as an important educational treatise. Originally published in Latin as a part of the larger work entitled *Opera Didactica Omnia* in 1657, the work was later translated into English in 1896 by M. W. Keatinge.¹⁰ Comenius was an early proponent of a universal education and this much was evident not only in his writing, but in the subject headings he selected to organize the *Great Didactic*. Similarly, Comenius offered a proposal toward equity in educational access where he wrote that "...all the Parishes, Towns, and Villages of every Christian Kingdom, that the entire Youth of both Sexes, none being excepted..."¹¹ from educational opportunity. He offered further indication elsewhere and his support for the idea that schooling become a feature in the lives of

⁸ In this instance, given the antiquity of Aristotle's writing, I use the term "modern" to apply broadly to educational thought in the past century, if not earlier. Elsewhere, the term applies to scholarly work, specifically place-based educational literature, contributed within the past two decades (~1990-2011).

⁹ David Gruenewald, "Foundations of Place: A Multidisciplinary Framework for Place-Conscious Education." *American Educational Research Journal* 40 (2003): 619–654; David Hutchison, *A Natural History of Place in Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2004).

¹⁰ M. W. Keatinge, *Comenius* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1931).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

not just the wealthy "... or of the powerful only, but of all alike, boys and girls, both noble and ignoble, rich and poor, in all cities and towns, villages and hamlets,..."¹² Certainly a significant contribution to modern educational thinking, one for which scholars have widely recognized Comenius, observers also find within *The Great Didactic* many of the core themes adopted in the writings of modern placed-based educators.

Nature of the Learner. In addition to the spiritual tone that Comenius' writing assumed, a striking feature of his educational philosophy was the attention paid to the nature of the learner. In short, Comenius suggested that the process of learning began with the pupil and that this understanding was an essential, unchanging characteristic of education. In a discussion of "Aim in Education"¹³ he explained, "By the word *nature* we mean, not the corruption which has laid hold of all men since the Fall (on which account we are naturally called the children of wrath, unable of ourselves to have any good thoughts), but our first and original condition, to which, as to a starting-point, we must be recalled..."¹⁴ In addition, Comenius understood that the interests of the learner deserved substantive consideration in organizing educational experiences. "...[A]n easier method of instruction may be introduced," he wrote, "so that students, instead of developing an antipathy towards learning, may be enticed by irresistible attractions, and that, as he says, boys may gain no less pleasure from study than from spending whole days in playing ball and amusing themselves. These are the views of Dr. [Martin] Luther."¹⁵ Unsurprisingly given his reform sentiments, Comenius went on to report that the schools of the day were often "...terrors for boys and shambles for their intellects,"¹⁶ thus driving many ways from what was

¹² Keatinge, *Comenius*, 41.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

already an institution scarcely accessed. Again, he pointed to “faulty method”¹⁷ as the source of “such a disgraceful waste of time and labour...”¹⁸ “The art of teaching,” Comenius concluded, “therefore, demands nothing more than the skillful arrangement of time, of the subjects taught, and of the method.”¹⁹

Scholars over the years have arguably failed to develop the “automatic machine” of learning, one “free from friction,”²⁰ for which Comenius had hoped. Nonetheless, this failure does not preclude, or make less valuable, the fact that Comenius provided strong indication of what he reasoned might lead in precisely that direction. Comenius believed that learning, both generally and in the sense of individual growth, was part of a natural process and it was within an understanding of that learning process that the scholar suggested answers must be sought. This much was implied where he indicated that “If we wish to find a remedy for the defects of nature, it is in nature herself that we must look for it...”²¹ Comenius recommended a developmental approach to the arrangement of both curriculum and method and reiterated the belief that the age and experience of the learner were relevant concerns. In addition to the suggestion that learners might perform best in the morning, which he reasoned paralleled the spring hours of the day, Comenius insisted that “All the subjects that are to be learned should be arranged so as to suit the age of the students...”²² Along similar lines, Comenius urged schools and teachers to adopt a plan through which the consideration of things and objects preceded a consideration of formal rules or otherwise abstract principles. In a clarification, he stated the concern explicitly through his declaration that “The knowledge of things precede the knowledge

¹⁷ Ibid., 48.

¹⁸ Keatinge, *Comenius*, 47-48.

¹⁹ Ibid., 50-51.

²⁰ Ibid., 51.

²¹ Ibid., 52.

²² Ibid., 56.

of their combinations,” and further, “...that examples come before rules.”²³ All of this was to say that the educational plan should proceed in a developmentally appropriate fashion. In a similar vein, Comenius believed that the curriculum should be arranged in such a way to ensure that essential and general themes were gained early on and expanded upon in greater detail later in the learning process. “At the very commencement of their studies,” he noted, “boys should receive instruction in the first principle of general culture, that is to say, the subjects learned should be arranged in such a manner that the studies that come later introduce nothing new, but only expand the elements of knowledge...”²⁴ What readers found in Comenius was a developmental program for teaching and learning, one that accounted for both the unique needs of the learner and the connection of new materials to old.

Familiarity. An extension of the arguments and principles described above, Comenius suggested that the presentation of materials should be organized from simple to complex, and from easy to more difficult. This feature of his work implied an appreciation for familiarity. Ultimately, familiarity in the selection of materials expanded in Comenius’ work to create an appreciation for local contexts. It was to err, he added, “...to teach the unknown through the medium of that which is equally unknown...”²⁵ It was through his understanding of the role of the familiar that Comenius’ educational theory on some level anticipated the place-based educational ideas of modern scholars. The following passage was clarifying with regard to a general commitment to the local in his educational writing:

(vi.) If the subject-matter be so arranged that the pupils get to know, first, that which lies nearest to their mental vision, then that which lies moderately near, then that which is more remote, and lastly, that which is farthest off. Therefore, if boys are being taught something for the first time (such as logic or rhetoric), the illustrations should not be taken from subjects that cannot be grasped by the scholars, such as theology, politics,

²³ Ibid., 59.

²⁴ Keatinge, *Comenius*, 67-68.

²⁵ Ibid., 83.

or poetry, but should be derived from the events of everyday life. Otherwise the boys will understand neither the rules nor their application.²⁶ Through his reference to “everyday life” the excerpt above revealed a connection, at least in the initial and earliest stages of learning, between the local, the familiar, and student learning. Modern place-based writers have echoed similar conceptions.

Sense-Perception. Very much related to his emphasis on the familiar, Comenius held an appreciation for the utility of first-hand, sense experience. This much he indicated where he revealed his belief that “...all knowledge begins by sensuous perception.”²⁷ Or, as he noted elsewhere, “...as far as possible, instruction should be given through the senses, that it may be retained in the memory with less effort.”²⁸ In some instances, this approach required that students and teachers rely less on the study of texts. Stated Comenius:

28. *Rectification.*- We arrive therefore at the following conclusion; men must, as far as is possible, be taught to become wise by studying the heavens, the earth, oaks, and beeches, but not by studying books; that is to say, they must learn to know and investigate the things themselves, and the observation that other people have made about the things. We shall tread in the footsteps of the wise men of old, if each of us obtain his knowledge from the originals, from things themselves, and from no other source. We may therefore lay it down as a law:

(i.) That all knowledge should be deduced from the unchanging principles of the subject in question.

(ii.) That no information should be imparted on the grounds of bookish authority, but should be authorized by actual demonstration to the senses and to the intellect.

(iii.) That in dealing with any subject the analytic method should never be used exclusively; in fact, preponderance should rather be given to the synthetic method.²⁹

Comenius was certainly not an advocate of removing the text from the school, though the passage did suggest a clear preference for first-hand observation and inquiry.

Readers of Comenius did not have to rely entirely on generalities as he did much to illustrate and outline his specific recommendations for practice. His attention to first-hand

²⁶ Ibid., 85.

²⁷ Keatinge, *Comenius*, 85.

²⁸ Ibid., 91.

²⁹ Ibid., 105.

experiences and the local in his vision of the educative process was thus clarified. In a discussion of the blending of learning and recreation, Comenius described a practice whereby students might learn about, and test existing knowledge, in local natural settings. “In spring,” he suggested, “[students] may be taken into the garden or into the country, and may be taught the various species of plants, vying with one another to see who can recognize the greater number.”³⁰ “In this way,” Comenius continued, “they will be introduced to the rudiments of medicine, and not only will it be evident which of them has a natural bent towards that science, but in many the inclination will be created.”³¹ Space does not permit a complete evaluation, yet other illustrations in Comenius surrounding the educational utility of local experiences could be found in his “Sketch of the Mother-School.”³²

Curriculum Articulation. Among other contributions to the development of modern educational thought, Comenius pointed toward an articulated curriculum plan which essentially paralleled the graded school from the elementary-level to the university. At the very base-level was the Mother-School, a non-formal period of education which took place, appropriately, at the “Mother’s knee.”³³ Here, Comenius described a localized, experience-based form of instruction designed around fundamental skills and observations. The local nature of the Mother-School was evident in the following selections:

5 (iv.) The rudiments of astronomy will consist in knowing what by the heavens, the sun, the moon, and the stars, and in watching their rising and their setting daily.

6 (v.) We know the elements of geography when we learn the nature of mountains, valleys, plants, rivers, villages, citadels, or states, according to the situation of the place in which we are brought up.³⁴

³⁰ Keatinge, *Comenius*, 142.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 142.

³² *Ibid.*, 203.

³³ *Ibid.*, 199.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 204.

The sixth principle seemed particularly significant in that it clarified the somewhat subtle understanding that a practice of arranging localized observations might take on unique forms from one locale to the next.

Comenius' localized Mother-School prescriptions did not stop with astronomy or geography. To history, he recommended "...recollecting and reporting what has recently happened, or how this or that person has carried out this or that matter."³⁵ Of course, the neighborhood and family supplied the stimulus for such recollections, as Comenius reminded that such an "...exercise should only relate to some incident in the child's life."³⁶ Similarly, early economic foundations developed locally and in familiar contexts. "The rudiments of economics," Comenius explained, "are acquired when the child learns the names of the various members of a family, that is to say, what is meant by the terms father, mother, maid-servant, etc.; or the various parts of a house, as hall, kitchen, bedroom, stable; or the names of domestic utensils, as table, plate, knife, broom, etc."³⁷ Through similar means, though perhaps to varying degrees, essential themes of politics, ethics, and justice could be gained in the Mother-School and in familiar, localized contexts. In all of those rather common experiences of early adolescence, Comenius found the roots of subject-matter study that was to come much later. Initial, localized experiences in the Mother-School provided foundations for future learning. To be sure, while he relied heavily on the unique and familiar lives of young learners in the development of observational skills and general, foundational understandings, Comenius did not suggest that all components of the Mother-School were entirely localized or familiar. Instead, Comenius committed himself to first-hand experience. While this commitment often pointed to local settings and opportunities,

³⁵ Keatinge, *Comenius*, 204.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 206.

this was not entirely the case. For instance, Comenius also looked to picture-books as valuable educational tools for young learners. He wrote:

The other aid to study in the Mother-School is a picture-book which should be put straight into the child's hands. At this age instruction should mainly be carried on through the medium of sense-perception, and, as sight is the chiefest of the senses, our object will be attained if we give the children pictures of the most important objects in physics, optics, astronomy, geometry, etc., and these may be arranged in the order of the subjects of knowledge that we have just sketched. In this book should be depicted mountains, valleys, trees, birds, fishes, horses, oxen, sheep, and men of varied age and height...Articles connected with house and the workshop, such as pots, plates, hammers, pincers, etc. should not be omitted. State functionaries should be represented;...³⁸

Again, while local family and neighborhood contexts might have provided opportunities for first-hand observations and experiences, the passage above indicated that Comenius' educational philosophy was not exclusively dedicated to the local. Moreover, while the Mother-School emphasized the local to a significant degree, the Vernacular and Latin- school programs hardly contained this feature. In his outline of the Vernacular-school, Comenius noted that students "...should learn as much economics and politics as is necessary to enable them to understand what they see daily at home and in the state."³⁹ This was the extent of any hint toward the local, however, and his discussion of the Latin-School and University contained virtually no mention. With this in mind, Comenius' effort to produce an articulated plan of study from early childhood through adolescence was not altogether place-based from top to bottom.

As was the case with Aristotle before him, Comenius did not draw explicit connections between local, experiential study and the improvement of the home community. At the same time, however, the brief illustrations of his thought represented above reveal in Comenius' writing themes highly consistent with several of those characteristic of modern place-based educational literature. An outgrowth of his desire to respect the nature of the learner and to

³⁸ Keatinge, *Comenius*, 210.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 215.

provide opportunities for first-hand experience and observation, Comenius frequently looked to the unique local opportunities and contexts available to learners. These aspects anticipated modern place-based educational ideas by more than three centuries.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Born in 1712 in the Republic of Geneva, a province of modern-day Switzerland, Jean-Jacques Rousseau is perhaps best remembered for his important contributions to political theory, the social contract, and revolutionary thinking generally. Like many prominent thinkers of the day, however, Rousseau had a diversity of scholarly interests. Of particular importance to the present discussion regarding the historical antecedents of modern place-based educational theory and practice, were his writings on education. First published in 1762, *Émile*, variously referred to as his *Treatise On Education*,⁴⁰ represented Rousseau's most concise presentation of an educational philosophy. Not unlike other reform-minded educational writers, he noted his dissatisfaction with the status quo of schooling in the mid-eighteenth century. Outlining his purposes, Rousseau reminded readers what "...thousands of others have said;" that is, he reported "...that for countless ages there has been a perennial protest against the current practice..."⁴¹ He was also explicit regarding the change he desired.

Formalism Critiqued. A reflection of Rousseau's allegiance to educational readiness, he carried an aversion to introducing the formal subject matter over the ideas and objects represented within it. To that end, he wrote strongly against those pedagogies offering "Words, words, nothing but words."⁴² In a lamentation directed toward common practice, he noted:

In any study whatever, representative signs are of no account without the idea of the things represented. The child, however, is always restricted to these signs without

⁴⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile: Or Treatise on Education*, trans, William H. Payne, Great Books in Philosophy (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2003).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, xii.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 73.

ever being made to comprehend any of the things which they represent. We imagine that we are teaching him to know maps. We teach him the names of cities, countries, and rivers, but he conceives them as existing nowhere save on paper where they are pointed out to him. I recollect having somewhere seen a geography which began in this wise: *What is the world? It is a globe of pasteboard.* This is precisely the geography of children. I dare assert that, after studying cosmography and the sphere for two years, there is not a single child of ten who, by the rules which have been given him, can go from Paris to Saint Denis.⁴³

Rousseau applied the same critique of fact over understanding to the study of language and history. He conjectured that “It is easy to put into their mouths the words *kings, empires, wars, conquests, revolutions, and laws*; but when it comes to attaching definite ideas to these words, there will be a long distance between all these explanations and the conversation with Robert and the gardener.”⁴⁴ It would be reasonable to conclude that this sentiment was one which he applied to the educational status quo generally; that is, form over substance hardly amounted to an education. Not unlike Comenius before him, a part of Rousseau’s solution was to consider the appropriateness and usage of school texts. “In thus relieving children of all their school-tasks, I take away the instruments of their greatest misery, namely, books.”⁴⁵ While Rousseau added a concession with regard to the indisputable value of reading, he nonetheless concluded that “It is useful that [Émile] know how to read when reading is useful to him.”⁴⁶ Developmental readiness, the unique nature of the learner, and learning over form were key themes in Rousseau’s educational philosophy.

Nature of the Learner. Rousseau indicated that a reformed program for teaching and learning required a reappraisal of the manner in which curriculum and method were oriented in relation to the learner. His attention to the learner was arguably his greatest association to the

⁴³ Rousseau, *Émile*, 75.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

present discussion regarding place-based educational antecedents. He noted in his prefatory remarks to *Émile*:

We do not know childhood. Acting on false ideas we have of it, the farther we go the farther we wander from the right path. Those who are wisest are attached to what is important for men to know, without considering what children are able to apprehend. They are always looking for the man in the child, without thinking of what he was before he became a man. This is the study upon which I am most intent, to the end that, through my method may be chimerical and false, profit may always be derived from my observations. I may have a very poor conception of what ought to be done, but I think I have a correct view of the subject on which we are to operate. Begin, then, by studying your pupils more thoroughly, for it is very certain that you do not know them. Now, if you read this book of mine with this purpose in view, I do not believe that it will be without profit to you.⁴⁷

Foundational understandings established, Rousseau moved to outline in detail his suggestions for the improvement of educational practice. While he must have offered his recommendations in earnest and with hope of adoption, he detailed an explicit rejection toward uniformity. "...[A]n education of a certain kind," Rousseau concluded, "may be practicable in Switzerland, but not in France..."⁴⁸ Rousseau went on to note the potential for differences not only according to location and place, but with regard to social class as well. Nonetheless, while he recognized an infinite number of "special applications,"⁴⁹ Rousseau regarded his prescriptions as useful and generalizeable across contexts.

Rousseau presented his treatise on education in narrative form through an imaginary student of upper-class rank, which he called *Émile*. While portions of the first book in *Émile* tended to present a rather rigid, if not draconian by some modern standards, approach to education, one where doctors were shunned and cold baths encouraged, Rousseau was nonetheless an advocate of the child. This much he clarified where he revealed a plan for

⁴⁷ Rousseau, *Émile*, xlii–xliii.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, xliv.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, xlv.

educating young learners via “instruction through experience and the senses.”⁵⁰ In short, Rousseau sought to liberate the learner in such a way as to free what he believed were natural inclinations to seek new knowledge and understanding. “Keep the child dependent on things alone,” he wrote, “and you will have followed the order of Nature in his education.”⁵¹ “Equally in his actions and in yours,” Rousseau continued, “let him feel his liberty.”⁵² A natural developmental process was innate and the educator’s job was to facilitate that process. The passage below offered further indication:

Nature would have children be children before being men. If we wish to pervert this order, we shall produce precocious fruits which will have neither maturity nor flavor, and will speedily deteriorate; we shall have young doctors and old children. Childhood has its own way of seeing, thinking, and feeling, and nothing is more foolish than to substitute our own for them. I would soon require a child to be five feet in height as to have judgment at the age of ten. Indeed, of what use would reason be to him at that age? Reason is the check to strength, but the child has no need of this check.*⁵³

For Rousseau, the developmental readiness of the learner was a critical consideration for the educator. Yet readiness was not determined by age alone, as he implied that the unique attributes of individual learners also warranted attention. “Another consideration,” he wrote, “which confirms the utility of this method, is that of the particular genius of the child, which must be known in order to determine what moral *regime* is adapted to him.”⁵⁴ Rousseau insisted that “Each mind has its own form according to which it is governed”⁵⁵ and that teachers would be wise, and students best served, to organize instruction around that principle.

Another important component of Rousseau’s early treatise on teaching and learning was the significance of the learner’s interest in securing positive educational results. “A surer means

⁵⁰ Rousseau, *Émile*, 41.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

to [learning],” he wrote, “and the one which is always forgotten, is the desire to learner.”⁵⁶ Where interest was secured, Rousseau continued, “Every method will be a good one.”⁵⁷ Going further, Rousseau implied elsewhere that a young learner’s interests were not infrequently casual lessons and experiences taken in through first-hand observation. Those experiences most immediate and accessible through the senses played an important role in early induction phases of learning. The excerpted passage was supportive of that notion:

The first natural movements of man being to measure himself with all that surrounds him, and to test in each object which he perceives all the sensible qualities which are capable of affecting him, his first study is a sort of experimental physics relative to his own preservation, from which he is turned aside by speculative studies before he has recognized his place here below. While his delicate and flexible organs can adjust themselves to the bodies on which they are to act; while his senses, still unimpaired, are exempt from illusions, it is time to put both in action on the functions which are appropriate to them, and the time to ascertain the sensible relations which things have with us. As all that enters the human understanding comes here through the senses, the first reason of man is sensuous reason...Our first teachers of philosophy are our feet, our hands, and our eyes.⁵⁸

The selection above reiterated several important features of Rousseau’s educational theory. Perhaps most importantly, the passage indicated once again his understanding and belief of the role that first-hand observation and experience played in the learning process. Secondly, and somewhat less pronounced, readers might gather from Rousseau’s writing the notion that the immediate environment of the learner was significant. Although Rousseau did not go as far as other early scholars (e.g., Comenius, Pestalozzi) in identifying the importance of local contexts, it seems reasonable to suggest that the local environments surrounding the pupil and teacher, those of the home and neighborhood, would somewhat naturally become elements of intellectual growth. If the learning process began with the learner under Rousseau, which he established rather firmly throughout *Émile*, the contexts in which the learner was situated would almost

⁵⁶ Rousseau, *Émile*, 82.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 89.

certainly take on an important role. To be sure, while Rousseau's educational writing linked him firmly to subsequent developments in child-centered learning, his language surrounding the contexts of learning, not to mention curricular and methodical choices, were not what modern observers could frame as explicitly place-based. Nonetheless, his emphasis on the development of the learner's observational capacities and his attention to the nature of the learner later became central features of progressive educational thinking, many iterations of which have emphasized the relevance of local contexts. Thus, Rousseau's work does hold some relevance in an historical investigation of place-based pedagogy. With regard to consideration of local context, however, Rousseau was far less explicit and this dissolves, to some degree, the strength of most arguments designed to connect his work to modern place-based educational thinking.⁵⁹

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi

First published in 1801, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi's *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*⁶⁰ arguably represented the most concise illustration of the Swiss scholar's philosophy on teaching and learning. Pestalozzi revealed early on that his efforts to derive effective educational practices stemmed as much from his own work and problems in practice as they did from his efforts as a scholar of pedagogy. He wrote: "But the impulse within me to seek and find for the people simple methods of instruction, intelligible to every one [*sic*], did not originate in the prevision that lay in me of the highest that could come from the results of these methods

⁵⁹ See Matt Dubel and David Sobel, "Place-Based Teacher Education." In *Place-Based Education in the Global Age: Local Diversity*, eds. David Gruenewald and Gregory Smith (New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007); Janice Woodhouse & Clifford Knapp, "Place-Based Curriculum and Instruction: Outdoor and Environmental Education Approaches," *ERIC Digest*, ED448012 (2000); There are a small number of authors who have attempted to link Rousseau's work to modern place-based educational scholarship. Arguments are often quite vague and seem to arrive at Rousseau through the connections that PBE shares with experiential learning and educational progressivism more broadly. Further investigation may reveal deeper connections to Rousseau, but the relationship to local study seemed to be relatively weak. At the same time, Rousseau's preference for rural/country educational settings is somewhat consistent with the rural focus of many modern place-based educational programs.

⁶⁰ Johann H. Pestalozzi, *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*, trans. Ebenezer Cooke, 2nd ed. (Syracuse, New York: C.W. Bardeen, 1898).

when found; but on the contrary this prevision resulted from the reality of the impulse that led me to seek these methods.”⁶¹ “[M]y view of the subject,” Pestalozzi noted further of his pragmatic approach, “came out of a personal striving after methods, the execution of which forced me actively and experimentally to seek, to gain, and to work out what was not there and what as yet I really knew not.”⁶² An exploration of Pestalozzi’s efforts to improve his own practice through experimentation, often times in trying circumstances, the letters contained in *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children* also hold relevance in the context of an historical investigation of place-based education.

Status Quo Critiqued. Perhaps a characteristic of all educational reformers, Pestalozzi expressed a certain level of discontent with mainstream educational practice and worked diligently to offer an alternative to the status quo. “I saw popular instruction like a bottomless swamp,” he wrote on New Year’s Day in Burgdorf in 1801, “and waded round and round with difficulty in its mire until at last I learned to know the sources of its waters, the causes of its obstructions.”⁶³ By his own account, Pestalozzi spent time among the people and became deeply committed to the general improvement of society. Hardly of means himself, Pestalozzi seemed to have a particular interest in the promotion of a sense of justice, civil rights, and social change, goals he would ultimately work toward through education. The following passage was clarifying:

...[E]ven in my misery I learned to know the misery of the people and its causes deeper and deeper, and as no happier man knows them. I suffered as the people suffered; and the people showed themselves to me as they were, and as they showed themselves to no one else. I sat long years among them, like an owl among birds. But in the midst of the scornful laughter, in the midst of the loudest taunts of the men who rejected me- “You poor wretch, you are less able than the meanest day laborer to help yourself, and do you fancy you can help the people?” – in the midst of these jeering taunts, which I read on all lips, the mighty stream of my heart ceased not, alone and lonely, to struggle towards the

⁶¹ Pestalozzi, *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*, 18-19.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 29.

purpose of my life – to stop the springs of the misery in which I saw the people around me sunk.⁶⁴

A reformer in every sense, Pestalozzi's challenges ultimately led him develop and describe innovative methods of practice which continue to inform educational theory and practice.

Anschauung. Pestalozzi's descriptions of his work at an orphanage at Stanz in Argäu illustrated the early development of a reformed methodology, an understanding of educational practice which would ultimately hinge upon the notion of *Anschauung*. In part, his own account of his efforts revealed an approach that modern educational scholars might regard as *recitations*, a method of call and response which saw wide adoption in both European and American schools alike. Johann Friedrich Herbart recalled his experience of a visit to Stanz thus: "I saw him in his schoolroom. A dozen children from five to eight years old,...The noise of the whole school speaking together- no, not the noise- it was a pleasant harmony of words, quite intelligible, in measured time, like a chorus, as powerful, and as firmly united, that I had some difficulty not to change from spectator and observer into a learner and child."⁶⁵ Yet there was more to Pestalozzi's early work than the recitation, a practice to which he later leveled some measure of criticism. Elsewhere, for instance, he described the practice at Stanz of children teaching children. The extended passage below offered clarity:

Children taught children. They tried [to put into practice] what I told them to do, [and often came themselves on the track of the means of its execution from many sides. The self-activity, which had developed itself in many ways in the beginning of learning, worked with great force on the birth and growth of the conviction in me, that all true, all educated instruction must be drawn out of the children themselves, and be born within them.]* To this I was led chiefly by necessity. Since I had no fellow-helpers, I put a capable child between two less capable ones; he embraced them with both arms, he told them what he knew, and they learned to repeat after him what they knew not [Brackets in original].⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Pestalozzi, *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*, 32.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

Despite the continued reliance on the recitation, Pestalozzi's effort to ask students to learn from one another was certainly innovative at the time. More importantly, however, the last of the passage above revealed a suspicion regarding the utility of simply repeating information. Pestalozzi's subsequent description of his pedagogical commitment to *Anschauung* was further indication of a shift in his thinking about the processes of learning. The source of some conflict with regard to appropriate translation, *Anschauung* most closely represented the English phrase "sense perception,"⁶⁷ according to an extended translation and discussion offered by Lucy E. Holland and Francis C. Turner.⁶⁸ Going further, Pestalozzi's account of *Anschauung* at the Stanz school revealed an approach to education which rested largely in observation and first-hand experience on the part of pupils. The following excerpt added clarity to Pestalozzi's development of *Anschauung* at Stanz:

I saw in this combination of unschooled ignorance a power of seeing (*Anschauung*), and a firm conception of the known and the scene of which our ABC puppets have no notion.

I learned from them – I must have been blind if I had not learned – to know the natural relation in which real knowledge stands to book-knowledge. I learned from them what a disadvantage this one-sided letter knowledge and entire reliance on words (which are only sound and noise when there is nothing behind them) must be. I saw what hindrance this may be to the real power of observation (*Anschauung*), and the firm conception of the objects that surround us.

So far I got in Stanz. I felt my experiment had decided that it was possible to found popular instruction on psychological grounds, to lay true knowledge, gained by sense-impression at its foundation, and to tear away the mask of its superficial bombast.⁶⁹

Experiments to orient instruction around first-hand experience soon collapsed for Pestalozzi as the encroachment of Austrian troops assumed control over the orphanage in 1799 and converted the institution into a field hospital. "My departure from Stanz," he recalled, "although I was near death, was not a consequence of my free will but of military measures which rendered the

⁶⁷ Pestalozzi, *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*, 7.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 7-14. Translation issues surrounding *Anschauung* are clarified in great detail. The term is idiomatic and justification is offered for meanings ultimately chosen.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

continuance of my plans temporarily impossible.”⁷⁰ In the same year, one month later, in fact, Pestalozzi accepted a new position at Burgdorf in the canton of Bern.

The transition to Burgdorf was not without complication. In the first instance, Pestalozzi noted some resistance regarding the curriculum focus on the Catechism and the unlikeness that he would present Catholic doctrine in the traditional, and in many circles preferred, manner. In addition to the perceptions of curricular change, some element of the Burgdorf citizenry “...decided at a meeting that they did not wish experiments made on their children with the new teaching...”⁷¹ Nonetheless, despite initial struggles, friends of Pestalozzi, many of whom were influential in the community, rallied to his aid and he “...was admitted into the lowest school in the upper town.”⁷²

In his account of Burgdorf, Pestalozzi explained the process through which his ABC method of recitation slowly came to merge with another, perhaps more critical, dimension of his developing pedagogy, that of *Anschauung*. The result was something of a developmental theory of education. In Pestalozzi’s own words: “I saw just as soon that in making these books the constituents of instruction must be separated according to the degree of the growing power of the child; and that in all matters of instruction,¹³ it is necessary to determine with the greatest accuracy which of these constituents is fit for each age of the child, in order on the one hand not to hold him back if he ready; and on the other, not to load him and confuse him with anything for which he is not quite ready.”⁷³ Central to the entire process, Pestalozzi went on to explain, was first-hand observation “...by means of well-chosen real objects...”⁷⁴ Going further, he implied

⁷⁰ Pestalozzi, *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*, 48.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 53.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

that the observation of real objects was not atypically localized in character. A description of one “happy experiment” confirmed the place-based nature of early learning:

He soon expressed himself clearly about the objects that lay within the limits of his knowledge. He found common illustrations in the street, the garden, and the room; and soon learned to pronounce the hardest names of plant and animals, and to compare objects quite unknown to him with those known, and to produce a clear sense-impression of them in himself. Although this experiment led to byways, and worked for the strange and distant to the disadvantage of the present, it threw many sided light on the means of quickening the child to his surroundings, and showing him the charm of self-activity in the extension of his powers.⁷⁵

In sum, Pestalozzi worked to provide initial stimulus for learning in young pupils through observation in readily available, local contexts, thereafter moving outward into new understanding. Of course, this emphasis on sensory experience in the elementary years stood in strong contrast to the status quo. “[W]e make all nature round them vanish from before their eyes,” he explained, and “tyrannically stop the delightful course of their unrestrained freedom; pen them up like sheep, whole flocks huddled together, in striking rooms; pitilessly chain them for hours, days, weeks, months, years, to the contemplation of unattractive and monotonous letters...”⁷⁶ Nonetheless, continuous efforts to engage students in the observation of their neighborhood remained a cornerstone of Pestalozzi’s method at Burgdorf.

Laws of Teaching. Following his apparently strenuous and problem-filled work at Stanz and Burgdorf, Pestalozzi continued to toil with the development of broad educational principles, or laws, to improve the overall effectiveness of schooling, elementary education in particular. Reflection on his work ultimately led him to derive a series of observations presented as “The Laws of Teaching.”⁷⁷ Pestalozzi maintained many of his initial understandings related to a developmental approach to teaching and learning. To begin with “the simple before proceeding

⁷⁵ Pestalozzi, *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*, 60.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

to the complex”⁷⁸ was an essential understanding, as was the somewhat commonsensical connection he recognized to exist between new learning and old. “Try to make in every art graduated steps of knowledge,” Pestalozzi continued, “in which every new idea is only a small, almost imperceptible addition to that which has been known before, deeply impressed and not to be forgotten.”⁷⁹ Direct sense perception, as the discussion above implied, was also critical. The following passage provided further illustration of the value Pestalozzi attached to the notion of sense-perception in the educative process: “Strengthen and make clear the impressions of important objects by bringing them nearer to you by the Art [of teaching and learning], and letting them affect you through different senses. Learn for this purpose the first law of physical mechanism, which makes the relative power of all influences of physical Nature depend on the physical nearness or distance of the object in contact with the senses. Never forget that this physical nearness or distance has an immense effect in determining your positive opinions, conduct, duties, and even virtue.”⁸⁰ Though not exhaustive of the laws he identified, “free play,” “freedom” and “independence”⁸¹ also held central positions in Pestalozzi’s recommendations. In sum, the learning process began with the learner, his or her existing knowledge, interests, and experiences.

In keeping with the reform-minded methods he offered, Pestalozzi was somewhat critical of the reliance on textbooks. Quite simply, the use of texts often ran somewhat, if not entirely, counter to the principle of arranging learning around direct, first-hand experience. “...As it is *publically and generally* conducted for the people,” he suggested of educational practice in the mainstream, “wholly and entirely ignores sense-impression as the supreme principle of

⁷⁸ Pestalozzi, *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*, 133.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 132-133.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 134.

instruction...”⁸² Going further, Pestalozzi noted that the result was to “...bind particularly that instrument of sense-perception, the eye, to the heathen altar of the new learning, letters and books,...[and] to make this universal instrument of knowledge a mere letter-eye, and us mere letter-men.”⁸³ And finally, in what was perhaps his clearest appraisal of mainstream educational practice, Pestalozzi offered the following: “And every time I reconsider it I come back to the assertion that the deficiencies of European instruction, -or rather, the artificial inversion of all natural principles of instruction, -has brought this part of the world where it is now; and that there is no remedy for our present and future overturn in society, morality, and religion except to turn back from the superficially, incompleteness, and giddyheadedness of our popular instruction, and to recognize that sense-perception is absolutely the foundation of all knowledge; in other words, all knowledge grows out of sense-perception and may be traced back to it.”⁸⁴ Again, first-hand experience was of no small significance for Pestalozzi.

Local Context. Pestalozzi’s strong reliance on the incorporation of sense-perception in the educative process implied an equally significant role for the local context in which learning was to take place. The objects for study immediately available to students and teachers could not be overlooked. Quite simply, that which was nearer and local was of a great significance as those objects were available for direct observation. Pestalozzi indicated as much himself where he wrote, “Nature, by virtue of which the *near* is always more firmly impressed upon the child than the *distant*,...”⁸⁵ Elsewhere, he reminded readers that the “...physical nearness or distance of all objects around you has an immense effect in determining your positive sense-impressions,

⁸² Pestalozzi, *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*, 220.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 239.

practical ability, and even virtue.”⁸⁶ And finally, Pestalozzi offered additional clarification where he recommended that students and teachers “...throw away the book and find in Nature and all that surrounds them a better guide to my goal than that which I have given them.”⁸⁷ Pestalozzi ultimately sought to develop in learners the power to reason, an aim which he concluded was best achieved through first-hand observation, much of which almost naturally occurred in local, familiar contexts. In other words, the notion that “actual impressions of physical objects”⁸⁸ often required a commitment to locally available materials was inextricably embedded within the method and philosophy outlined in *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*.

Throughout his educational writing, Pestalozzi turned time and again to the home. In large part, the emphasis stemmed from his dedication to addressing, through education, the improvement of life conditions for the poor. He recounted:

The less I was able to deceive myself as to the true condition of the poor, the more I endeavored out of a sense of duty to afford them assistance suited to the demands of their position and circumstances. Aware from personal experience of the magnitude of the powers which Nature herself develops in the poor, I eagerly sought in these powers a means of relieving their need. I was impelled to find work and training for work for the poor children whom I had taken into my house. But it was not merely this that I sought. I wished during their work and by means of it both to warm their hearts and to develop their minds. I wished not merely to instruct them, but that their own life and activity should instruct them and should through self-instruction, elevate them to a sense of the inner dignity and worth of their natures. I wished above all to provide for the culture of the heart, as the noblest part of their being....”⁸⁹

Utterly committed to the improvement of educational practice for all students, teachers, and educational institutions, the passage revealed a particular sense of calling with regard to the extension of educational opportunities to segments of society traditionally underserved, namely the poor. From there, Pestalozzi turned quickly to the home of the child and the relevance of the

⁸⁶ Pestalozzi, *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*, 320.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 254.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 325.

⁸⁹ Lewis F. Anderson, *Pestalozzi* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1931), 104-105.

home experience in the educational process. “The life of the home,” he wrote, “the tender care of the mother, the strength of the father, the atmosphere of love and sympathy, the interaction of each with all, the education by work, the totality of these good influences acting upon each other in groups bound together by the ties of nature, all this constitutes a framework to which one might easily attach everything essential to a good education.”⁹⁰ Pestalozzi held a practical understanding of the home which led him to the renewed belief in the necessity of a formal, public education. Even within the duty of the school, however, he looked to the significance of the experiences first developed in the context of the home; that is, to some degree, the student’s home life was the starting point in the educative process. On this point, Pestalozzi was explicit:

In view of their essential aim it is the duty of the schools to secure for the pupil the advantages of home life in educating him to be a man and a citizen and to increase these and make them more generally available. They should strengthen and develop those means of education, reflection, love and vocational training, which are already in the home and should combine new with older means of accomplishing its end.

Its intimate harmony with home life they (the schools) should afford a continuation, an expansion and completion of the powers and capacities which naturally develop in the home. Where they actually accomplish this they deserve the respect of the people and the gratitude and confidence of every good father and mother, even where in the interests of liberal or vocational education their work seems to be one-sided.⁹¹

Pestalozzi seemed to regard formal education in the schools as an extension of those experiences gained by the student in the home.

Coupled with his mandate for first-hand experiences and his commitment to the interests of the learner, Pestalozzi’s emphasis on the local context of learning situates his educational philosophy in close proximity to the concerns of modern place-based educators. While he did not expend a great deal of time outlining in an explicit fashion the manner in which local educational stimuli might become the source of curricular choices, the approach he developed at Stanz, Burgdorf, and Yverdon anticipated place-based ideals by more than two centuries. Of course,

⁹⁰ Anderson, *Pestalozzi*, 122.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

two centuries would not pass without multiple reiterations of these general themes. In fact, one of Pestalozzi's own students carried on and refined much of his pioneering educational work.

Friedrich Wilhelm August Froebel

The most notable of Pestalozzi's students, Friedrich Froebel published an account of his own educational philosophy in 1826 under the heading *The Education of Man*.⁹² Widely regarded in the annals of educational history for his contributions to the development of elementary education and the kindergarten, in Froebel one found many of the same commitments to the local and to the nature of the learner that exemplified the work of his mentor. That said, Froebel is very much an important figure in an historical review of place-based educational theory and practice.

Nature of the Learner. At the core of Froebel's educational philosophy was his awareness that outward appearances were neither necessarily nor completely representative of the inner character of the student; that is, the nature of the learner deserved thoughtful consideration. Although he recognized the relationship between outward manifestations and inner character, he cautioned against undue judgments in either direction. The following passage was clarifying of the value the principle represented in the development of the child:

Nevertheless, education should not draw its inferences concerning the inner from the outer directly, for it lies in the nature of things that always in some relation inferences should be drawn inversely...

The failure to apply this truth, or rather the continual sinning against it, the drawing of direct inferences concerning the inner life of childhood and youth from certain external manifestations of life, is the chief cause in life and education... Therefore, this truth, in its application to parents, educators, and teachers, is of such great importance that they should strive to render themselves familiar with its application in its smallest details. This would bring into the relations between parents and children, pupils and educators, teacher and taught, a clearness, a constancy, a serenity which are now sought in vain; for the child that seems good outwardly often is not good inwardly, i.e., does not desire the good spontaneously, or from love, respect, and appreciation; similarly,

⁹² Friedrich Froebel, *The Education of Man*, trans., W. N. Hailmann, International Education Series (New York: D. Appleton, 1911).

the outwardly rough, stubborn, self-willed child that seems outwardly not good, frequently is filled with the liveliest, most eager, strongest desire for spontaneous goodness in his actions;...⁹³

In the extended passage, Froebel outlined his dedication to understanding the character of the individual child, a critical feature in the context of the school. To educate well, he reasoned, an intimate understanding of the student was absolutely requisite. "...[A]ll prescription should be adapted," he noted elsewhere, "to the pupil's nature and needs, and secure his co-operation."⁹⁴ And further, "...the child should, from the very time of its birth, be viewed in accordance with his nature, treated correctly, and given the free, all-sided use of his powers."⁹⁵ In part, Froebel's interest in the nature of the learner was inextricably linked to his understanding of child development. Indeed, his educational theory was a developmental one which suspected that young learners progressed through a series of somewhat fixed human growth stages from infancy to adulthood.

Sense-Perception. A striking feature of Froebel's writing was the deep sense of spirituality that he brought to his work, and, more importantly for the present discussion, the manner in which that spirituality worked to shape his affection for sense-perception in the context of learning and development. The religious nature of Froebel's educational theory was evidenced throughout *The Education of Man* and the extended excerpt below was generally illustrative of the tone that Froebel so consistently adopted:

Jesus himself charges man in and with this precept to acknowledge the divinity of his mission and of his inner life, as well as the truth of his teaching; and this is, therefore, the precept that opens the way to the knowledge of all life in its origins and nature, as well as of all truth (see § 23)

This explains and justifies, too, the next requirement, and indicates, at the same time, the manner of its fulfillment: *The educator, the teacher, should make individual and particular general, the general particular and individual, and elucidate both in life; he*

⁹³ Froebel, *The Education of Man*, 6-7.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

*should make the external internal, and the internal external, and indicate the necessary unity of both; he should consider the finite in light of the infinite, and the infinite in the light of the finite, and harmonize both in life; he should see and perceive the divine essence in whatever is human, trace the nature of man to God, and seek to exhibit both within one another in life (see § 25). [emphasis in original]*⁹⁶

The passage illustrated not only the manner in which Froebel's religious understandings impacted his notions of education, but also, as David Hutchison pointed out of Froebel generally in *Growing Up Green*,⁹⁷ the holistic nature of his thinking. Going further, Hutchison suggested that "...Froebel's understanding of God was not Christian in the ordinary sense, but ecological, for he perceived all of nature as comprising the inherent make-up of God. Indeed, God was the binding force between humankind and the balance of nature, the animate and the inanimate, empowering both nature and mind."⁹⁸ Guided by his own spirituality, Froebel sought to develop a plan for schooling which promoted investigation and understanding of the connectedness of all things. Like his mentor, however, Froebel did not call on educators to simply reveal their beliefs about the unity of nature, the individual, and society; that is, Froebel's educational theory relied upon first-hand observation. "An appreciation of the universality of law in nature, of her unity," he wrote, "does not require special technical terms for the objects and their attributes, but plain and accurate observation and accurate naming of these things in accordance with the character of language and of the thing named."⁹⁹ Froebel explained further that "In rendering the boy familiar with natural objects we are by no means concerned with the teaching of names nor of preconceived views and opinions, but only with presenting the things themselves with their obvious attributes in such a way that the boy may view each object as the definite individual

⁹⁶ Froebel, *The Education of Man*, 15-16.

⁹⁷ David Hutchison, *Growing up Green: Education for Ecological Renewal* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1998). Hutchison actually noted the adoption of Froebel by holistic educators rather than calling Froebel's work holistic.

⁹⁸ Froebel, *The Education of Man*, 85.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 200-201.

object it reveals itself to be in its form, etc.”¹⁰⁰ And again, as highlighted above, and in addition to developing natural powers of observation in learners, Froebel insisted that educational programs take into account the interests of the child. “[W]e should here, as in all instruction,” he concluded, “start from a certain inner want of the boy. The interests of the child offered direct connection to student motivation and thus were “...indispensible if the boy is to be taught with profit and success.”¹⁰¹ Interest was a central concern.

Familiarity. Not unlike Pestalozzi’s emphasis on the home life of the child, Froebel believed that the familiar settings of school and family shared profound connections in the development of young learners. “The union of the school and of life,” he remarked, “is the first and indispensable requisite of a perfect human education of this period.”¹⁰² Froebel certainly spoke to the early, nurturing role that the home and family provided to the student. At the same time, his efforts to connect the school and the family stemmed from a broader concern with his perception that the tendency of schooling was to focus on outward, foreign sources of learning at the expense of immediately available, local knowledge. “This is indeed an old disease,” he explained, “...if we inquire how the German people has obtained the first principles of its present knowledge, we discover unequivocally that those first principles always came from a distance, from foreign parts, or were even forced upon it from without.”¹⁰³ Less than a critique of foreign sources of knowledge and information, Froebel seemed eager to awaken the creative potential of Germany, a reasonable alternative it seemed to “...stamping our children like coins and adorning them with foreign inscriptions and foreign portraits...”¹⁰⁴ He offered further the hopeful suggestion that “...we need and seek knowledge and insight that have sprung into vigorous and

¹⁰⁰ Froebel, *The Education of Man*, 201.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 230.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 231.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 231-232.

healthy life in our own minds and grown strong in the sunshine and conditions of our own life.”¹⁰⁵ With the above in mind, Froebel’s conception of educational change was in some sense similar, not unlike the philosophy represented by his predecessor, to place-based conceptions of schooling.

Elsewhere in his discussion of an educational practice developed around the unification of family and the school, Froebel clarified the localized characteristics of his educational philosophy. The familiar was a starting point in the process. In Froebel’s words, “Observation and study of nature and the external world, proceeding from the nearest surroundings to the more remote” should become a guiding principle. Similarly, he called for the “Memorizing of short poetical representations of nature and life, particularly of short poems that impart life to the objects of nature in the nearest surroundings, and significance to the incidents of home-life, showing then, as in a mirror, in their pure and deep meaning.”¹⁰⁶ Rather than the exotic, the foreign, or the unfamiliar, Froebel looked at least initially to those things “...in the ordinary school and family life, with the ordinary occupations of home and school.”¹⁰⁷ While some portion of learning in familiar contexts was intellectual school work in the traditional sense, physical domestic work also had a role to play. For Froebel, this was a part of the complete education of the child, not to mention a bridge between home-life and school.

Illustrations of Practice. Froebel further illustrated the role of the local in his educational philosophy in an extended discussion of practice under the heading *Observation of Nature and Surroundings*, a component of his broader effort to clarify the connection between the school, the family, and the community. “The knowledge of every thing [*sic*],” he explained,

¹⁰⁵ Froebel, *The Education of Man*, 232.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 235.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 236.

“of its purpose and properties, is found most clearly in its relations to surrounding objects.”¹⁰⁸ Froebel added that “...the pupil will get the clearest insight into the character of things, of nature and surroundings, if he sees and studies them in their natural conditions.”¹⁰⁹ A reiteration of the principal worth of first-hand observation, his approach almost necessarily implied at least a partial commitment to incorporating locally available objects and sites into the curriculum. Yet readers had little cause to speculate as Froebel was explicit with regard to the form that practice might follow. He wrote:

Again, the boy will, of course, see most clearly and appreciate most fully the conditions and relations of objects that are in closest and most constant connection with him, that owe their being to him, or at least have in their being some reference to him. These are the things of his nearest surroundings – the things of the sitting-room, the house, the garden, the farm, the village (or city), the meadow, the field, the forest, the plain. The sitting-room, then, furnishes starting-point for this orderly study of nature and surroundings, which thus proceeds from the near and known to the less near and less known, and becomes for the purpose of orderly classification and subdivision of school instruction.¹¹⁰

From the discovery of the household, Froebel described a process of moving outward and into investigations of the homestead property, the barn, the stable, etc. And outward still, the investigation led into considerations of how the homestead might fit into the community and village, which also included the church, the school, etc. Froebel explained that that process continued outward such that “...the earth’s surface (geography) becomes an independent subject of instruction.”¹¹¹ Along the way, the purpose of carrying out investigations locally was not incidentally related to the development in the learner of the skill to inquire, to classify, and to otherwise draw and test conclusions. “Then follow observations of animals with reference to the locality they inhabit,” Froebel suggested, “yielding classes of domestic animals, animals of the

¹⁰⁸ Froebel, *The Education of Man*, 251.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 231.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 251-252.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 254.

field, of the woods; terrestrial, aquatic, amphibious, aerial animals.”¹¹² The same general process applied to plants, to “tame and wild animals,” and to classifications of those things “useful and noxious.”¹¹³ Like geographic study, Froebel’s plan for student experimentation with natural history occurred in and around the neighborhood and community in which the school itself was situated. In all, Froebel’s statement that “...the course of instruction resembles life closely”¹¹⁴ did as much as anything to capture the essence of the role of the local with regard to both method and curriculum.

In addition to his respect for the local in the investigation of the sciences and human/social studies, Froebel also discussed the potential for what he termed “language-exercises.”¹¹⁵ As he described it, “The observation of nature and surroundings considers things merely as such with reference to their individual peculiarities and their general, more particularly local, relations.”¹¹⁶ A central part of observation for Froebel was language as “...language comes in as an auxiliary in order to furnish tests of the extent and accuracy of the pupil’s observations.”¹¹⁷ Simply stated, the observation of nature and other surrounding environments provided opportunities for the development of language and the student’s capacity for oral and written expression. Froebel sought to encourage not merely the naming of objects, but the comprehension of the qualities of those objects, such as texture, color, and dimension. This much he revealed where he wrote, “Language-exercises, based on the observation of nature and surroundings, in considering the activities and impressions of objects, and their precise and accurate designation by words, must revert to physics and chemistry.”¹¹⁸ Incidentally, the brief

¹¹² Froebel, *The Education of Man*, 257.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 256.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 258.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 272.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 275.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 276.

excerpt offered further indication of something akin to a multidisciplinary, holistic understanding of learning in Froebel's writing. Again, as with "nature-study"¹¹⁹ and the investigation of human/social features of life, Froebel urged that local observations could provide the "budding points"¹²⁰ for language instruction.

With regard to explicit instructional tools and methods, Froebel is perhaps most remembered for his contribution in promoting the use of blocks. Aside from the development of *Fröbelgaben*, or Froebel gifts, he also advocated the excursion as an instructional tool, a feature of his work which anticipated to some extent the recommendations of subsequent developments in place-based pedagogy, explicitly named or otherwise. "Outdoor life," he explained, "in open nature, is particularly desirable for young people; it develops, strengthens, elevates, and ennobles."¹²¹ In part, the excursion was to develop in young learners an appreciation for nature. In Froebel's mind, the learner "...must feel the connection between the development of nature and of man, between the phenomena of nature and of humanity in their mutual relations..."¹²² All of this, he continued, was to be carried out in such a way that "...man may appreciate as fully as possible the character and phenomena of nature..."¹²³ Froebel argued that the excursion afforded learners the opportunity "to see as a whole the district in which he lives..."¹²⁴ and recommended that trips remain rather free-flowing. The following illustration offered further insight:

Therefore, the boy should early see the objects of nature in their actual relations and original combinations. His excursions are to show him his valley in its extent; he should explore its ramifications; he should follow his brook or rivulet from its source to

¹¹⁹ Froebel seems to have used this phrase in a descriptive way, not as an indication of a larger educational program. Interestingly enough, the phrase and the underlying pedagogical conceptions would receive renewed attention in the later nineteenth century, the subject of Chapter 3.

¹²⁰ Froebel, *The Education of Man*, 277.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 309.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 310.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 311.

its mouth, and study its local peculiarities in their causes; he should explore the elevated ridges, so that he may see the ranges and spurs of the mountains; he should climb the highest summits, so that he may know and understand the entire region in its unity.

Actual inspection should reveal to him the mutual relations of mountain and valley and river in their form and formation.¹²⁵

Froebel's use of the excursion was arguably an extension of his dedication to providing to learners opportunities for first-hand experiences. Whether in the sciences, language instruction, social and human study, or mathematics, Froebel found great worth in learning through observation. He rightly identified "short excursions and walks"¹²⁶ as effective means of achieving that end.

As highlighted above, Froebel's use of the local meshed well with his understanding of instruction and study in those areas that modern observers would regard as the sciences. Natural history and physics, in particular, frequently found their way into his illustrations. At the same time, Froebel looked to the local as a means of engaging in human study, though he never used any particular phrase to describe the domain as a whole (e.g., social study, human study, culture study, etc.). "[The pupil is required to enumerate the works of man in the surrounding district (the house, the village, the road, the bridge, the wall, the plow, etc.)," he wrote, and "he finds their differences in origin, material, use, and purpose."¹²⁷ Pestalozzi called for the study of local occupations and their purposes, "the uses of public buildings,"¹²⁸ "the characteristics of villages and cities,"¹²⁹ and, of no small importance, noted that "...questions are asked concerning the common features and the ultimate aim of human work..."¹³⁰ Froebel placed a great deal of emphasis on how this sort of neighborhood investigation might influence the pupil's

¹²⁵ Froebel, *The Education of Man*, 311.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 309.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 259.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 260.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 259.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 260.

understanding of the role and purposes of the family as a social unit. The following passage was clarifying with regard to the value Froebel attached to the family:

“Since all men live and have lived in families, and since the highest and ultimate aim of all men is the clearest consciousness of an purest representation of their God-given nature, where can all men be most surely and effectively prepared and developed for the attainment of this aim?” “In the family.” “What are the external conditions of the family, and who are its most important members?” “Father, mother, children and servants.” “What now must be the condition of a family, if it is to prepare and develop the human being for the attainment of the highest and ultimate purpose of life?” They must know this ultimate purpose and the means for its attainment; they must be agreed concerning the ways and means to be adopted; they must aid and support each other in all they do, having only this purpose in view.” “If a single family should fulfill these conditions, would it thereby be enabled to attain the purpose of man in and through itself?”...¹³¹

Clearly, Froebel saw the family and the improvement of the family unit as direct means to similar improvement and development within the learner, and by extension, the adult citizen. But his question regarding the power of a single family’s effort to achieve “highest and ultimate aim[s]”¹³² was telling. Froebel answered in the negative, convinced that no single family could “...possess all the means for this purpose.”¹³³ Change, expressed by Froebel as the attainment of “clearest consciousness,”¹³⁴ would only be achieved through a consensus of effort. While the family always held a central responsibly, he nonetheless concluded that ““Only humanity as a whole, as a unit, can fully attain the highest and ultimate purpose of human striving, the representation of pure humanity.””¹³⁵ The attention to family and community betterment, read more broadly perhaps as positive social change, was a significant feature in Froebel’s educational philosophy. In some sense, that feature of his work connects him all the more to modern place-based educational initiatives, where local improvement is often a stated objective.

¹³¹ Froebel, *The Education of Man*, 260-261.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 260.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 261.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 260.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 261.

Beyond the Local. Openly supportive of the role of local contexts in the process of learning, Froebel was keenly aware that knowledge worth knowing was not always near the student and that educators must look beyond the local. With the full endorsement of the notion that "...instruction should start from the pupil and his nearest surroundings..."¹³⁶ Froebel was not a purest. "It is scarcely necessary to say," he reasoned, "that the last of the above answers neither can nor should be given by the pupil in their completeness and connection..."¹³⁷ Froebel noted further that it was not "...necessary to say that, because instruction is to be connected wholly with the boy's locality, in particular application all things are to be excluded that lie beyond his circle of experience."¹³⁸ Above all, whether local or non-local study, the primary objective of learning through observation and inquiry remained. "Thus he is led to reflect," Froebel reminded, "and gains insight into the character, origin, and purpose of all things."¹³⁹ While readily available contexts and environments offered unique opportunities for the development of such habits in young learners, Froebel was not unduly insistent on localized curriculum and instruction.

In the context of the present discussion regarding place-based educational antecedents, Froebel's contributions are quite significant as his work revealed the central educational role that local contexts potentially played in the development of the learner, his/her capacity to develop investigational skills, and, ultimately, to the improvement of community and society, generally. The emphasis on the local, the nature of the learner, and the improvement of community/society are themes echoed by modern placed-based educators and anticipated by Froebel nearly two centuries earlier, not merely in a general sense, but complete with illustrations to guide practice.

¹³⁶ Froebel, *The Education of Man*, 262.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 265.

Despite the apparent similarities, this study only identified a single, brief reference to Froebel in the body of literature representing place-based education.¹⁴⁰

Johann Friedrich Herbart

A contemporary of both Pestalozzi and Froebel, the educational ideals of Johann Friedrich Herbart also deserve attention in an historical review of place-based pedagogy. Born in Hanover, Germany in 1776, Herbart wrote at length on the purposes and methods of teaching and this particular feature of his scholarship played a significant role in shaping the development of educational progressivism in the United States in the later decades of the nineteenth century. Early efforts by the American-based National Herbartian Society, for instance, later grew into the National Society for the Scientific Study of Education, or NSSE, a long-lived and influential body of American educational scholarship. As Kliebard recalled the influence of Herbart's legacy in American curricular reform, Herbartianism "...served for a relatively brief but intense period as a focal point for a challenge to the old order in education, as represented largely by mental discipline and by traditional humanists such as [William T.] Harris."¹⁴¹ Despite some philosophical inconsistencies," Kliebard added, "...the Herbartian emphasis on child growth and development and children's interest blended nicely with the main thrust of the child study movement,"¹⁴² a significant strand of progressive educational thought. Not unlike his connection to certain aspects of educational progressivism, Herbart's work also shared certain similarities with modern place-based education. His work represents an important antecedent to the modern theory and practice.

¹⁴⁰ Hutchison, *A Natural History of Place*.

¹⁴¹ Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge Falmer, 2004), 29.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 30.

Geography Study. In *Outlines of Educational Doctrine*, Herbart offered his perspectives on teaching and learning within each of the several fields of study represented in the standard curriculum. That contribution was particularly valuable as it allowed readers, contemporary and modern alike, to gain some idea of what precise form his educational prescriptions might assume in practice. Similarly, embedded within his outline were a number of elements found today, more than 150 years later, in the field of place-based education.

Without overlooking the value of the entire body of his pedagogical thinking, Herbart's work in geography education was especially relevant to the present discussion. In regard to geography instruction, in particular, Herbart offered an approach which contained unique consideration for the local context of learning. On the one hand, he suggested a vague advocacy for the study of geography at the global scale. At the same time, Herbart also recommended that students take part in geographical investigations within and through local geographic settings. In some sense, he seemed to balance the global and local. The latter was "analytic," he explained, "and begins with the pupil's immediate neighborhood, to the topography of the place..."¹⁴³ This notion, place-based in essence, would later be revisited by American educational reformers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the subject of Chapter 4.

Like other educational thinkers before him and after, Herbart held a view of geography that was unifying, a course which opened avenues for investigation across the curriculum. In modern educational parlance, Herbart's conception of geography education was a multidisciplinary one. The following passage was indicative of the general notion of unity:

Geography is an associating science, and use must be made of the opportunities it offers for binding together a variety of facts, none of which should be allowed to remain isolated in the mind of the learner...

¹⁴³ John Frederick Herbart, *Outlines of Educational Doctrine*, trans., Alexis F. Lange (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901), 263.

With many pupils, geography is the first study which gives them the consciousness that they can learn as they are expected to learn. With all pupils, geography must connect the remaining studies and must keep them connected. Without it everything remains unstable. Historical events lack places and distances; products of nature are without regions where they are found; popular astronomy, which is called upon so often to prevent and dispel erroneous notions, is deprived of its very basis, and the geometrical imagination of one of its most important incentives. If the facts of knowledge are allowed to fall asunder in this way, instruction endangers the whole of education.¹⁴⁴

The unifying function in geography study may have been, for Herbart, particularly acute. For whatever unique opportunities that geography may have afforded, a larger stream of thought that ran throughout Herbart's educational writing was the notion that new knowledge was best gained through existing knowledge. Regarded by Herbart as "apperception,"¹⁴⁵ the principle did much to not only clarify the value that he placed upon geography study, but also to highlight the value that he placed upon local field-trips as an educational tool. As a psychological principle, apperception pointed simply to the idea that new knowledge was an outgrowth of existing knowledge, an understanding clarified by Herbart, but expressed long before as the foregoing discussion has revealed. In his words, "Apperception, or assimilation, takes place through the reproduction of previously acquired ideas and their union with the new element..."¹⁴⁶ Going further, Herbart offered the following:

The approving, or assimilating, attention (74), though not the first in time, is yet observed very early. It shows itself when little children catch and repeat aloud, familiar words of an otherwise unintelligible conversation between adults; when a little later they name, in their own way, the well-known objects that they come upon in their picture-books; when later still, while learning to read, they pick out from the book single names coinciding with their recollection; and so in innumerable other instances. From within ideas are suddenly bursting forth to unite with whatever similar elements present themselves. Now the apperceiving activity must be exercised constantly in all instruction.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Herbart, *Outlines of Educational Doctrine*, 268.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 63-64.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

In sum, apperception demanded that all instruction be linked to existing student knowledge “...gained already by experience and intercourse with others...”¹⁴⁸ To return to the initial discussion of Herbartian geography instruction, the use of local environments was in part a reflection of his commitment to apperception. Although Herbart did not elaborate on the particular method he preferred to engage “the pupil’s immediate neighborhood,”¹⁴⁹ readers might reasonably assume that the learner’s familiar, local context (e.g., social, ecological, topographical, etc.) could become powerful starting points in an apperceptive learning process. At that intersection, Herbart’s educational ideals forecasted certain key elements of modern place-based educational theory and practice. More specifically, his emphasis on the local and the learner’s experience in the educative process are consistent with the defining features of the modern approach. Although Herbart wrote little about the role of local study in the context of community improvement, his work nonetheless anticipated several of the themes characteristic of contemporary place-based theory. As is generally true of the personalities highlighted throughout this chapter exploring early antecedents, there is to date no mention of Herbart in the literature representative of the modern field.

Colonel Francis Wayland Parker

A Union officer in the American Civil War, Francis Wayland Parker became a prominent figure in educational circles in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. A scholar of educational theory and a skilled practitioner, John Dewey, whose own children Parker educated, later deemed Parker “the Father of Progressive Education,”¹⁵⁰ a powerful moniker delivered by one the era’s most thoughtful representatives. Following the war and several school supervisory

¹⁴⁸ Herbart, *Outlines of Educational Doctrine*, 69.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 263.

¹⁵⁰ Wayne J. Urban & Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr. *American Education: A History* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2004); Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961).

appointments in New Hampshire and Ohio, Parker went on to study in Germany at King William's University in Berlin. He spent two years at the university studying, among other subjects, *pedagogics*. Upon his return from Germany, Parker accepted a position in Quincy, Massachusetts and according to one subsequent observer, "...nothing since the time of Horace Mann has created such a sensation as his five years' supervision of those schools."¹⁵¹ In many ways, Parker revolutionized the traditional practice of schooling, not exclusively at Quincy, but in his subsequent work in Boston and, beginning in 1882, with the famed Cook County Normal School in Chicago as well. Given his profound influence on nineteenth century school practice and a then nascent trend towards what would become a movement in educational progressivism, Parker's work warrants attention in the context of place-based educational history, a development which is itself somewhat of a reiteration of certain brands of progressive educational theory and practice. In particular, Parker's attention to the local and to the nature of the learner, two criteria of place-based educational thinking, position his contribution to school reform as an important historical precedent to the modern field.

Nature of the Learner. By his own account, Parker was interested in the education of the whole child, "the harmonious development of the human being, body, mind, and soul."¹⁵² Like Comenius, Pestalozzi, Froebel and others before him, he understood the learner to be a starting point in the educative process. Reflecting on his motivations and the work of his predecessors, he noted:

This truth has come to us gradually and in fragments from the great teachers and thinkers of the past. It was two hundred years ago that Comenius said, "Let things that have to be done be done by doing them." Following this, but broader and deeper in its significance, was Pestalozzi's declaration that "Education is the generation of power." Last of all, summing up the wisdom of those who had preceded him, and embodying it in one grand

¹⁵¹ Francis W. Parker and Lelia W. Patridge, *Notes of Talks of Teaching*, Martha's Vineyard Summer Institute, July 17 to August 19 (New York: E.L. Kellogg, 1883), xvii.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 22.

principle, Froebel announced the true end and aim of all of our work – the harmonious growth of the whole being. This is the central point. Every act, thought, plan, method, and question should lead to this. Knowledge and skill are simply the means and not the end, and these are to work toward the symmetrical upbuilding of the whole being.¹⁵³

Packed with meaning, Parker nonetheless expressed his general belief that educational approaches were perhaps most effective where measures were informed by some knowledge of the learner in question and, as noted, with the broad intention of educating the whole child. Of course, Parker surmised that such objectives necessitated something other than traditional practice, rote memorization, and a rigidly standardized curriculum. Oriented toward the notion that “The organism itself determines the external conditions for development,”¹⁵⁴ Parker offered what surely was for some a radical alternative.

Geography Study. As was true of Herbart, Parker’s description and recommendations for geography education, a subject on which he commented at length, provided insight into the type of school reform and educational philosophy he advocated. Echoing Herbart and anticipating several important developments in geography education soon to take hold in American educational circles, Parker’s brand of instruction called for the direct observation of local geography. “The unseen is made, or imagined,” he wrote, “entirely out of the seen.”¹⁵⁵ For geography students at all levels, but particularly those with only limited geographical experiences, the field-trip provided potentially important foundational experiences. Parker explained:

The question, then, in teaching structural geography, is, How can the proper sense products, necessary to the imaging of the forms of continents, be brought to the mind? The answer is near at hand. In order to imagine the unseen, that which can be seen must be brought clearly into the mind. Elementary geography consists of the close and careful observation of the forms of the earth’s surface around us. There is hardly a town or district in the Atlantic States, where each and all of these forms may not be observed....

¹⁵³ Parker, *Talks on Pedagogics*, 22.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

Begin with the forms around you; the close and careful study of the chains and ranges of hills, valleys, plains, coast-lines, springs, brooks, rivers, ponds, lakes, islands, and peninsulas. Study them as you do objects in Botany and Zoology. Take the children out into the fields and valleys; return to the school-room; let them describe orally what they have seen; then mould and draw it' and, finally have them describe the objects they have seen by writing. Teach them distance by actual measurement; boundaries by fences and other limitations; drainage by gutters, and the flow of water after a rain...Use the means *continually* in teaching geography.¹⁵⁶

Parker's recommendations for geography instruction continued at length. In addition to the study of local geographic features, Parker offered several other recommendations which he reasoned might serve to maintain the interests of students and provide opportunities for the development of the geographic imagination, an aspect of geographic learning that he found to be all important. In short, Parker reasoned that the geographic imagination might allow students to continue their investigations into non-local areas.¹⁵⁷ In addition to the inclusion of *The Seven Little Sisters* and *Each and All*,¹⁵⁸ two illustrations of children's literature intended to broach the subject of cultural difference and sameness, Parker suggested that local geographical learning translated well enough to world geographical investigations. "Thus," he recommended, "after a lesson upon a hill, tell the children about the great mountains in the world. When they have seen one river, tell them about others that they can't see...When they have studied an island, tell them about the great islands [the continents]."¹⁵⁹ In addition to the geographic analogy provided through first-hand experience locally, Parker also looked to the power of student investigation. His recommendation was a simple one; "Constantly exercise their curiosity to solve problems..."¹⁶⁰ To better illustrate the general notion, Parker listed a series of potential geography-based questions, including: "Where does the water go when it falls on the ground?...Why does not a

¹⁵⁶ Parker, *Notes of Talks of Teaching*, 128-129.

¹⁵⁷ Interestingly enough, Parker did not adopt the expanding horizons model as did so many other educators after him. In fact, in his mind, the "continent was simpler, in its general construction, than a single town or district..." Ibid., 130.

¹⁵⁸ Parker, *Talks on Pedagogics*, 129.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

river run in a straight line?...What makes a pebble? What is the difference between a pebble and a grain of sand?...”¹⁶¹ Parker built his approach to geography education upon student inquiry. “These and other questions,” he concluded, “when skillfully used, and the child is led to discover everything for himself, may be made a source of deep and abiding interest on the part of children.”¹⁶² Investigations and first-hand experiences were pedagogical staples for Parker regardless of the scale of the geographic investigation.

In his concluding remarks on geography at an 1882 Summer Institute at Martha’s Vineyard, Parker offered a final appraisal of what he viewed as effective method in the teaching of geography. As he had elsewhere, Parker looked to the first-hand experiences gained in local, neighborhood, and school settings as entry points to invigorate geographical investigations in non-local settings. Committed to the transformation of “...the old way, of memorizing facts, which were the staple products of the old geographies,”¹⁶³ Parker looked to connect the distant to the local in engaging ways. Rather than simply telling students where certain soils, plants, and peoples might be found globally, outlining in turn the features of distant places, he described instead a unique alternative:

The soil may be divided into fertile, arable, and barren, and indicated by colored crayons upon the maps. Lessons upon soil should be given, and specimens of the various kinds of earth, from gravel to vegetable mould, examined. If you have a bit of ground near the schoolhouse, raise all different kinds of useful plants that you can. Then, take up successively all the great food staples. Locate the wheat, the rice, the corn, the potato, and the rye regions, and indicated them, as I have said, in colors on the maps. Follow these, with the luxuries in the way of food – coffee, tea, cotton, cocoa, etc. Then the subject of shelter and fuel may be studied, the forests and kinds of wood...¹⁶⁴

Following the initial investigation of the distribution of soil types, then, Parker reasoned that students might be led into wider explorations of botanical, zoological, and anthropological

¹⁶¹ Parker, *Notes of Talks of Teaching*, 130.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

questions. Simply stated, one question led to numerous other questions. Similarly, through his recommendation that students experiment in the propagation “of different kinds of useful plants,”¹⁶⁵ Parker further demonstrated the mechanism by which non-local geographical investigations might nonetheless remain experiential and hands-on. In all, Parker urged practitioners to consider the possibility that allegiance to a more experiential, inquiry-based instructional strategy, an approach which might also better account for the unique needs and development of the learner, could “...enable the child to learn more of the world in one week, than the children who memorize the conglomerated mass of disconnected facts can learn, in a year.”¹⁶⁶ Interestingly enough, a significant portion of Parker’s reform plan, at least with regard to geography instruction, made conscious use of the educational tools and resources available in the immediate surrounds of the school and neighborhood. In this way, Parker’s “New Educational”¹⁶⁷ recommendations deserve close consideration in an historical consideration of modern place-based education, and this is particularly true of his writing on geography.

Beyond Geography. Of course, Parker’s call to procure a more student-centered practice of schooling extended well beyond his writing on geography instruction alone. As noted, the entirety of Parker’s educational philosophy was colored by the desire to position the student as the starting point, as reflected in both curriculum and instruction. Yet Parker’s writing on geography did reveal the value he placed on the local and familiar in certain educational circumstances, a feature of his work which, again, gains special relevance in a discussion of place-based educational precedents. Geography was not the sole domain for localized instruction and first-hand experience, however. Ever committed to the utility of observation in the

¹⁶⁵ Parker, *Talks on Pedagogics*, 138.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁶⁷ Parker frequently made reference to the “New Education,” reforms which subsequent scholars came to understand as precursors to educational progressivism and child-centered pedagogies.

educational process, Parker also looked to locally available conditions and phenomena in the context of teaching the sciences, specifically botany, physics, and zoology. Rather than locking students into the authority of the science textbook, he called on practitioners to bring students outdoors where they might engage in their own observations of nature. “Thousands and tens of thousands of pupils,” he wrote, “go through the high-school text-books on physics, botany, and zoology with little or no observation.”¹⁶⁸ Where students were afforded opportunities to observe some slice of the natural world, Parker continued, “...the specimens are too often paraded as something out of the ordinary, held in the hands of the teacher, or placed upon the table, merely to prove the facts (?) stated in the text-book.”¹⁶⁹ A clear alternative to the confinement of the “poor children” to “dead words,”¹⁷⁰ Parker recognized that the approach, the exploration of the school and neighborhood environment, was far from novel. He reported:

I am making an argument here for observation that is as old as human thought. Every great thinker and every educator, from Socrates down to Froebel, have urged the study of the great text-book of nature. The Master illustrated all His teachings by scenes from the hills of Judea. The fact that confronts us in this discussion is that, although these truths have been urged for ages persistently, although they are generally believed by thoughtful men, still the real educative, life-giving work of observation has reached in our Republic very few children, and the reason for this sad state of things is that very few teachers have had an opportunity to actually study science.¹⁷¹

While the general approach may have been “as old as human thought,”¹⁷² Parker lamented the fact that relatively little engagement with the natural world could be found in most schools in the late nineteenth century. In part, Parker was successful in changing that feature of schooling on a small scale through his work at the Cook County Normal School in Chicago. His collaboration with Henry Harrison Straight and Wilbur S. Jackman and their concerted efforts to develop

¹⁶⁸ Parker, *Talks on Pedagogics*, 163.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 163.

renewed programs in American nature study were remarkable and the subject of an independent discussion in Chapter 3. As indicated above, Parker's significance in the development and continuation of an educational theory and practice that shared so much in common with the essential themes of modern place-based education is noteworthy; his work represented the continuity of such ideas over time. To date, Parker has not received consideration from contemporary scholars in the field.

John Dewey

Parker's efforts to re-shape the school into a more student-centered, experiential standard of practice found close union with another famed Chicago educator and scholar, John Dewey. Without overlooking the diversity of perspectives that grew out of the movement, there was perhaps no better representative of educational progressivism than John Dewey. While he was in some cases critical of his progressive contemporaries, the influence of his philosophy and practice was unmistakable and has continued into the present in ways that few other thinkers have enjoyed. Dewey's legacy is also significant in the context of modern place-based educational thinking as he often emphasized localized instruction and the needs and character of the learner. In addition, and perhaps more so than other figures reviewed in this chapter, Dewey addressed a third component frequently found in modern place-based theory and practice; that is, Dewey spoke to the role of the school in responding to community and social needs.

Nature of the learner. Among the range of contributions that Dewey's legacy represents today, he continued the long tradition of concern for the nature of the learner introduced above. A deeper consideration of the unique attributes of the learner in the educational process was among the staples of his educational writing; that is, without an attention to the character of the child and his or her lived experiences, little could be accomplished. While Dewey conceded that

a learner might manage “...to develop an interest in a routine and mechanical procedure,...”¹⁷³ such as recitations in the fundamentals of the disciplines, he maintained that “Mental assimilation is a matter of consciousness...”¹⁷⁴ In Dewey’s mind, the learner was not to be regarded as a receptacle of facts, but rather as an active participant and, in fact, the starting point in the process of schooling and in the determination of the curriculum. In a somewhat comical fashion, Dewey reported what he viewed as the building up of momentum toward the rethinking of the perceived role of the student at the time of writing. “It is a change,” he wrote, “a revolution, not unlike that introduced by Copernicus when the astronomical center shifted from the earth to the sun.”¹⁷⁵ He continued by noting that “In this case, the child becomes the sun about which the appliances of education revolve; he is the center about which they are organized.”¹⁷⁶ In sum, Dewey insisted that educational programs must be designed with a strong regard for the students served. What was most worth learning was to be negotiated between the learner’s current experiences and capacities, together with the teacher’s appreciation for the wider experiences available.

At the same time that Dewey looked to the learner’s needs, he balanced that commitment with a sincere appreciation for the valuable experiences represented in the traditional academic disciplines. He noted in the *Child and the Curriculum*, published 1902: “On the face of it, the various studies, arithmetic, geography, language, botany, etc., are themselves experience – they are that of the race. They embody the cumulative outcome of the efforts, the strivings, and the successes of the race generation after generation...Hence, the facts and truths that enter into the

¹⁷³ John Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum*, in *The School and Society and The Child and the Curriculum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 206.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹⁷⁵ John Dewey, *The School and Society*, in *The School and Society and The Child and the Curriculum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 34.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

child's present experience, and those contained in the subject-matter of studies, are the initial and final terms of one reality."¹⁷⁷ In that important discussion, Dewey argued that the knowledge contained within the academic disciplines must necessarily remain a part of the educative process, despite his disagreements with contemporary traditionalists over method. He explained further: "Any fact, whether of arithmetic, or geography, or grammar, which is not led up to and into out of something which has previously occupied a significant position in the child's life for its own sake,...is not a reality, but just the sign of a reality."¹⁷⁸ Dewey's critique of academic formalism was, in no small part, due to his attention to the learner and the varying experiences and starting points that a collection of such learners would logically generate.

Problem-Solving. But Dewey was not simply a child study advocate and his rationale for placing the child near the center of the educative process grew out of a philosophy of the nature of learning, and perhaps thinking itself. In short, he insisted that in order for learning to occur, for the student's experience to be broadened, or for thought to be provoked, there must be present a problem to solve. Dewey outlined these conditions explicitly in *How We Think*, first published in 1933, where he explained: "Thinking begins in what may fairly enough be called a *forked-road* situation, a situation that is ambiguous, that presents a dilemma, that proposes alternatives....In the suspense of uncertainty, we metaphorically climb a tree; we try to find some standpoint from which we may survey additional facts and, getting a more commanding view of the situation, decide how the facts stand related to one another."¹⁷⁹ He added further: "What often makes observation in schools intellectually inefficient is (more than anything else) that it is carried on without a sense of a problem that it helps define and solve. The evil of this isolation is

¹⁷⁷ Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum*, 190.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 203.

¹⁷⁹ John Dewey, *Essays and How We Think*, in *The Later Works, 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, Vol. 8:1933 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), 122.

seen through the entire educational system, from the kindergarten through the elementary and high schools to the college....Moreover, intellectual method is violated because observations are not aroused and guided by any idea of the *purpose* they are to serve. [emphasis in original]”¹⁸⁰

The passage captured Dewey’s emphasis on problem-solving as an instructional approach. In many instances, the same commitment can be seen in the instructional practices described by modern place-based educators. At the same time, Dewey’s effort to discuss a particular brand of student engagement provided context for another important component of his educational thinking, namely, the significance of first-hand experiential learning.

Sense-Perception. Related to Dewey’s respect for the learner and the significance of purposeful, problem-based learning, he, like Aristotle, Comenius, Pestalozzi and numerous others before him, maintained a profound commitment to first-hand experience. As Dewey remarked early on in *The School and Society*, “...we cannot overlook the importance for educational purposes of the close and intimate acquaintances got with nature at first-hand, with real things and materials, with the actual processes of their manipulation, and the knowledge of their social necessities and uses.”¹⁸¹ Dewey looked to the common occupations of life as a framework through which to organize the purposeful, experience-based classroom. The following passage was clarifying:

The educative forces of the domestic spinning and weaving, of the sawmill, the gristmill, the copper shop, and the blacksmith forge, were continuously operative.

No number of object-lessons, got up as object-lessons for the sake of giving information, can afford even the shadow of a substitute for acquaintance with the plants and animals of the farm and garden acquired through actual living among them and caring for them. No training of sense-organs in school, introduced for the sake of training, can begin to compete with the alertness and fullness of sense-life that comes through the daily intimacy and interest in familiar occupations. Verbal memory can be trained in committing tasks, a certain discipline of the reasoning powers can be acquired through lessons in science and mathematics; but after all, this is somewhat remote and

¹⁸⁰ Dewey, *How We Think*, 318.

¹⁸¹ Dewey, *The School and Society*, 11.

shadowy compared with the training of attention and of judgment that is acquired in having to do things with a real motive behind and a real outcome ahead.¹⁸²

For Dewey, the challenge at hand was to determine in what manner the productive elements of certain pre-industrial educational traditions might be maintained; that is, how might schools organize for learners first-hand experiences in purposeful, relevant ways while also meeting the challenges of a then rapidly changing social, political, and economic landscape. While contemporary movements toward manual training offered partial solutions, not the least of which was student interest and motivation, Dewey found them deficient when and where the educative goal was to develop tradesmen alone. Dewey also found within the occupations (e.g., sewing, weaving, woodworking, etc.) the essence of much broader opportunities for continued learning, learning well beyond the occupations themselves. To say it another way, at the same time that Dewey expected engagement in a particular occupation to produce a certain familiarity with the trade itself, he had, as noted above, far more in mind than occupational training alone. The following description was illustrative:

In educational terms, this means that these occupations in the school shall not be mere practical devices or modes of routine employment, the gaining of better technical skill as cooks, seamstresses, or carpenters, but active centers of scientific insight into natural materials and processes, points of departure whence children shall be led out into a realization of the historic development of man. The actual significance of this can be told better through one illustration taken from actual school work than by general discourse...

...For example, the children are first given the raw material – the flax, the cotton plant, the wool as it comes from the back of the sheep (if we could take them to the place where the sheep are sheared, so much the better). Then a study of these materials from the standpoint of their adaptation to the uses to which they may be put...The students in one group worked thirty minutes freeing cotton fibers from the boll and seeds,...They could easily believe that one person could gin only one pound a day by hand, and could understand why their ancestors wore woolen instead of cotton clothing...¹⁸³

¹⁸² Dewey, *The School and Society*, 11-12.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

Dewey continued the description at length to discuss the ways in which geographical, historical, and scientific knowledge might be brought to bear, but even the excerpted remarks demonstrated the general notion he had in mind. Learning was to take place through first-hand experiences and those experiences were to lead to new learning by providing the purposes for further investigation. Through the initial, occupational experience in weaving and sewing, for instance, Dewey's students moved outward in all directions. As Dewey concluded rather pointedly, "When occupations in the school are conceived in this broad and general way, I can only stand lost in wonder at the objections often heard, that such occupations are out of place in the school because they are materialistic, utilitarian, or even menial in their tendency...The world in which most of us live is a world in which everyone has a calling and occupation, something to do."¹⁸⁴ Although Dewey's recommendations touched upon numerous school reform issues, at the core of his critique readers found a call for wider adoption of an educational program whereby first-hand experience was foregrounded. Similarly, as expressed through his description of the possibilities attainable through the occupation of weaving, Dewey's approach was also somewhat developmental in the sense that new learning was an outgrowth of old. Not altogether new, all of this brings Dewey's educational philosophy into close proximity to the ideas and principles espoused by place-based scholars in the modern era who frequently reference the value of the first-hand experiences available through localized learning.

Local Context. As was true of each of the prominent educational thinkers highlighted above, it was not apparent that Dewey addressed directly in his writing the concept of *place*, those ecological, cultural, and historical features which together contribute to the context and character of a locality. Nonetheless, he did demonstrate a certain respect for local context in the educative process; that is, Dewey's educational philosophy resembled modern place-based

¹⁸⁴ Dewey, *The School and Society*, 23.

ideals, specifically the emphasis on the local, despite the absence of the formal terminology. In the *The Child and the Curriculum*, for instance, Dewey remarked that “The lack of any organic connection with what the child has already seen and felt and loved makes the material purely formal and symbolic...The genuine form, the real symbol, serve as methods in the holding and discovery of truth. They are tools by which the individual pushes out most surely and widely into unexplored areas. They are the means by which he brings to bear whatever of reality he has succeeded in gaining in past searchings.”¹⁸⁵ This was very much consistent with Herbart’s discussion of apperception and the general notion that new experiences arise from those existing. Dewey argued that something of value existed in the experiences of the learner him/herself, a point of departure in the educational process. This much was noted earlier in the discussion and highlights an additional connection between Dewey and place-based educational thinking. To clarify, in addition to identifying the worth of the learner’s experiences as starting points in a problem-based and experiential instructional program, Dewey seemed to understand that the learner’s existing experiences themselves were typically shaped in those settings within close proximity to the school. Dewey’s consideration of the relationship between the local, experience, and the learner did much to anticipate place-based educational theory.

In what was perhaps a better example still, Dewey suggested in *Experience and Education*, that educators “...should know how to utilize the surroundings, both physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute to the building up of experiences that are worthwhile.”¹⁸⁶ He sensed a new demand in schooling, “[to] become intimately acquainted with the conditions of the local community, physical, historical,

¹⁸⁵ Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum*, 202.

¹⁸⁶ John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, The Kappa Delta Phi Lecture Series (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 40.

occupational, etc. in order to utilize them as educational resources”¹⁸⁷ Through his appreciation for the learner and first-hand experience, both shaped within particular localities, Dewey arrived at an early vision for a place-based plan of teaching and learning. *Experience and Education* was perhaps the most explicit theoretical linkage between Dewey and contemporary concerns with place in education as it was there that Dewey recognized the “...primary responsibility of educators [to become] aware of the general principle of shaping of actual experience by environing conditions.”¹⁸⁸ More so perhaps than other works, *Experience and Education* actually came quite close to the language incorporated by modern place-based educators with regard to the utility of the local.

Geography. Much of Dewey’s writing on the relationship between the child’s lived experiences and interests was generalized and theoretical. He did, however, offer several insights into the specific ways in which the principle might be carried out in practice within the traditional disciplinary domains. As one example, Dewey paid particular attention to geography instruction. Like Herbart and Parker, Dewey’s conception of geography education offered but one instance of his appreciation for local context. In a discussion of the synthetic and analytic aspects to teaching in *How We Think*, for example, Dewey argued that the learner “needs to define the features of the local environment in order to clarify and enlarge his conceptions of the larger geographical scene to which they belong.”¹⁸⁹ While only a partial representation of his larger discussion on synthetic and analytic processes, Dewey nonetheless held the position that a novice learner’s experience was central to the educative process and should be regarded by educators as a starting-off point for learning. In other words, Dewey’s effort to use the local geography was arguably an extension of his advocacy for first-hand experience. To start with the

¹⁸⁷ Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 40.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Dewey, *How We Think*, 219.

local is to be place-based and it is easy to see why place-conscious educators today refer to Dewey's work as frequently as they have.¹⁹⁰ The following passage offered still further illustration:

When the child gets into the classroom he has to put out of his mind a large part of the ideas, interests, and activities that predominate in his home and neighborhood... While I was visiting in the city of Moline a few years ago, the superintendent told me that they found many children every year who were surprised to learn that the Mississippi river in the textbook had anything to do with the stream of water flowing past their homes. The geography being simply a matter of the schoolroom, it is more or less of an awakening to many children to find that the whole thing is nothing but a more formal and definite statement of the facts which they see, feel, and touch every day. When we think that we all live on the earth, that we live in an atmosphere, that our lives are touched at every point by the influences of the soil, flora, and fauna, by consideration of light and heat, and then think of what the school study of geography has been, we have a typical idea of the gap existing between the everyday experiences of the child and the isolate material supplied in such large measure in the school.¹⁹¹

Here again, Dewey pointed to the necessity of using local neighborhood circumstances and contexts in the classroom. Students and teachers, he understood, had much to gain through the incorporation of the local geographical experiences in the larger pursuit of geography study. Chapter 4 offers a more thorough discussion of the development of place-based geography instruction and the purpose here is primarily to emphasize the value that Dewey's educational philosophy placed upon localized instruction and the union of the school with the lived experiences of the learner.¹⁹²

Beyond Geography. Aside from geography education, Dewey also suggested that the local business life deserved curricular attention. To this end, he was explicit:

Though there should be organic connection between the school and business life, it is not meant that the school is to prepare the child for particular business, but that there

¹⁹⁰ The number of PBE publications that make reference to John Dewey are too numerous to cite as a number of authors have mentioned his work in one form or another. Again, however, those conversations rarely provide any direct connection to Dewey's writing and his concern with learning locally.

¹⁹¹ Dewey, *How We Think*, 76.

¹⁹² Here, the phrase "place-based geography instruction" is used in a descriptive manner, not to suggest a formal phrase in the academic literature reviewed.

should be a natural connection of the everyday life of the child with the business environment about him, and that it is the affair of the school to clarify and liberalize this connection, to bring into consciousness, not by introducing special studies, like commercial geography and arithmetic, but by keeping alive the ordinary bonds of relation...[T]here are plenty of real connections between the experience of children and business conditions which need to be utilized and illuminated. The child should study his commercial arithmetic and geography, not as isolated things by themselves, but in their reference to his social environment.¹⁹³

The “social environment” might very well have included aspects of business life that were not entirely localized. At the same time, however, the passage revealed in a rather direct way Dewey’s preference for the inclusion of those aspects of local economic trends, institutions, and operations that touched the learner’s life directly, those elements with which s/he was, or should become, somewhat familiar.

A third example of Dewey’s attention to local contexts in the organization of the school comes from his description of study in what today might be termed home economics. In short, in the kitchen and dining room or through lessons in cooking, all of which were components of Dewey’s model school and laboratory experiments, students might be led not simply through the process of preparing meals, but into an exploration of where various foodstuffs had originated and through which organic processes. Cooking and the kitchen touched the sciences and geography, if not anthropology and history as well. Dewey wrote:

Cooking may be so taught that it has no connection with country life and with the sciences that find their unity in geography. Perhaps it generally has been taught without these connections being really made. But all the materials that come into the kitchen have their origin in the country; they come from the soil, are nurtured through the influences of light and water, and represent a great variety of local environments. Through this connection, extending from the garden into the larger world, the child has his most natural introduction to the study of the sciences. Where did these things grow? What was necessary to their growth? What their relation to the soil? What the effect on different climatic conditions? and so on.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Dewey, *How We Think*, 77-78.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

Dewey next moved the illustration into the field of botany. "...[A] real study of plants," he explained, "takes them from their natural environment and in their uses as well, not simply as food, but in all their adaptations to the social life of man."¹⁹⁵ And he did not end there as chemistry, too, gained notice. "Cooking becomes as well a natural introduction to the study of chemistry," Dewey remarked, "giving the child here also something which he can at once bring to bear upon his daily experience."¹⁹⁶ As illustrated through his brief considerations of geography, economic study, and home economics, then, Dewey looked to relevant local contexts as a tool in curriculum making and in an effort to "secure the organic connection with social life."¹⁹⁷ The central organizing feature in Dewey's ideal conception of the school was experience, much of which he demonstrated could be arranged around the lived experiences (i.e., occupations) of the learner and within the local environments immediately surrounding the school. As suggested above, his approach anticipated similar practices recommended by modern place-based educators.

School & Community. Dewey spoke at length regarding the relationship between the school and the community. In *The School and Society*, Dewey remarked that school activities must be perceived "...in their social significance, as types of the processes by which society keeps itself going, as agencies for bringing home to the child some of the primal necessities of community life."¹⁹⁸ If students were ultimately to contribute to the communities of which they were a part, they should confront the types of problems and opportunities characteristic of social life. As Dewey imagined it: "Make each one of our schools an embryonic community life, active with types of occupations that reflect the life of the larger society and permeated throughout with

¹⁹⁵ Dewey, *How We Think*, 84.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Dewey, *The School and Society*, 79.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 14.

the spirit of art, history, and science. When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the deepest and best guaranty of a larger society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious.”¹⁹⁹ Rather than divorcing the school from the community and issues surrounding social living, Dewey sought to immerse students in the realities of life. As noted, his approach was essentially experiential; that is, Dewey urged practitioners to give students first-hand encounters with social living. In this way, his work in the early twentieth century anticipated to some extent the ideals of modern place-based educators who often reference the larger social goals of learning. Although Dewey’s endeavor to establish a collaborative and experiential atmosphere for learners did not mandate a connection to the community at large, it certainly pointed in that direction. His educational program was intended in part to provide students with opportunities to wrangle with social situations as a sort of preparation for their future roles as citizens. With that in mind, modern place-based education represents today somewhat of a refinement of Dewey’s ideal. This connection, along with his popularity among educational writers generally, may at least partially explain the consistent attention, however cursory it has been at times, that Dewey has received from modern place-based advocates.

Chapter Summary

The discussion above has illustrated through the educational writings of such thinkers as Aristotle, Comenius, Parker, Dewey, and others, that the core elements of modern place-based education are indeed quite old. This chapter has identified historical precedents for modern place-based education through a careful analysis of the major works of foundational figures in educational theory and practice and the extent to which those writings and philosophies

¹⁹⁹ Dewey, *The School and Society*, 29.

addressed the central themes representative of the contemporary field. Found in various iterations across the authors cited above was a consistent appreciation for the nature and needs of the learner. Beginning with Aristotle, but equally present in Dewey, was the notion that familiar contexts served important educational purposes, as each of those thinkers reviewed held the general belief that new knowledge often grew from existing experience. Not unrelated, there was a developmental aspect in each of the educational philosophies highlighted in this chapter. Seldom used as a direct term (e.g., “developmentalism”), the notion that learning began with the student in familiar settings and later expanded outward from existing experience was a consistent theme and often provided as a rationale for the use of local contexts in the educative process. In Herbart, the concept was particularly well defined and presented as a theory of “apperception.” Although few other writers explicitly named an approach, discussion surrounding developmental appropriateness, familiarity, and an outwardly expanding course of study, was present in virtually every writer reviewed.

Beyond familiarity and the lived experiences of the learner, the figures highlighted in this chapter further represented their affection for the unique needs of the student through a functional concern for first-hand experience. Sense-perception, each scholar argued independently, offered tangible, observation- and inquiry-based experiences, a preferable alternative to rote memorization or disciplinary abstractions. For Comenius and Rousseau, first-hand experience was preferable to the overuse and reliance on books and textual study. In Pestalozzi, sense-experience received special consideration through his extended discussion of *Anschauung*. For Parker and Froebel, direct observation served a vital educational function and in Dewey it was the experience of the occupations. Across each of the scholars reviewed, first-hand experiential learning received consideration, a reflection of the perceived needs of the

learner. Given similar concerns in the theory and practice of modern place-based educators, the figures here represent important precedents.

Of course, attention to the nature and needs of the learner would mean little in the context of an historical review of place-based education were there not also present a certain recognition of the value of local context. Although the modern concept of *place* was never incorporated by Rousseau, Parker, Herbart or any of the figures considered in this chapter, wide consensus existed regarding the notion that local contexts did much to inform the learner's lived experiences. Without exception, scholars have returned to the simple realization that within the school grounds, the neighborhood, and surrounding natural settings, there are wonderful and abundant opportunities to engage students in first-hand observation through the senses. In Comenius, one found explicit consideration of local flora, astronomy, and geography study. In Rousseau, the pedagogical emphasis on the local was perhaps less pronounced, but nonetheless informed by the contexts that surrounded the student. In Froebel, Herbart, and Parker, local excursions designed around geographic and nature study received special attention. Dewey and Pestalozzi, too, emphasized the significance of the home and the neighborhood. A trademark feature of place-based education, this chapter has demonstrated that local study is a well established practice, one far more mature than that represented through the modern field.

Finally, though surely with less regularity, one found in the discussion above some recognition of the possibilities that the school might hold toward the improvement of society and, in some instances at least, the local community. In Pestalozzi, for instance, the role of the local, student-centered instruction was designed to meet the needs of the poor, an underserved segment of society. Although Pestalozzi did not explicitly frame his instruction around local problems, his philosophy and practice grew directly from his work with poor, illiterate students

in particular locales at Stanz and Burgdorf. Dewey provided a closer connection to community responsiveness, though his expectations were somewhat generalized. In short, Dewey's connection to the community/society came through his dedication to establish the "embryonic community;" that is, he understood that the school could serve as a sort of training ground for future citizens in a democratic community. Dewey seemed to stop short of suggesting explicit ways that local community problems might be brought into the classroom, but he clearly reserved an important function for the school in the improvement of society/community. In modern place-based educational writing, community responsiveness, where it is discussed at all, often assumes a more direct role in the school. With that in mind, the community responsiveness function is undeveloped in the writings of foundational figures reviewed in this chapter. Instead, the precedents reviewed tended to look to the local not as a means to addressing local problems or improving local conditions, but rather out of understandings regarding the learner and the process of learning.

Given the attention to the needs and nature of the learner and the explicit focus on local context, the figures highlighted above do indeed represent important historical precedents for modern place-based theory and practice. Both themes, refined perhaps, can be found today in the work of those scholars advocating a place-based educational reform plan. Yet the early writers discussed above do not exhaust the historical antecedents of modern initiatives. To the contrary, the core themes highlighted above have been perpetually reinvented and repackaged over the last century and a half, often times with the support of a wide range of institutions, practitioners, and researchers. Building on this introductory portrait of the earliest precedents of place-based educational theory and practice, the discussion now transitions to consider the robust efforts of American nature study advocates in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

CHAPTER 3

THE NATURE STUDY MOVEMENT

Introduction

The sketch of influential theorists, practitioners, and philosophers developed in Chapter 2 provided a case for the claim that the fundamental elements of what modern educators regard as place-based pedagogy were well rooted in the past. The emphasis on the manner in which students learn and the potential significance of the student's lived experiences in the educative process were themes reiterated time and again over centuries of educational scholarship. The review provided, far from exhaustive, also revealed an acute sensitivity regarding the role that the local environment, be it cultural, historical, or ecological, might play in shaping the learner, and consequently, the appropriateness of instructional practices. The relationship between the school and the community also surfaced as a concern, though clearly less so than that represented by many modern place-based proponents. Of course, those ideas did not perish with the Comenius, Pestalozzi, or Parker, but rather gained new momentum in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through the range of progressive educational innovations that earlier figures did so much to inspire. The first of several examples discussed throughout the remainder of this study is the nature study movement, a far-reaching educational reform agenda which gained considerable attention among American scholars in the initial decades of the twentieth century.

This chapter reviews the development and practice of nature study in detail, beginning with the earliest influences of Louis Agassiz and the Anderson School and extending through the

first decades of the twentieth century. The chapter is informed by the primary works of well established nature study advocates such as Liberty Hyde Bailey, Anna Comstock, and Clifton F. Hodge, though the list is not exhaustive. The discussion is built around documents which range from theoretical pieces intended to outline the parameters of nature study to manuals for practice and normal school instruction. In an effort to accurately and systematically identify an historical precedent for place-based education in early twentieth century nature study, the chapter is arranged around the three guiding criteria established at the outset of the study. More specifically, and following an outline of the earliest origins of the American nature study movement and the foundational work of Wilbur S. Jackman, the evaluation of nature study literature is framed around the local, the learner, and the community. Of equal importance, this chapter sheds light on the social and political contexts which gave rise to nature study reforms beginning in the late nineteenth century.

Social & Political Contexts

The American nature study movement grew out of several wider sociopolitical developments in the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the first place, the nature study movement was backgrounded by what Lawrence Cremin described as “a stormy period of early industrial growth.”¹ “Spurred on by protective tariffs, cheap labor, abundant raw materials, and a spreading network of railroad communication,” Cremin explained further that “American manufacturing was expanding at an unprecedented rate. People were on the move [and a] steady stream of immigrants poured through the gates of the eastern seaports...”² In short, the American experience post-Civil War was one of significant cultural, religious, economic, and political change. But as Wayne Urban and Jennings Wagoner reported, “The industrialization and

¹ Lawrence Cremin. *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1961), 15.

² Ibid.

urbanization that began in the nineteenth century continued to develop and to give rise to numerous economic, political, and social problems.”³ Responses to industrialism and its consequences in America were not singular, but rather pluralistic and by the 1890s a wide variety of vocalized responses to change had been established. Urban and Wagoner revealed further that in addition to the multitude of progressive responses, the movement often “encompass[ed] diametrically opposed strategies”⁴ for change. Although “conservative” and “liberal” progressives may have shared, at times, conceptions regarding social, political and economic outcomes, the means to those ends were often contradictory.⁵ Without overlooking the diversity of the movement, however, whether reforms were geared toward sanitation and hygiene, or immigration and labor, the collective response to the industrialization of America represented a far-reaching Progressive Era transformation, a period of reorientation and change which provided a backdrop for educational reform plans such as nature study among others.

Within the larger progressive movement of which it was a part, an independent nature study movement grew up and out of two additional developments, one social and one educational. In the first place, nature study should be regarded as a reflection of late nineteenth century American environmentalism and naturalism. Sally Gregory Kohlstedt clarified that connection in her recent historical appraisal of the nature study movement in America. “The wide acceptance of nature study,” she wrote, “proved to be emblematic of public attitudes toward both nature and the human condition in the anxious years of social and intellectual change at the turn of the twentieth century.”⁶ On the one hand, Americans began to look back to nature in a

³ Wayne J. Urban and Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr., *American Education: A History*, 3rd ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2004), 194.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Sally G. Kohlstedt, *Teaching Children Science: Hands-On Nature Study in North America, 1890-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 1.

somewhat romantic and sympathetic fashion that longed for a deeper aesthetic appreciation in life perceived to exist in pre-industrial times as the result of a closer connection with the natural environment. As Kevin Armitage phrased it, Americans “...were uneasy about the impersonal and dispassionate nature of social and economic life...[and] citizens ‘groped for some personal connection with the broader environment.’”⁷ Not unrelated, burgeoning trends to promote the conservation and preservation of the nation’s natural resources also offered support for nature study initiatives. But in addition to a desire to reconnect and to preserve, support for nature study was also prompted by a growing appreciation for science itself. By the late 1890s, a “...scientific worldview had entered the daily lives of people as never before”⁸ and the study of nature offered a complement to that intellectual development.

Of course, the nature study movement was largely a pedagogical entity, one deeply impacted by the practical and theoretical reforms that characterized parallel trends in educational progressivism. “[T]eachers taught with natural objects from their local environments” and “...insisted that pupils should be taught using materials attractive to them and at a level readily understood.”⁹ These sorts of curricular and instructional strategies flourished in the school reform climate of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With these wider contexts in view, the discussion below turns to the American nature study movement as an historical precedent for place-based reform.

Early Roots in Nature Study

Relevant to any investigation of the nature study movement, to both its theoretical underpinnings and the method in practice, was the pioneering effort of Jean Louis Randolph

⁷ Kevin C. Armitage, *The Nature Study Movement: The Forgotten Popularizer of America’s Conservation Ethic*. (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 2-3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹ Kohlstedt, *Teaching Children Science*, 1, 6.

Agassiz to offer one the earliest descriptions defining a method similar to nature study in American educational circles. Agassiz, a renowned geologist and biologist of Swiss decent, became involved with the Anderson School of Natural History in the early 1870s. The Anderson School, which was located on Penikese Island off the southern coast of Massachusetts, was named for the island's owner, John Anderson. A wealthy merchant and businessman, Anderson had previously held the approximately 75-acre island as a vacation retreat until Agassiz petitioned the philanthropist with his innovative school plan. With the support from wealthy investors and notable coverage in the press, the school received considerable attention from contemporary observers and opened its doors to the first class of students in the summer of 1873.

The initial plan for Anderson was to organize a school whereby students could investigate the natural environment, specifically the marine environment, of Penikese Island, through first-hand observation. The school was to provide a natural laboratory for teachers in the sciences as well as to promote Agassiz' innovative pedagogy. The passage below, excerpted from an account of the inauguration of the Anderson School in 1873, was illustrative of the school's mission: "Prof. Agassiz said a few words, speaking feelingly of the debt he owed Mr. Anderson...He spoke of the study to be pursued in the school. Nature, he said, was to be the students' textbook...He had asked that students bring no books, as their appliances for study were to be none but those which nature offers. He would, every morning, give them a little advice, and they should look over the island, and tell him something of what they saw each day...Instruction would come chiefly from the means given them for self-instruction."¹⁰ First-hand observation, then, was the cornerstone of instruction at Penikese, an understanding shared

¹⁰ Special Dispatch, "The Anderson School: Opening of the Establishment on Penikese Island by Prof Agassiz," *New York Times*, July 8, 1873.

by other notable cofounding members such as Alexander Agassiz, son of Agassiz and a celebrated scholar in his own right, and Nathaniel Shaler, a one-time student.

While the phrase “nature study” was never formally utilized by Agassiz, the sentiment expressed, not to mention his brief tenure with the Anderson School, was clearly consistent with the overall agenda of using the local natural environment as an educational instrument. Not insignificantly, famed nature study advocate Liberty Hyde Bailey later pointed to Agassiz as the individual responsible for the all important and defining phrase “study nature not books,”¹¹ a pithy slogan that later came to represent the nature study movement’s educational philosophy. Bailey’s attribution was consistent with the other recollections of the day. As a former student of Agassiz, David Starr Jordan, once noted: “He would have students trained through contact with real things, not merely exercised in the recollection of the book descriptions of things. “If you study nature in books,” he said, “when you go out of doors you cannot find her.”¹² Jordan’s description continued thus: “Agassiz was once asked to write a text-book in Zöology for the use of schools and colleges. Of that venture he recalled: “I told the publishers that I was not the man to do that sort of thing, and I told them, too, that the less of that sort of thing which is done the better. It is not school-books we want, it is students. The book of Nature is always open, and all that I can do or say shall be to lead young people to study that book, and not to pin their faith to any other.”¹³ From the passages above, just a sampling of the many representations available, Agassiz’s method clearly captured the spirit of the nature study movement which would develop in later years somewhat independently. Yet his contributions toward the general sentiment of nature study went beyond words alone; that is, accounts of Agassiz’s teaching demonstrated equally well his commitment to the practice of observation and first-hand experience in the

¹¹Liberty H. Bailey, *The Nature Study Idea*, 3rd ed. (New York: MacMillan Company, 1909), 16.

¹² David S. Jordan, “Agassiz at Penikese,” *The Popular Science Monthly* 49 (April 1892): 721.

¹³ Ibid.

learning process. The following passage provided by Harvard scholar and former student Nathaniel Shaler revealed much of Agassiz's unique approach to thinking and learning: "In [Agassiz's laboratory], already packed, I had assigned to me a small pine table with a rusty tin pan upon it... When I sat me down before my tin pan, Agassiz brought me a small fish, placing it before me with a rather stern requirement that I should study it, but should on no account talk to any one [*sic*] concerning it, nor read anything relating to fishes, until I had his permission to do so?"¹⁴ Shaler went on to remark that Agassiz, while always close at hand, "concerned himself not further with me that day, nor the next, nor for a week."¹⁵ Only after what the one-time student estimated to be 100 hours was the exercise complete, yet Shaler recalled he was nonetheless better for it, having truly come to understand his own capacities to observe and to inquire. In many ways, the unobstructed, first-hand observational method illustrated through Shaler's fish was the essence and motivation behind the establishment of the Anderson School. The summer course offered there, founders designed to familiarize teachers of natural history with just such a methodology, such that the "...real work in science should spread throughout our educational system."¹⁶ Although practitioners might just as well have adapted Agassiz's pedagogical reliance on observation to the laboratory, the adaptations at Anderson added a unique component to the equation.

At Penikese, Agassiz's observational approach was localized in such a way that emphasized the uniquely available flora, and particularly marine fauna, of one small corner of the northeast Atlantic coast. Despite initial promise and considerable investment in the Anderson School, the relative bareness of observable fauna in the neighborhood of Penikese, coupled with fire and the death of the institution's charismatic leader, brought the coeducational experiment to

¹⁴ Lane Cooper, *Louis Agassiz as a Teacher* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1917), 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁶ Jordan, "Agassiz at Penikese," 723.

an end by 1875, just two short years after its founding. However short-lived Agassiz's work in Massachusetts may have been, the legacy of Anderson has remained a rich one. A successful and early entrée to American nature study, the school also represented some of the same ideals that modern place-based educators would describe more than a century later, specifically, the emphasis on the student experience and the use of the local environment as the starting point for teaching and learning. But the promise of the school's underlying approach would not wait that long to be revisited and reinvented, as theorists and practitioners associated with the nature study movement would soon call for educational reforms baring a close likeness to Agassiz and the Anderson School.

The Nature Study Idea. In *The Nature-study Idea*, first published in 1903, Liberty Hyde Bailey provided a useful introductory history of the approach, the first to date, where he recognized not only the Anderson School and the early efforts of Agassiz, but other key players in what would ultimately become the nature study movement. Important early examples, for instance, could be found in the Normal School at Oswego, New York. Disciples of the Agassiz experiment, leaders at Oswego also drew heavily on the work of Johann Pestalozzi and the practice of *object teaching*.¹⁷ In particular, Henry Harrison Straight's involvement with Oswego came to mind in Bailey's effort to trace the origins of the nature study movement. Of the scholar's contributions, Bailey wrote: "[Straight] was a student of science, but his views of science-teaching in the elementary school underwent gradual but decided change under the Pestalozzian influence in which he was placed...As director of the practice school, he worked out his ideas of correlation in nature subjects and geography subjects. His work included the study of the common things in the neighborhood."¹⁸ Although Straight did not use the formal

¹⁷ Bailey, *The Nature Study Idea*; Armitage, *The Nature Study Movement*.

¹⁸ Bailey, *The Nature Study Idea*, 20.

phrase “nature study” to describe his approach, his efforts at Oswego and later at the Cook Country Normal School in Chicago, Illinois were significant nonetheless, as they exemplified the core themes of nature study in practice. According to Bailey’s historical account: “In 1883 Professor Straight went to the Cook County (Ill.) Normal School and taught there until his death, in 1886. He had great influence in developing the ideals of this institution, and was given credit therefor [*sic*] by Colonel Parker, the distinguished head of the school.”¹⁹ Instrumental in the continuance and development of the nature study approach generally, the formal movement, including the heading *nature study*, would gain wide approval several years later.

Wilbur Samuel Jackman. Among the defining figures in the nature study movement was Wilbur Samuel Jackman, a biology teacher from Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, whose originality and innovation in 1889 earned him an invitation to work with famed American educator Colonel Francis Wayland Parker in Chicago in 1889. At the Cook County Normal School, Jackman became an early and vocal proponent of nature study curricula and established himself as one of the more prominent advocates in the field. His first volume on the subject, *Nature-Study for the Common Schools*, published in 1891, stood as the first widely published text on the subject and for all intents and purposes marked the beginning of the nature study movement in American educational circles. A collection of pamphlets representative of his earlier work on the subject, *Nature-study for the Common Schools*, outlined the theoretical underpinnings of the approach and provided descriptions of practice across a wide variety of environmental settings.²⁰ It was the first of several volumes Jackman would produce on the theory and practice of nature study.

¹⁹ Bailey, *The Nature Study Idea*; Parker is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

As defined by Jackman, nature study was an educational approach which held as its primary purpose the uniting of the learner with the natural environment.²¹ Students, young students in particular, were to be provided opportunities to experience all things natural first-hand. Jackman insisted that at the root of the educational problem was the lack of understanding and familiarity with the natural world on the part of the learner. He wrote: “The lack of familiarity with natural phenomena in a broad, general way, and the absence of many, if not most, of the facts from the common experience of the pupils, are unsurmountable [*sic*] obstacles, not only in the way of elementary science work, but of all rational instruction.”²² While Jackman pointed to a lack of understanding of the natural world everywhere, he noted that the problem was particularly acute in the city school. “With the children in the cities, especially,” observed the scholar, “the whole trend of influence has been towards manufacturing an experience for the pupils within the walls of the school room, without having recourse to those things in nature which necessarily underlie all normal human experience.”²³ But again, despite what might have been unique opportunities for exposure to nature in country school settings, Jackman was quick to point out that rural educational programs were nearly as deficient. “It has been no better in the country,” he noted, “except for the incidental advantage which the child has derived from the close contact with nature necessitated in his daily life.”²⁴ In Jackman’s mind, then, connections between the learner and objects and phenomena studied were to be strengthened everywhere.

Jackman suggested that an important function of nature study would be to reorient the manner in which formal science instruction would be conceptualized and delivered in the classroom. He clearly preferred direct experience over artificial laboratory work. Laboratory

²¹ Wilbur S. Jackman, *Field Work in Nature Study: A Handbook for Teachers and Pupils*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: A. Flanagan, 1894).

²² *Ibid.*, 5.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

work, while not inherently miseducative, was often inappropriate for new learners. As Jackman viewed the problem: “In advanced science work, a fine laboratory becomes essential; in elementary stages, it is by no means necessary, and in the hands of irrational teachers it may become hurtful. The function of experiment deserves the closest study, and the relation of the work done in the laboratory to mind growth should be well understood.”²⁵ Clearly appreciative of the value of the laboratory in certain contexts, Jackman sensed that purely formal work for younger students thwarted deeper understanding though an emphasis on the symbolic. He offered the following clarification: “Water evaporating from a test tube will entertain for the moment, but it does not lay hold of child life with the power that the same phenomenon does when he sees the mists rolling up from the lake and river.”²⁶ In both instances, the principles of evaporation were demonstrated. It was to the latter, however, to the “mists rolling up from the lake,” to which Jackman pointed as most likely avenue to the educative experience desired. The natural environment surrounding the school was to become the laboratory for young learners. While he never used the phrase, Jackman’s attention to the experiences of the learner and to the local context in which the school was set, was quite similar to what modern educators have since termed place-based pedagogy.

Jackman made no effort to disguise the challenges of fieldwork with young learners, or to use his terminology, *field lessons*. He was explicit with regard to the overall challenge of the project, noting that “most teachers, as yet, have everything to learn.”²⁷ Jackman continued: “It requires no little skill to plan and carry in to execution a series of properly related field lessons. It involves not only the systematic, and as far as possible, economic expenditure of time in

²⁵ Jackman, *Field Work*, 6.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

collecting data, but, also, the question of how to utilize the data in the most intelligent way.”²⁸ Despite the potential challenges to educators in effectively making nature study a reality, Jackman was wholly committed to the effort and eager to encourage a wider enjoyment of the numerous benefits he believed to be associated. Nature study held great potential for students and teachers alike, but beyond what were perhaps the traditional goals of schooling in the last decade of the nineteenth century. More specifically, while nature study was for Jackman a sound means through which to approach early scientific study with young learners, his goals extended well beyond content understanding. Young naturalists, he recognized, would not only understand important scientific processes, but would also become more appreciative of the natural environment. Better still, Jackman suggested that such sensibilities would ultimately develop into a deeper appreciation of all things, but particularly music, poetry, and great works of literature. He wrote: “When placed by the field lesson in direct communion with that spirit which infused the lives of those who along nature’s paths have led the way to higher things, the child and the man are in the most perfect attitude of mind to appreciate and enjoy the highest and best things ever written. The pupil and the teacher, too, will rejoice to find that even they have something in common with the poets and this the study of nature, and the study of literature, in the mind of the pupil, merge into one.”²⁹ He concluded that “...by placing the child in appreciative, loving contact with nature, the attempt is made to bring him back directly to the original source of all human strength.”³⁰ While it was certainly the case that Jackman’s vision of nature study was deeply connected to what could be reasonably considered the science curriculum, aesthetic appreciation was a significant, if not parallel, motivation. Along similar lines, in that Jackman’s method appeared to support an effort to re-unite the individual with his

²⁸ Jackman, *Field Work*, 7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

or her natural environment, his contribution was to some degree suggestive of wider trends he perceived to exist in American society, generally. In particular, the understanding that the “artificial environment of modern life”³¹ had replaced any connection between the individual and nature was a critique within Jackman’s work, a response to American industrialization which informed his views regarding the utility of traditional schooling and perhaps the immediacy of reform through nature study as well.

Jackman’s nature study was non-traditional in every way and he offered suggestions to would-be adopters to forestall potential pitfalls in the process of implementation. In the first place, he attempted to dispel the notion that the outdoor classroom could be guided by the same measures as the traditional, indoor counterpart. With regard to classroom discipline, Jackman insisted: “Remember that the usual modes of discipline and that the usual school room decorum are out of place in field work. The pupils will ordinarily respect any rational means that the teacher may employ to let them into nature’s secrets. Shouts and laughter are indicative of health rather than depravity,…”³² An alternative to a conventional approach to classroom management, bolted desks, or recitations, nature study sought order through measures “...inspiring the pupils with a desire to learn something,”³³ hardly a traditional approach even by modern standards. Nor would students necessarily be engaged in precisely the same learning at one moment. “Single pupils or groups may be assigned to different subjects,”³⁴ Jackman explained. To this end, “...the preference of the pupils may well be consulted.”³⁵ Generally, then, “The initiative of the work should be as informal as possible.”³⁶ Hardly the standard program for schooling, Jackman may

³¹ Jackman, *Field Work*, 8.

³² *Ibid.*, 9-10.

³³ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

have sensed the possibility of resistance, not necessarily from students, but from observers of the unorthodox approach. The following passage was illustrative: “It is of great importance to enlist and cultivate the interest of the parents in field work. Disarm their fears for the children by making careful plans for the safety of the pupils, and disarm their prejudices by doing thoughtful work...A campaign of education for the patrons will bring good results.”³⁷ Aside from the practical concerns of garnering administrative and parental support for practices that would almost certainly have been regarded by many as needlessly experimental, Jackman moved to address, in a very precise manner, the procedures for designing and implementing nature study instruction. In fact, he oriented the bulk of *Field Work in Nature-study* around that purpose.

Jackman’s recommendations for nature study instruction were inherently localized in scope. His call to step outside of the traditional laboratory in order to recognize the possibility for learning that the natural world offered, just as Agassiz had done before him, suggested an investigation of local environments as a part of schooling. Out of necessity, readers would have assumed this of Jackman’s program in any effort to operationalize his plans in practice. But *Field Work in Nature-study* required little conjecture, as Jackman was explicit with regard to his prescriptions for the classroom. He understood that nature study was essentially a localized endeavor, noting in his prefatory remarks: “In using this book it is suggested that the teacher and pupil look through the questions under the topic selected for study with a view to getting the thought and purpose of the work to be undertaken. With a general idea in mind of what may be done, the topics prepared may be taken in order which will best suit the peculiar conditions presented by any particular locality.”³⁸ From there, Jackman went on to offer a series of references, over fifty texts in total, as potential resources for educators in their pursuits to design

³⁷ Jackman, *Field Work*, 10-11.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, i.

a program of nature study for their own, and their students', particular locality. Sample texts included: Bradford Torrey's *A Florida Sketchbook*, Garrett P. Serviss' *Astronomy with an Opera Class*, Celia Thaxter's *Among the Isle of Shoals*, and Henry David Thoreau's *Early Spring in Massachusetts*. Other texts provided served as primers to such varied and naturalistic subjects as bird-watching, geology, geography, butterflies, and trees. In keeping with the larger purpose of the text, to introduce and guide the practice of nature study, the organization of the handbook itself reflected the localized nature of the approach. In an effort to facilitate the "general survey of the neighborhood"³⁹ across the widest variety of possible environments, Jackman committed the bulk of his handbook to an exploration of several common, but diverse, natural landscapes. Investigated separately, he described fieldwork possibilities in a river basin, soils, a swamp, a lake shore, and a cliff. For each of the discussions, Jackman adopted essentially the same pattern, a set of introductory remarks accompanied by a substantial list of problems to guide student investigation. The passage below from a chapter entitled "Field Work in a River Basin" was indicative of the typical format adopted:

In giving the pupils an idea of a river basin and of work done by a river, it is not absolutely necessary to study a large stream. A brook basin presents many of the features, and frequently all, or nearly all, of the phenomena of erosion found along a river...The study should be greatly enriched by sketchings and drawings of more or less diagrammatic character...Collections of plants may be made showing their longitudinal and traverse distribution in the basin...Different forms of animal life, also, find their congenial and appropriate abode in the stream, in the banks, on the lowlands and about the bluff.⁴⁰

The passage was typical of the introductory comments offered and created a framework around which sample problems might be arranged. For instance, to the study of erosion highlighted in the introduction above, Jackman added the following guiding questions:

³⁹ Jackman, *Field Work*, 16.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

8. Can you account for the deposition of the coarse gravel, fine gravel, sand and silt, where you find them? Where do the pebbles come from? Are there any stones among them that do not belong to the country rock?...
13. What causes determine whether erosion or deposition shall take place?...
14. Are erosion and deposition in the same places when the stream is at flood hight [*sic*] that they are when it is at its usual stage?...⁴¹

The questions continued from there, a total of sixty in all. In each case, whether the topic was erosion, common vegetation, or plant life, Jackman intended the suggested problems in the text to guide students and teachers into a more complete investigation of their immediate environs. The sample questions identified above were representative of the depth of study of which nature study was to promote and few observers could suggest that the approach was anything less than rigorous.

Jackman also worked to demonstrate the potential of nature study appropriately implemented. In keeping with his motivation to embrace the commonplace and the local, he provided a sketch of the Monongahela Basin, which he titled, "A Story of a River Basin."⁴² Through the extended illustration, Jackman's effort to create an understanding of natural processes through an investigation of one's local environment became clear. He wrote in an introductory paragraph:

Very much of the country belonging to the region selected for description and illustration in the following pages is in its character extremely commonplace. There is here not a trace to be found of those violent forces in nature witnessed in the earthquake, the volcano, the primal heat, or glaciers, which elsewhere frequently give a definite setting to all present appearances and phenomena...The natural features, taken singly, approach that generalization in form which renders them almost mediocre. Their presence is scarcely imposing to incite remark, and their absence would hardly occasion comment, but taken together, they possess a quiet and unobtrusive beauty which must at last find its way to the heart of the dullest sensibility...⁴³

⁴¹ Jackman, *Field Work*, 23.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 58.

Beginning with a seemingly insignificant, small spring, Jackman went on to trace the flow of water through the valleys of southwestern Pennsylvania. Taken as a whole, Jackman's description of the spring, rivulets, brooks, creeks, and valleys, not to mention flora, fauna, and soil character, came together to create a holistic view of an entire river valley. And his illustration did not stop with observation and consideration of natural processes alone.

While it was generally true that nature study was perhaps best suited to the science curricula, it was also the case that Jackman's vision of the approach was ultimately intended to produce a more detailed understanding of the relationship between the natural environment and human societies. Jackman himself noted as much: "The central idea in the teacher's mind should be the relation of the present condition of life in the area selected to the natural features. How has the present state, social, political, and economic been evolved from primitive conditions?... Out of these relations grow the social and political conditions of the community..."⁴⁴ Investigations of local environments, then, were to be considerate of, if not intensely focused upon, the relationship between natural and human-social systems. To return to the Monongahela, Jackman provided considerable discussion of just such a relationship, highlighting, among other things, appropriate locations for grist mills and the railroad. Similarly, he linked the preponderance of mining as a Pennsylvania occupation to geological conditions in the state and the presence of bituminous coal. Jackman's concluding remarks in his efforts to explore a river basin were also indicative of his appreciation for the significance of human-environment interactions. He wrote: "The history of the social, intellectual, and moral development of the people who have lived within an area studied is not less interesting than that of their industrial and commercial growth."⁴⁵ The passage above was significant in that it showed a concern within Jackman's

⁴⁴ Jackman, *Field Work*, 17.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

brand of nature study that moved beyond the economic dimensions of human involvement with the natural environment. In addition to an understanding of natural and scientific processes and environmental change, Jackman showed concern for social and cultural change as well, though perhaps not proportionately so. He continued his description of the Monongahela and offered the following: “From the erection of the first log cabin to the present moment, history reveals the community in constant change. The people of to-day deal no less directly with the forces of nature, with the natural features of their region, than did their ancestors, but their blows are given with acquired power. The unique life which flourishes here has received coloring from without, but its essence has been evolved from within.”⁴⁶ If his narrative of the Monongahela was any indication of the ideal, nature study, at least the version represented through Jackman, was ultimately to extend beyond observation and study of the local natural environment to include an investigation of the local social environment as well, including local lifeways and history. In some ways, Jackman’s holistic vision of nature study, his efforts to tie together environmental and the human-social investigations, were reflective of similar educational reforms offered by contemporary geography educators, a development addressed subsequently in Chapter 4.

Among several other texts on the subject, Jackman published *Nature-study for Grammar Grades: A Manual for Teachers and Pupils below the High School in the Study of Nature* in 1898, a contribution intended to provide concrete classroom guidance to the practice of nature study. He outlined the problem in his introductory remarks: “In preparing this Manual, it has been his aim to propose, within the comprehension of grammar school pupils, a few of the problems which arise in a thoughtful study of nature, and to offer suggestions designed to lead to

⁴⁶ Jackman, *Field Work*, 118.

their solution.”⁴⁷ Jackman dedicated some 400 pages to this end and among the forty-one sample lesson topics were: “Mutual Relations of Plants and Insects,” “Meteorology,” “A Study of Sunshine Distribution,” “The Dissemination of Seeds” and “Heat and Energy in the Animal Body.” Within each sample lesson, Jackman began with a description of possible field observations. In “Mutual Relations of Plants and Insects,” for instance, he provided the following outline for investigation:

- A. *Equipment*: Baskets and small knives
- B. *Places to be visited*: Open fields, woods, thickets and marshes. Study and collect specimens of plants, including every part - fruit, flower, leaf, stem, and root ...
- C. *Evidences to be considered*:
 1. Galls on leaves or stems.
 2. Partially eaten leaves or stems.
 3. Partially eaten or stung fruit.
 4. Stings of all kinds upon various parts of plants....⁴⁸

In chapter thirty, by way of comparison, Jackman offered a lesson on local fossil study. The description read:

OBSERVATION: Make a careful search about the coal yards in the block of soft coal for traces of forms having plant-like structure. Miners and other workers in coal often find such forms, and, not infrequently, they acquire an interesting collection. If requested, they are usually glad to place such collections at the disposition of school children, and are very willing to save any specimens they may find.⁴⁹

In both instances, Jackman continued with a series of questions to guide students and teachers through an evaluation of the materials collected for observation. He also provided sample math problems contextualized within the topic under consideration. And finally, a number of Jackman’s sample lessons included what he referred to as “representative expression.”⁵⁰

Examples of representative expression included drawing scale figures, painting landscapes and

⁴⁷ Wilbur S. Jackman, *Nature Study for the Grammar Grades: A Manual for Teachers and Pupils Below the High School in the Study of Nature* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1901), i.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁵⁰ Jackman, *Nature Study*, 5.

the like, all of which were to grow out of the associated lesson completed. Though with less frequency, Jackman also created opportunities for modeling and writing under the same heading. In this way, while Jackman's brand of nature study was most reasonably suited to the sciences, namely biology, physical and earth science, physics, and chemistry, he nonetheless supported a somewhat multidisciplinary curriculum in that skill work in mathematics, art, and language was apparent throughout. Coupled with his earlier contributions, wherein he highlighted connections between the natural environments and human-social development, the potentially multidisciplinary character of Jackman's nature study was all the more apparent.

Summary. Jackman's nature study approach represented a clear precedent for modern place-based education. In the first place, he demonstrated across his several scholarly contributions an emphasis on the educational utility of local study. Similarly, his early efforts illustrated a significant concern for the needs and nature of the learner. Jackman's nature study plan was intensely focused on sense experience and the role that first-hand observation played in the development of new understandings about the natural world and the sciences. In addition, given his attention to aesthetic sensibilities and the importance of personal appreciations for (local) natural settings, one might also argue that Jackman attached to his brand of nature study the larger objective of stewardship. To say it another way, Jackman's nature study served something of a community responsiveness function, though perhaps in less distinct ways than many representatives of the modern counterpart in place-based education. With the above in mind, Jackman's nature study evidenced many of the essential themes found today in place-based educational theory and practice, a clear historical antecedent for the modern field. Yet while his writing helped to popularize the nature study movement, he was not alone, as numerous other educators and theorists endeavored to do the same in the first decades of the

twentieth century. A consideration of those contributions deserves attention and is the subject of the discussion below.

Nature Study as Localized Curricula

Numerous educators depicted nature study as a localized curriculum in the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; in many ways; this characteristic was a defining feature of the approach. In his *Manual of Nature-study by Grades*, an early contribution to the movement published in 1894, Indiana educator and school superintendent William Handford Hershman. Hershman exemplified the use of the surrounding local environment in nature study. As the title would suggest, Hershman dedicated the bulk of his manual to recommendations for practice. Divided into chapters by grades, he offered practical nature study lessons on such topics as plant life, animal life, geography, weather, and physiology. An excerpt from a sample third-grade lesson on trees was illustrative of the manual's general arrangement and style, as well as the use of the home environment as a curricular tool. The lesson read: "The autumn month any time before frost will be the proper time to introduce the study of trees. A trip into the woods by the whole school is the best way to secure the right kind of interest. This may be done immediately after a study of leaves in the school room, as given in the first part of this outline..."⁵¹ Clearly intent on organizing a first-hand experience within the immediate surroundings of the school, Hershman went on to provide, in great detail, the types of activities around which an investigation of trees might be arranged. He continued: "Before starting them on this visit to the woods it will be well for the teacher to supply each of the children with a number of cards on each of which may be written near the upper margin the name of a tree whose leaf has already been studied by the pupil. On entering the woods the children holding these cards will separately search for a tree or trees named on these cards...The teacher will now

⁵¹ W.H. Hershman, *Manual of Nature Study by Grades* (Chicago: A. Flanagan, 1898), 39.

go with the pupils, visit all the trees and notes the good hits as well as the errors.”⁵² Hershman broadened the illustration to include a consideration of habitat, parts of the tree (e.g., bark, leaves, buds, etc.), seasonal changes, and other similar nature investigations. The nature study program he advocated was detailed and thorough, and little, if anything, seemed unworthy of consideration. Without question, a considerable portion of Hershman’s nature study lessons were intended to be carried out locally. Supplemented by in-class study and experimentation, the natural laboratory just beyond the school was a central component of the overall program to investigate the seemingly mundane home environment. The passage below from Hershman’s recommendations for the study of plant life in the seventh grade was equally revealing: “There are over six thousand species or members of this [*Mustard*] family known to botanists. We cannot expect to make the acquaintance of the entire family, yet it is possible to learn a few characteristics or marks that will enable us to know one of them when we have the opportunity. If the children will go out on the hillside they may be able to find the toothwort, which may be known as mustard by the common marks, and as toothwort by its root and leaves.”⁵³ Throughout his manual, then, Hershman highlighted the value of what observers might term a curriculum of opportunity which was provided through local environmental conditions, an extension of the classroom laboratory. Most evident in his lesson descriptions for the earlier elementary grades, he also drew on the potential of the natural environment surrounding the school as a learning tool throughout the primary and middle grades. An early contributor to the movement, the emphasis on the local environment in Hershman’s work was not his alone, but rather a characteristic trait across the literature representative of the nature study movement.

⁵² Hershman, *Manual of Nature Study*, 39-40.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 155.

Clifton F. Hodge. Delivering a forceful justification for nature study, Clark University's Clifton F. Hodge, too, illustrated a plan for school reform which capitalized on the local environments surrounding the school. First published in 1902, he dedicated the bulk of his *Nature-study and Life* to a consideration of classroom practice. Hodge's contributions were diverse, addressing a wide variety of subjects including, but not limited to, the following: "Children's Animals and Pets," "Garden Studies," "Propagation of Plants," "Beneficial Insects," "Common Frogs and Salamanders," "Our Common Birds," "Elementary Forestry," and "Flowerless Plants." Under each of those chapter headings, Hodge offered a description of possibilities for the classroom. His "Plan for Insect Study" was in many ways representative of the style he adopted throughout. As Hodge recommended: "Teachers ordinarily feel quite at a loss about where to begin or what to do with insects, but in no other subject should they feel more at ease. The trouble has been that the field is so boundless and the books so technical that it has seemed impossible to bring it into any fruitful relation to elementary teaching...let them play ball with the questions."⁵⁴ To learn the basics of the insect world through a natural process of direct observation was Hodge's best advice. He pointed specifically to a consideration of the beneficial and destructive insect, the household insect, and the beauty of the insect as potentially valuable guiding frameworks for study. Part of this process involved the study of what Hodge termed the "life history" of the insect. He explained: "First, as to a few simple terms: By the life history, or the life story, of an animal, we mean all the changes it goes through and that it does from the time it hatches from the egg, or is born, until it dies of old age. Most insect eggs hatch out into something quite unlike the parent."⁵⁵ Hodge elaborated on the various transformations that insects might undergo throughout the life process (e.g., larva, pupa, etc.), all of which he

⁵⁴ Clifton F. Hodge, *Nature Study and Life* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1903), 45.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

took up in a generalized fashion and without reference to specific species. His efforts to generalize his recommendations and descriptions were not insignificant and highlighted, in fact, an understanding about the wide ranging applicability of nature study to virtually any school context. In Hodge's words: "The best rule to follow is to study the insects that happen to be of most importance or of greatest interest for any locality or season...We never can tell what will come next, so, while the following are described as probably of greatest importance at present and for some time to come, we must not be too much influenced by a formal list, but keep our minds open to study nature as it flows by and be ever ready to do the thing that is most worth our while."⁵⁶ Again, in Hodge one found advocacy for an opportunity curriculum, whereby the unique context of the school and community determined the character of student work in the sciences. In other words, the precise dimensions of the nature study curriculum were locally determined and immediately accessible from the school and its students and teachers. The insects to study, to return to the initial illustration, the nature study practitioner identified in an idiosyncratic way and according to the particular ecological context in which the school was situated. Over time, a school or classroom might work to establish a catalogue of local species. Hodge explained in great detail the appropriate methods for collection and preservation, ultimately suggesting the following: "With the above suggestions any class in nature-study may easily begin a permanent collection of insect life stories that will be an invaluable aid in instruction and grow in excellence and completeness for the important insects of the neighborhood from year to year...The mounting cases should be labeled on one end with the name of the insect contained in it, and also with that of the child or class that contributes it to the

⁵⁶ Hodge, *Nature Study and Life*, 50.

school collection.”⁵⁷ Universalizing in theory, for Hodge the practice of nature study was almost necessarily highly localized.

Another important educational tool highlighted in *Nature-Study and Life* was the school garden, a commonly cited feature of nature study work. As was the case with insect study, the arrangement of the school garden, too, was a localized affair. “The form a school garden should take,” Hodge suggested, “the things planted in it, and the sphere of its influence in the education of a neighborhood must, of course, vary with local needs and conditions.”⁵⁸ While Hodge did provide itemized lists of favorable trees, shrubs, and plants for the generic school garden, he added the caveat that local circumstances should be taken into account. Preceding his list of preferred vegetation, Hodge added that “A list that might meet these requirements will differ greatly with soil, locality, and available space.”⁵⁹ As even the lay parson might imagine, local environmental conditions had a way of dictating, to one degree or another, the form a school garden was to follow.

Without advocating an overly rigid plan of study, Hodge included a sample grade plan for his nature study program, an effort toward curriculum articulation. In large part, he intended the plan to assist in the avoidance of repetitiveness and to more evenly space the various components of nature study throughout the course of study. In his words: “The following grade plan is offered, merely as a suggestion, by which progression and coordination of subjects may be secured, and confusion and repetition may be avoided. If I thought that it would exert an undue influence toward rigidly fixing and mechanizing the course, I should leave it out.”⁶⁰ To begin, Hodge recommended that instructors select nature study topics according to familiarity

⁵⁷ Hodge, *Nature Study and Life*, 60.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 478.

and interest. Domestic animals and common genera of plants, for instance, would provide a foundation for future nature study work. Hodge offered the following suggestions: “Do not attempt too much at first. To begin with, select such topics under your grade as you are most familiar with, and such as are related to the interests of your pupils, and carry these through to a definite result...For different parts of the country, as suggested throughout the book, free substitution of topics, different species of insects, birds, trees, flowers, etc. will be necessary.”⁶¹ Hodge’s plan for the nature study course ran through grade eight, generally moving outward from the most common local plants and animals and into a deeper consideration of the surrounding environment. From his sample course plan to the school garden to his recommendations for the collection of school specimen catalogues, Hodge’s brand of nature study was a highly localized endeavor that would almost necessarily vary according to the unique ecological circumstances of the community.

Liberty Hyde Bailey. Liberty Hyde Bailey became a fixture in the nature study movement and did much to refine both the theory and practice of the approach as a school reform measure. As was true of other contributors, Bailey’s nature study was characteristically localized. It was his intention that the general principles of the approach be adapted by teachers and students to particular local contexts. Nature study could not be replicated in precise ways from one school to the next. Bailey addressed the issue in the following passage: “After all these years of nature-study enterprise, it is naturally assumed by many persons that we ought to be able to give statistics of the number of pupils who are enrolled in the subject, the number of books that have been read, and other exact figures. This supposition misses the very purpose of The Nature Study Movement, which is to set pupils at work informally and personally with the

⁶¹ Hodge, *Nature Study and Life*, 479.

objects, the affairs and phenomena with which they are in daily contact.”⁶² Bailey surely recognized and appreciated the need to take stock of educational progress in the school, to measure in some fashion the relative effectiveness of learning strategies, of student learning. But to offer broad statistical generalizations was clearly out of question in Bailey’s mind. To do so would be a violation of the core principles of the nature study program: “There are very many teachers and very many schools, and very many pupils, who have a new outlook on life as the result of nature study work; but if I could give a statistical measure of The Nature-Study Movement, I should consider the work to have been a failure, however large the figures might be.”⁶³ Bailey’s consternation for any plan of overly rigid determinations of school reform and educational progress seemed to stem from the understanding that nature study was a localized affair in practice. If nature study directed students and teachers to consider their own lived experiences, a necessarily idiosyncratic venture in many instances, a fully standardized practice would nearly always be complicated, if not altogether elusive. He added: “The evolution of a new intention in education is under way and is beginning to be felt. The principles have been stated; the current discussions are of methods, difficulties, and of local and personal adaptations.”⁶⁴ Bailey’s nature study philosophy was simply too fluid to meet certain mainstream expectations.

In addition to outlining the theoretical foundations of the approach, Bailey also had a good deal to offer to the parallel conversation surrounding practice. Consistent with his nature study approach overall, his suggestions for the classroom amounted to a highly contextualized form of instruction. The starting point in the nature study course was the familiar. As Bailey described it: “The immediate purpose or plan may be to teach the progress of the seasons; the

⁶² Bailey, *The Nature Study Idea*, 10.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

common implements and simple handicrafts; the plant life of the neighborhood; the bird life; the usual insects; the heavens and its relations with man and the heavens; something of the farming or industries of the region; one's own mind and body and how they should be governed in the interest of good health; or some other theme that might tie the work together...The environment will suggest the work."⁶⁵ The notion that "The environment would suggest the work" was an elegant way capturing Bailey's larger message to practitioners. In nature study work, he went on to note, "There will be opportunity for endless variation in the details and in the little applications..."⁶⁶ Nature study had to be worked out at the local level.

Frederick L. Holtz. Like Bailey and other nature study proponents in the first decade of the twentieth century, Frederick L. Holtz, too, offered a plan for nature study that was thoroughly contextualized within the immediate environs of the school and community. The one-time Department Head of Nature study at Brooklyn Training School for Teachers in New York, a feature which suggested a certain degree of institutionalization, Holtz contributed to the movement a practical manual for teachers and students, though his text revealed certain difficulty in providing prescriptive suggestions for the classroom. In other words, like other contemporary versions, the actual practice of nature study varied according to the particularities of the surrounding natural environment, the teacher, and the students for which the nature study program was designed. The following passage was illustrative of such a non-standard approach: "There is no hard and fast rule for studying nature in the grades. It would be better not to have any set lessons at all, if the formal lessons only tired the children and destroyed their interest. This does not mean that a formal lesson in nature-study may not be highly interesting and inspiring in the hands of an able and enthusiastic teacher. It can, and more lasting results in the

⁶⁵ Bailey, *The Nature Study Idea*, 38-39.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

way of definite knowledge and training in thinking can be given by such formal lessons than by the formal.”⁶⁷ Rather than a fixed set of practices, then, Holtz insisted that flexibility must become the norm. The curriculum and practice of nature study stemmed from the surrounding environment, not from a textbook or prescriptive manual of practice. Nature study required some degree of spontaneity. Noted Holtz: “If a teacher sees the first robin in spring, let her speak of it in school and ask the children to be on the watch. If she stands an interesting flower, a stone, or insect, let her show it to the pupils and tell them about it. This can often be done at recess or before or after school, or a few moments may be taken daily or occasionally in the general period for such informal observations of nature.”⁶⁸ Again, opportunities for nature study shifted with the seasons, from moment to moment, and from one locale to the next. Despite the highly contextualized character of the approach, Holtz did offer generalized recommendations for practice in the form of a sample graded course. Without denying the fact that nature study was in some ways antithetical to a fixed course of study, Holtz suggested a general course of study for grades one through eight. His recommendations were universalizing and widely applicable. For instance, while he recognized that his suggested course of study might be imperfect, he nonetheless called on nature study practitioners to work to avoid repetition from one grade to the next. Effective nature study instruction required planning and supervision in Holtz’s mind and this was the sort of commonsensical advice in which a wide audience might find worth. He also established a type of litmus test for curriculum development in the area of nature study. “We have an embarrassment of riches in nature-study,”⁶⁹ Holtz insisted, and the trouble for practice was in determining which resources to use and which to omit. He went on to add that, in his

⁶⁷ Frederick L. Holtz, *Nature-Study: A Manual for Teachers and Students* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1908), 21.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 400.

experience at least, "...the problem in making out a course is as much one of elimination as one of selection."⁷⁰ The nature study expert solved the problem thus: "The guiding principle in the selection of this course have been the natural interests of the child in his home and neighborhood environment, the social motive, and the principle of correlation."⁷¹ With this general principle in the foreground, teachers and supervisors were to tailor their own nature study courses, partly with recognition of the student interest, a feature of nature study addressed in detail below, and partly through the materials and opportunities locally available. Holtz included an extended outline for a sample course of study, but the rationale of the nature study approach itself nearly always produced a certain measure of idiosyncrasy. Of this, Holtz was keenly aware, where he revealed: "It is not expected or intended that all of the topics indicated in the following course shall be studied in any one school. It has been extensive with the idea of allowing teachers a greater freedom of choice according to local conditions, and also to provide for variety from year to year...The educational motive and the educational material in a commercial metropolis must necessarily differ considerably from those of a rural, agricultural community...Each should select from the course according to local requirements."⁷² The local circumstances in which teachers and students found themselves were the greatest factors in determining the actual course of study in Holtz's nature study plan. In this way, Holtz's extended course was suggestive of the types of exercises and activities in which nature study practitioners might engage their students. In the first grade outline, for instance, he introduced his illustrations by pointing out that early nature study work "...is not so much for the sake of imparting information as for training the senses..."⁷³ "The course begins," Holtz added, "with the common things in the home, garden,

⁷⁰ Holtz, *Nature-Study*, 400.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, 401.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 402.

fields, and streets of the child's neighborhood."⁷⁴ A further illustration of these general recommendations, he suggested specific strategies for the classroom. The following passage entitled "Weather Study" was illustrative:

WEATHER STUDY: Have the children note the seasonal changes (X, V), and the effects upon the landscape* (W, L, poems). Note the effect of frost and warm weather on the garden vegetation, trees, etc. and upon animals. Note the migrations and hibernation (X3, E, L, I, P). Observe the preparation of the farmer for winter, his winter and his spring work (R, P, X); his benefits from the rain, sunshine, warmth, etc....⁷⁵

As an additional example, "Earth-Study" received attention:

In connection with house construction study building-stones, the kinds used, where they come from. Observe if possible boulders in the fields, ledges of rock, quarries, and visit a stone cutter, or observe the work on a building under construction. Not much can be expected in this grade in the identification of the stones. (S, T, V, 316, 339, 343)...⁷⁶

In addition to the excerpts provided above, trees, spring weather, birds, frogs, insects, fish, gardening, and harvesting were among the numerous other topics considered. Again, in each case, Holtz's discussion was a generalized one and intended to be adapted to local circumstances. As the student progressed through the grades, the depth of the investigations grew in kind. In short, Holtz effort to respect the need for an articulated nature study curriculum was mindful of the growing maturity and knowledge base of the student. Whereas he hoped that first-grade students would be brought into greater sympathy with living things, he suggested that fifth-grade students held a greater capacity "...to reason out relations, adaptations, comparisons, and generalizations, and to make better applications of their knowledge."⁷⁷ By contrast, the seventh and eighth grades were more complex still, approaching what Holtz termed "elementary science." His discussion of aims for the seventh and eighth grade was clarifying: "The nature-study in this grade merges into what is generally known as elementary science. The difference is

⁷⁴ Holtz, *Nature-Study*, 402.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 404.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 413.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 452.

that the method of study is more inductive, and the pupils are made more conscious of the logic of their own thinking...All of this is possible because of the greater mental maturity of the pupils of this grade.”⁷⁸ Holtz continued by outlining the scope of the seventh and eighth grade course. He wrote: “Therefore we give more of earth forces, physics and chemistry, more of invention and the application of scientific principles to the industries. The economics of plants and animals receive more attention. There is more interest in the social application of the facts of science, in the welfare of the many, and in altruism toward future generations, and the outlook is more national.”⁷⁹ As one might suspect, Holtz’s sample illustration of a nature study course became increasingly complex over time with regard to both the level of sophistication of investigations and the subjects and topics under consideration. Whereas Holtz asked the third-grader to “Have a school-room exhibit of the things raised in the school-garden,”⁸⁰ an eighth-grader under the same plan might act to “Develop interest in school-ground improvement, home and civic improvement.”⁸¹ Or, as he suggested elsewhere, upper level-students in an eighth-grade nature study course might “Make a study of the beautification of the city.”⁸² These civic functions, which readers encounter across nature study writings, are addressed in greater detail below. But whatever form the nature study plan eventually took, Holtz’s descriptions maintained his stated commitment to the local.

Illustrated time and again through the excerpted passages above, nature study under Holtz was, by and large, an approach that most directly touched the sciences. To extend that claim to geography was more than reasonable,⁸³ but it was generally the case that physical geographic

⁷⁸ Holtz, *Nature-Study*, 483.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 430.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 509.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 510.

⁸³ See Chapter 4 for a more complete consideration of PBE and geography education.

topics were the best representations. Weather and climate, landforms, and natural process such as erosion, for instance, appeared regularly in his illustrations. At the same time, however, and not to overlook the appropriateness of nature study for instruction in the sciences, there were nonetheless hints of what might be regarded in modern terms as human geography. Holtz's nature study allotted considerable instructional time, the large majority in fact, to the investigation of nature. Given the practical, hands-on, character of the approach, it was ultimately the case that students drew inferences regarding the interactions between themselves and the world around them. This feature was perhaps unavoidable. His recommendations for the third-grade provided an excellent illustration:

Make a study of Indian life – Hiawatha.*...Discuss the division of labor and trades, origins and advantages. (U, T.) Domestication of animals, advantage over hunting and fishing. Planting of crops, advantages. (D, U, 60.) Shepherd life* (Arabs, early Jews). (U, V, T, 60.) Agriculture and man, origin, advantages of the farmer, dependence of others upon him. (U, V, T, R.) City life,* stores, transportation, lighting, etc. briefly considered. City industries. Relation of the city to the country. Commerce. (V, T.) Stories of the people in other lands to give the idea of different climates, products, and modes of living.⁸⁴

Holtz's suggestions regarding inventions provided a similar case. He wrote: "Observe men at work with tools. Visit a factory, and note machinery. Visit a place where derricks, etc., are used for moving heavy weights. Compare primitive man with the present in regard to tools, machines, and other inventions."⁸⁵ In each instance, Holtz moved beyond investigations of local ecologies and physical processes alone and into a consideration of the relationships between human societies and the natural environment. Those investigations moved outward from the sciences and into such related subjects as anthropology, history, human geography, and economics. While his brand of nature study, like other contemporary models, approached curriculum and instruction in the sciences primarily, Holtz's plan did not do so exclusively. With that in mind,

⁸⁴ Holtz, *Nature-Study*, 425.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 454.

what observers found in Holtz was a localized, opportunity curriculum that was at least partially engaged in an articulated elementary course of study that stretched beyond the sciences alone.

John M. Coulter, John G. Coulter, & Alice J. Patterson. John M. Coulter, John G. Coulter, and Alice Jean Patterson, a trio of Chicago area nature study advocates, collaborated to publish *Practical Nature-study and Elementary Agriculture* in 1909. Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson offered the text with the express intent of addressing the challenges facing practitioners and normal school students. While not exclusively so, they also spoke to the unique opportunities offered in rural school settings. This much was illustrated in the title of the text itself. To clarify, they dedicated a considerable portion of the text to what they together believed to be a false distinction between work in nature study and that of elementary agricultural. Stated Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson: “Nature-study seeks to bring children into intelligent and sympathetic touch with their environment. The environment determines the material that is selected for the lessons. In an agricultural community, for example, the lessons must be primarily agricultural. In no other way can nature-study fulfill its mission. *It makes no difference whether we call it elementary agriculture or agricultural nature-study; it is the same thing and should be so understood.* [emphasis in original]”⁸⁶ They went on to note that any notion that nature study and elementary agriculture need be divorced conceptually or in practice was “...as unfortunate as it is erroneous.”⁸⁷ For Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson, the two domains were either to be united as a whole, or abandoned in schools altogether. In large part, the conflict surrounding nature study and elementary agriculture was definitional and stemmed from the purposes educators ascribed to each of the respective domains. For some, elementary agriculture provided the most relevant educational experiences for students in agricultural communities. Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson

⁸⁶ John M. Coulter, John G. Coulter, and Alice Jean Patterson, *Practical Nature Study and Elementary Agriculture: A Manual for the Use of Teachers and Normal Students* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1909).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

were in perfect agreement that education should be drawn from the context in which the school was located; that is, they believed that the lived experiences of the student must become a vital part of the curriculum. Nonetheless, they insisted at the same time that an education, the curriculum, could become too focused on the practical and as consequence less educative. This pitfall, of course, was one encountered when educators came to view elementary agriculture and nature study as distinct. In their words: “If nature-study fails to consider economic values and the best benefits which man may derive from nature, then it is not justified. If elementary agriculture fails to consider the response to all nature which may be aroused in us – the one thing which will make higher agriculture consistent with higher living – if it is purely utilitarian and ‘practical,’ then it, too, is not justified in a school system which aims to turn out a higher type of man as well as a higher type of farmer.”⁸⁸ With this in mind, Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson called for the union of both nature study and agricultural study in practice.

As the subtitle alluded, Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson’s manual on nature study dealt directly with the practical application of the approach in practice. They were explicit regarding this feature of the text and reported that while numerous works and a great deal of effort had been applied toward the development of the theory of nature study reform, the field of practice was, at least at the time of writing, inadequate. They wrote: “The immediate task in the development of nature-study is the training of teachers to use it. Principles are sufficiently agreed upon. The need is to put into actual effect what we already know. There is plenty of undigested inspiration on the subject, but not very much execution.”⁸⁹ Going further, Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson suggested that underdevelopment of the practical application of nature study was in some cases a hindrance to its wider adoption. “[T]he potent argument which superintendents

⁸⁸ Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson, *Practical Nature Study*, 2.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

bring against allowing it that place [in the curriculum],” they revealed, “is that teachers are not sufficiently well trained to make it effective.”⁹⁰ Poorly implemented, nature study would ultimately procure its own demise, perhaps even before its inception could fully take shape. They wrote: “In some cases in which they have been allowed to try it the results have amply confirmed the original contention of the superintendent. But in all these cases, so far as known, the teachers themselves have had to bridge that large and troublesome gap between general inspiration and specific lessons.”⁹¹ Whereas the Illinois State Normal School held courses explicitly designed around nature study, this practice had not everywhere been adopted. This deficiency, that of offering instruction to teachers in the practical application of nature study instruction, Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson worked to correct. To start, they found some degree of conflict in the effort to provide formal instructional advice for a method that they reasoned necessarily called for localized, context-specific, delivery. The following passage was indicative of such a challenge, as well as their resolution: “It may be argued that to outline specific lessons violates the ideals of nature-study by making it rigid and formal. But rigidity and formality are not so characteristic of these lessons as definiteness, and perhaps the most serious charge brought against nature-study is that it is indefinite. It needs to be shown that it can be taught in a perfectly definite manner.”⁹² Less than fixed lessons and courses, then, they sought to demonstrate the tangible possibilities for nature study. *Nature-study and Elementary Agricultural* always seemed to highlight the need for flexibility and adaptation in an approach to schooling that called for a deep consideration of context, with regard to both the learner and the community of which she or he was a part.

⁹⁰ Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson, *Practical Nature Study*, 5.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, 6.

While seeking to address the lack of educational opportunities for teachers interested in nature study, the trio was clear that normal school training was not a prerequisite for the practical application of the method. Quite the contrary, Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson suggested that the practicing teacher often benefitted from the opportunities that experimentation in the live classroom offered. Rather than talking about doing nature study, practicing teachers were to experiment with the actual practice of nature study. Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson's experiences in working with teachers of nature study seemed to confirm the belief: "...[W]e have found that working teachers make decidedly better progress in a course in nature method than do students in the normal school who are not engaged in practice teaching. There is a great advantage in having one's own class for stimulus and, to some extent, as a means for experiment."⁹³ Recognizing the reluctance of some school leaders to accept experimental methods, Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson insisted that some degree of carrying out nature-study was necessarily so. "Its content," they concluded, "must be as various as environments are various."⁹⁴ Nonetheless, despite the local dimension of the approach, Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson hoped to relieve those teachers interested in implementing nature study from experimentalism alone. Their efforts towards teacher education were exemplary and illustrated the challenges of promoting the context-specific and idiosyncratic reform as nature study represented. Like its modern counterpart, place-based education, nature study under Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson was tied in a very explicit way to the local. On this point, they were explicit. They wrote:

A Local Study.-Nature-study is necessarily restricted in the materials it uses to those which any particular environment affords. Hence the details of nature-study courses must differ widely. The objects of nature which are of especial interest in one community may be entirely lacking in another. In one community the outdoor interest may center in the

⁹³ Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson, *Practical Nature Study*, 7.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

forest, in another in the prairie, in another the fields and gardens, or in another in the seashore.⁹⁵

Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson went on to admit that uncertainty was also the source of much difficulty in implementation. Nature study required a certain type of instructor, “initiators rather than imitators.”⁹⁶ On the difficulty in carrying out the approach, they added: “It demands acquaintance with the local material, facility in using it, and flexibility of presentation to a degree not dreamed of in those orderly laboratories where the cut-and-dried ‘sciences’ hold sway. To ask such work of unprepared teachers and to demand good results is unreasonable. It is not strange that failures in teaching nature-study have been numerous;...”⁹⁷ Despite the difficulties and ambiguities, Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson were nonetheless confident of nature study’s potential educational reward and recommended that teachers individually endeavor to develop their own plans in practice, drawing on all available resources, but ultimately tailoring their nature study work to the unique needs of the school, students, and community to be served. In this way, readers found again an intense consideration for local contexts in Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson’s vision of nature study. The following passage offered further clarification: “No outline is altogether good except one that is made with special reference to the particular teacher and to the neighborhood of the particular school. That nature-study is peculiarly a local study cannot be emphasized too frequently.”⁹⁸ Nature study was most definitely a local affair and to attempt to apply the methods and practices approximate to one locale marked a certain danger for practicing teachers. Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson explained the potential dangers through the case of a borrowed outline. As they described the case: “The school of a teacher in the Central West was visited. The town was small and surrounded almost completely by a

⁹⁵ Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson, *Practical Nature Study*, 13.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

magnificent forest. In her eager search for instruction and an outline for nature-study, the teacher had gone far afield, attending a summer course given on the Atlantic coast and securing an Atlantic coast outline. On the day of the visit, the class was observing seaweeds!”⁹⁹ As ecological systems varied, so, too, would the nature study course for which each was designed. Again, in their conception, nature study and its application in practice, was tailored to the particular places in which it was delivered. Time and again, from their efforts to identify the core principles of the approach to their contentious work in the area of teacher education, Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson impressed upon readers the belief that nature study was a thoroughly localized educational reform initiative. Influential figures in the movement all, their contributions were not altogether unique.

Anna Comstock. One of the most remembered figures in the nature study movement, Anna Comstock, too, recognized nature study as a localized pursuit. As she described in her description of the misplaced connections sometimes thought to exist between the approach and elementary science, Comstock detailed a process through which young learners worked to investigate objects and phenomena close at hand. “Nature-study,” she wrote, “is for the comprehension of the individual life of the bird, insect, or life that is nearest at hand.”¹⁰⁰ In her model of nature study, students engaged with the familiar, the commonplace, and the most immediately available natural objects and processes as a matter of practice. This process of investigation almost necessarily implied a localized, or in the modern conception, place-based, approach to teaching and learning for the simple reason that the immediate natural environment represented, quite literally, the nature study curriculum at hand. The following passage, a rare example of student work, provided further evidence of a localized approach:

⁹⁹ Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson, *Practical Nature Study*, 44.

¹⁰⁰ Anna B. Comstock, *Handbook of Nature-Study: For Teacher and Parents*, 10th ed. (Ithaca, New York: Comstock Publishing Company, 1911), 5.

...I donned my boots and sweater, pocketed my opera glasses and notebook and blithely headed off to Pepacton [Creek]...

Along by Wagoner's orchard I saw a white-breasted nuthatch, busily inspecting a gnarled branch of an old apple tree. A goldfinch flew overhead and I noticed that he called "pen-chic-o-nee" on the descending part of each wave of his undulating flight.

In the snow along the roadside, where the ragweeds were thick, I found a number of bird tracks,...¹⁰¹

This excerpted journal entry from the notebook of a fourteen year old student of nature study, illustrated somewhat more directly the style of observation into the neighborhood environments of the community, as well as the localized character of the approach overall. As others before her and after, Comstock proposed an interdisciplinary conception of nature study. In other words, while nature study was best suited to the domain of science education, the work held the unique capacity to enrich other areas in the course of study as well. In large part, Comstock's argument stemmed from her understanding of student motivation and interest. For instance, nature study possessed the capacity to invigorate traditional methods of writing instruction. In her words: "Why do pupils dislike English exercises? Simply because they are not interested in the subject they are asked to write about, and they know that the teacher is not interested in the information contained in the essay. But when they are interested in the subject and write about it to a person who is interested, the conditions are entirely changed. If the teacher, overwhelmed as she is by work and perplexities, could only keep in mind that the purpose of a language is, after all, merely to convey ideas, some of her complexities would fade away."¹⁰² In other words, English teachers could not expect writing for the sake of writing to convey much meaning or importance to young learners. Nature investigations, however, gave the exercise of writing a purpose and with renewed interest came learning. In a similar fashion, nature study informed geography work. Geography, much of which Comstock regarded as the study of relationships between life and

¹⁰¹ Comstock, *Handbook of Nature-Study*, 14.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 16.

environmental conditions, was just as neatly explored through local nature study excursions as it was through textbooks and intellectual fieldtrips to deserts and oceans. “The question is,” she noted, “how are we to impress the child with the ‘have to’ which lies behind all these geographic facts.”¹⁰³ Nature study provided those connections. Comstock explained that “There are just as many have to’s in the stream or the pond back of the school-house, on the dry hillside behind it or in the woods beyond the creek as there are in desert or ocean; and when the child gets an inkling of this fact, he has made a great step into the realm of geography.”¹⁰⁴ While the investigation of local ecologies would ultimately limit the range of possible first-hand knowledge, nature study nonetheless offered an experience of the principles that Comstock believed extended into a wider of appreciation of geographic study. In other words, nature study contributed to a strong foundation for the learner’s geography work. But the connections between nature study and the standard course of study extended further still. For instance, Comstock pointed to the relationship between history and nature study. As with principles of geography, nature study lessons potentially elevated student interest in historical work. For her, nature study and the supposed familiarity with the plant and animal species it fostered, enlivened history by bringing learners into somewhat closer contact with the historical period under consideration. The following passage was clarifying: “Here are many points where nature-study impinges upon history in a way that may prove the basis for an inspiring lesson. Many of our weeds, cultivated plants and domestic animals have been introduced from Europe and are a part of our colonial history; while there are many of the most commonly seen creatures which have played their part in the history of ancient times. For instance, the bees which gave to man the only means available to him for sweetening his food until the 17th century, were closely allied to

¹⁰³ Comstock, *Handbook of Nature-Study*, 18.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

the home life of ancient peoples. The buffalo which ranged our western plains had much to do with the life of the red man...”¹⁰⁵ Comstock continued at length and referenced a wide variety of possible connections between human societies historically and the cultural, economic, and political connections to the natural environment. Arguably, the result was for most observers a rather sophisticated glimpse into the past, all of which was to be made possible in the classroom through nature study.

Finally, Comstock broached the issue of mathematics and nature study. Interestingly enough, they advocated a union which emphasized mathematics instruction through local environments, rather than the converse. To clarify, practitioners were not merely to attach elements of the natural environment to mathematics. Nature was not simply to become the stuff of word problems. Instead, the investigation of nature, appropriately coordinated and implemented, consisted of a rich variety of mathematical problems. Comstock clarified the relationship in the following fashion: “As a matter of fact, the teacher will find in almost every nature lesson an arithmetic lesson; and when arithmetic is used in this work, it should not be vital and inherent and not “tacked on;” the pupils should be really interested in the answers to their problems; and as will all correlation, the success of it depends upon the genius of the teacher.”¹⁰⁶ Nature study and mathematics work was to be purposeful and geared toward the greater understanding of both mathematical concepts and procedures and a deeper understanding of the surrounding environment.

Summary. Across the writings of the influential nature study advocates considered above, one found a consistent and deep commitment to local contexts. And the emphasis on the local was not a casual one, but rather an inextricable component of nature study in principle.

¹⁰⁵ Comstock, *Practical Nature-Study*, 19.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Nature study in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a curriculum of opportunity, whereby local ecologies informed the subject and character of young learners' investigations. Yet despite the fact that the local character of a place largely determined curricula, proponents nonetheless made strong efforts to ensure cohesion across the grades. The character of nature study writers' engagement with practitioners, pre-service teachers, and college departments was also significant, a further indication of the instrumental role that the local school and community environments played in the learning process, as well as the level of institutionalization that the movement appreciated. And finally, while it was certainly the case that nature study was best suited to the science curriculum, the elementary science curriculum in particular, in much of the early twentieth century nature study literature observers found calls for holism and the use of the local outside of those domains traditionally regarded as science. While the educational phrase *place-based education* would not arrive for nearly a century, nature study's advocacy for the use of the local environment as a source of curriculum development positions the reform movement a clear historical antecedent to the modern field. But the connection between the two is perhaps deeper still as many contributors to the movement also placed considerable emphasis on the needs and nature of learners, another characteristic feature of place-based education.

Nature Study & the Learner

The local emphasis characteristic of nature study was, at least in part, an outgrowth of the perceived needs and nature of the learner. To clarify, the organization of nature study curricula around the shared contexts of home, community, and school was perhaps a matter of necessity, or perhaps efficiency, given the attention to student development and the significance of the lived experiences of the student. In addition, the impetus within nature study to organize

instruction around first-hand observation and inquiry further promoted the use of the local as a curriculum source, as such measures provided the requisite opportunities for the study of objects and phenomena. In this way, American nature study in and around the early twentieth century reflected a pedagogical outlook that observers might regard as both experiential and child-centered.¹⁰⁷ Not unrelated, advocates emphasized problem-solving and inquiry skills over unconnected disciplinary facts and principles. Throughout the representative literature, proponents exemplified these features of nature study as an approach to teaching and learning and as a rebuttal to perceived academic formalism. As noted, the main force of nature study reform was very much consistent with the educationally progressive trends of the same era. Interestingly enough, these same characteristics position nature study as a well established historical antecedent to modern place-based education.

Clifton E. Hodge. But one illustration of many, Hodge's writing on nature study demonstrated the manner in which the approach offered a means through which the native interests of the learner might best be nurtured. In *Nature-study and Life*, Hodge expressed his belief that nature study held a unique capacity to build upon what he viewed as the natural motivations of young students. He suggested: "In freshness, in lively interest, in originality, nothing equals a child; and it has long been conceded that at no time is progress in learning so rapid as during the first three or four years of life. The secret of this, it has seemed to me, lies in the fact that touch with nature at first hand, original research, if you please, is the very breadth of mental life. How might this splendid growth process of infancy be prolonged through life?"¹⁰⁸ The answer, of course, was a solid commitment to the design and implementation of nature study. Hodge sought to position his brand of the approach through a consideration of those things

¹⁰⁷ Kimberley Tolley, "'Study Nature, Not Books': The Nature Study Curriculum, 1891-1932" (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA, April 5-8, 1994).

¹⁰⁸ Hodge, *Nature Study and Life*, x.

“*best worth knowing*” [emphasis in original]¹⁰⁹ and, in a general sense, suggested that the nature study curriculum was to explore the relationships that existed between human societies and the environment. Knowledge of and adaptation to the natural environment, Hodge insinuated, was the primeval problem to encounter. The “hand-to-hand fight against nature,”¹¹⁰ as he phrased it, was of central importance and problem-solving was underscored. “And it remains as true as ever,” he wrote, “that character can only be developed by struggle, by active, intelligent, patient overcoming of difficulties, the elements that achieved success throughout the ancient travail of the race...and nothing can take the place of the hard task in education.”¹¹¹ Perhaps a reflection of late nineteenth century Darwinian and Spencerian views regarding struggle and change, Hodge’s justification for the worth of nature study took the form of a speculative history of human-environment interactions. More importantly, the passage above was illustrative of a broader understanding about the role and function of nature study education, namely that thinking in a critical way about important problems was educationally valuable. Not unrelated, Hodge supported the notion that nature study curricula might draw on the interests and experiences of young learners. As a rationale for elementary zoological study, for instance, Hodge offered the following:

Thus we miss the substance for the shadow when we attempt to give this kind of education by pictures of animals; and we also lose the humanizing and educational essence of the process when we substitute the demonstrational method of the “school animal” or the zoological garden for primitive, normal, natural relation of companionship between the living animal and the child...Domestication of animals in its widest sense (and possibly we should add certain phases of hunting and fishing) is *elementary zoology*. Its fundamental character and value for education are evinced in the passion of children for pets;...[emphasis in original]¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Hodge, *Nature Study and Life*, 2.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 4-5.

Beyond children's appreciation for animals, which Hodge believed to be innate, he pointed to the worth of nature study as a point of access to student interest generally.

Although he recognized that "...[T]he parents make all sorts of objections to nature-study,"¹¹³ Hodge embraced criticism as an indication of incomplete and misguided practice. He admitted: "These objections of the home are for the most part right as to what often goes by the name of nature-study, and nothing can be more helpful for development of ideal courses adapted to local conditions than to invite their freest possible expression."¹¹⁴ Acknowledging criticisms, Hodge was undoubtedly confident in the potential value of nature study to tap into student interests and his faith in the power of explorations of the natural environment, the local natural environment in fact, was unshakeable. He concluded:

...[W]e shall have a nature-study that shall bind home and school together as nothing in the curriculum does at present. Instead of giving over our entire school system to passive book learning, we shall have at least one subject that shall keep alive in the child the spirit of research, under the impetus of which he makes such astounding progress in learning the great unknown of nature around him during the first three or four years of life. This matter of original research in hand-to-hand contact with nature ought to be made the breadth of life in an educational system.¹¹⁵

First-hand experience with the surrounding local environment and an educational philosophy that created possibilities for student inquiry and exploration seemed to define Hodge's nature study agenda. He was consciously sensitive to the needs and development of young learners, at least as far as he understood those dynamics. Hodge offered the following clarification: "Clearly, this relation is that of active response in direct, first-hand contact with nature. Doing something with nature has ever formed a large factor in education, of which nothing can take the place. This alone, as Froebel says, can prevent education from becoming hollow and empty, artificial, and a

¹¹³ Hodge, *Nature Study and Life*, 12-13.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

wholly secondhand affair.”¹¹⁶ His goal, then, was to bring into greater union the learner and the subject matter to be learned. A common progressive theme, Hodge spoke about the need to relate the curriculum to the lives of students and to the life of society. To do this, nature study necessarily needed to provide opportunities for creative exploration, a tendency which Hodge seemed to regard as inherent in the learner. Secondly, nature study under Hodge engaged with and built upon the student’s existing knowledge and experiences. As he phrased it: “[T]wo important conclusions must be clearly borne in mind. These are, first, that quality of knowledge depends upon the ideas with which it is associated in the mind; and, second, that the strongest associations are related to the spontaneous activities of the individual. That is, for elementary study we must select those things that stand in fundamental associations with life and about which the children can find something worth while to do.”¹¹⁷ In recognition that his nature study plan was not in principle embarking upon anything entirely novel, Hodge added his ideas were “In line with Herbart’s doctrine of apperception and Froebel’s of self-activity, it is the active as distinguished from the passive method of instruction...”¹¹⁸ Despite what may have been long-theorized understandings of student learning, Hodge returned to the immediate value of investigations of nature. For him, nature study served a particularly useful purpose where the goal was to better connect the student to his/her learning. Hodge wrote that “Nature is the great mother of such interests, and in proportion as education becomes thus alive, nature-study must form a prominent factor in the curriculum. What is there for the whole child – hands, feet, eyes, ears and brain, mind and soul – to work with actively, except phenomena of nature, responses to which have consisted the chief education of living forms through all time?”¹¹⁹ Guided by a

¹¹⁶ Hodge, *Nature Study and Life*, 22.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

particular conception and philosophy of education, nature study held great potential for Hodge's vision of school reform. And this reform agenda was one that Hodge appeared to regard as widely transferable. Nature study was not simply for the expert teacher to carry out. In fact, without denying the challenges of practice, he appeared to regard the expert, or all knowing, teacher as somewhat of a canard. On this subject, Hodge's objections were clear: "Instead of being afraid or ashamed to say 'I don't know,' the teacher who sincerely desires to learn will be glad to say it, glad to have something brought that affords him an opportunity to learn, and not only that, but at the same time the best possible opportunity to teach. Such teaching and learning will transform education from a deadly mechanical grind to a living process."¹²⁰ Hodge viewed the role of the nature study educator as that of a facilitator of student investigation. Teachers, as students, were to become earnest investigators, "original researchers,"¹²¹ to use Hodge's phrasing, of the immediate natural world that surrounded them. Subject-area expertise seemed of secondary importance. What Hodge viewed as critical was the educational emphasis on the learner, particularly the utility of interest, first-hand experience, and inquiry.

Liberty Hyde Bailey. Like Hodge, Bailey's conception of nature study was very much a child-centered approach to teaching and learning. Again, less than precise scientific principles, the goal was to bring young learners into closer contact with the natural environment and to promote the first-hand engagement with natural things. The following passage was suggestive: "Nature-study, then, is not science. It is not knowledge. It is not facts. It is spirit. It is an attitude of mind. It concerns itself with the child's outlook on the world."¹²² The emphasis on the "child's outlook" revealed much, but it was not the case apparently that all nature study advocates shared his understanding of the method. In fact, in no small part, Bailey drafted *The Nature-Study Idea*

¹²⁰ Hodge, *Nature Study and Life*, 26-27.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹²² Bailey, *The Nature Study Idea*, 6.

as an attempted clarification of principles. He explained: “So common is the misconception of the meanings and mission of The Nature Study Movement, that I cannot resist the temptation to bring together in book form a few notes and essays on some of the more salient features of it,...They are offered in all humbleness, since every person’s view is colored by his or her own field of work; but the main thesis – that nature-study teaching is one thing and that science-teaching for science’s sake is another – I have no hesitation.”¹²³ Whereas Bailey highlighted the utility of nature study for the common school curriculum, his placement of the approach was not limited to the primary grades alone. In fact, he was explicit in pointing out the potential of nature study across the educational spectrum. Bailey noted: “I have a growing feeling that the nature-study method is not only a public-school process, but that it is equally needed in colleges and universities for all unspecialized students. The process applies, in fact, from kindergarten to college.”¹²⁴ Without overlooking the value in traditional scientific educational approaches for some students, those geared towards science-specific careers, Bailey found tradition to be out-of-synch with the needs of most students. The “general student”¹²⁵ was an important constituent for Bailey, if not his primary concern. All students deserved an opportunity to investigate the world around them in a thoughtful, personal way and the traditional course and method of teaching simply did not meet Bailey’s expectations. Here again, Bailey’s concern for the experiences of the learner seemed to prevail. On the general deficiencies of science education in the colleges and universities, he argued: “Much of the teaching in the sciences in colleges and universities is undoubtedly very bad. It is no doubt accurate, and it may also be adapted to the few students who desire to specialize in the subject; but such students should be taken further in courses designed for them. Condensed general courses that give the college student a rational view of the subject,

¹²³ Bailey, *The Nature Study Idea*, 7.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

without many details and exceptions, are very much to be desired; and such courses should attempt to relate the student to his own experience in life.”¹²⁶ Here, Bailey seemed to suggest that a purely formalistic, overly symbolic, method of science instruction was of little use to many learners. As a partial remedy, the needs of the learner were to be given more sincere consideration.

A naturalist and a practitioner, Bailey’s first occupation was not educational philosophy or psychology. Nonetheless, his interest in school reform ultimately brought him, and his conception of nature study, into closer contact with the mainstream educational theory and practice of the day. Bailey described the transition thus: “The reader will understand that I have approached my subject from the side of fact and of experience, not from the side of pedagogical theory or of the psychology of educations.”¹²⁷ Bailey ultimately came to identify his educational plan as a part of a larger program of “experience-teaching.”¹²⁸ But while he may have become conscious and respectful of the fact that his work and reform commitments might fit into broader educational philosophies, Bailey remained committed more to the realities of practice than anything else. As he phrased it: “I had merely set forth my convictions, resulting from many years of teaching, to the effect that the best way to teach nature subjects is to begin with good simple observation rather than with dissection, classification, experiment or memorizing. I think the same can process should be followed in the training of the teacher himself.”¹²⁹ Without denying the value of theoretical foundations, he seemed intent to point out the utility of practical wisdom in the education of new teachers, perhaps with the aim to further solidify his advocacy for the practice of nature study and its experiential character. Bailey offered the following:

¹²⁶ Bailey, *The Nature Study Idea*, 9.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

I doubt whether saturation in the psychology of pedagogy affords a good start for the training of teacher. I observe an indefiniteness and haziness of ideas in persons who have their theory before them. They do not have their feet on the ground...I do not doubt the value of the psychological study of education, and all teachers should profit by a discussion of educational history and method; but I greatly doubt the advisability of filling a young teacher full of metaphysics. A teacher may safely theorize and speculate after he has learned to how to teach.¹³⁰

Less than a critique of educational theory, however, the passage above did more to highlight, once again, the localized, idiosyncratic dimensions of nature study. While he opposed overly rigid educational training, finding it ill-suited to the flexibility required in practice, he was not blind to the pitfalls of his own non-standardized approach. “I insist too much on spontaneousness and informality,” Bailey remarked, “and thereby provide an excuse for lazy or indifferent teachers who do not want to make preparation for their lessons.”¹³¹ Regardless, he was unswayable in his attack on the “stiff, dead and painfully exact teaching”¹³² that he believed had come to represent the school experience for many at the turn of the twentieth century. As an educational reform, Bailey placed a high value on the capacity of nature study to better address the unique needs of the learner, young and old alike.

Going further to define the approach, Bailey did much to debunk what he viewed as common myths and misconceptions. In the first place, he reported that nature study was not to be confused with the teaching and study of science, a debate common enough to be addressed by a number of writers associated with the nature study movement. In Bailey’s words: “[Nature-study] is not the teaching of botany or entomology or geology, but of plants, insects and fields. But many persons who are teaching under the name of nature-study are merely teaching and interpreting elementary science. Fundamentally, nature is seeing what one looks at and drawing proper conclusions from what one sees; and thereby comes into personal relation with the

¹³⁰ Bailey, *The Nature Study Idea*, 13.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 15.

object.”¹³³ Nor was Bailey’s conception of nature study consistent with the mere reading of academic or scientific materials. While certainly he was not opposed to academic reading outright, his preference, in fact a guiding purpose, was that students in nature study programs should experience the world around them first-hand. Bailey wrote: “Nature-readers may be of the greatest value if they are made incidental and secondary features of instruction; but, however good they may be, their influence is pernicious if they are made to primary agents. Nature-study begins with the concrete, as the child does if left to itself. The child should see the thing first.”¹³⁴ As he argued frequently in varied iterations, Bailey’s vision of nature study was rooted in a respect for the unique character and development of the learner. To move away from strictly textual learning and toward a more experiential approach was a central part of his overall program. And finally, Bailey insisted upon an education designed around worthwhile use of human potential for reason and thought. The passage below was instructive: “Nature-study is not the teaching of facts merely for the sake of the facts, or materials for the sake of the materials: its purpose is to develop certain intellectual powers by the use of the materials...We must begin with the fact, to be sure, but the lesson lies in the significance of the fact.”¹³⁵ Nature study, for Bailey, encouraged habits of logical thinking and questioning. And again, the context deemed most appropriate for promoting such habits was that with which the student could interact directly. The local, familiar environment was the ready-made laboratory of nature study work. It was there that the school could be brought into greater association with the lived experiences of the learner. Bailey explained that “Nature-study should not be unrelated to the child’s life and circumstances. It stands for directness and naturalness. It is astonishing, when one comes to think

¹³³ Bailey, *The Nature Study Idea*, 30.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

of it, how indirect and how remote from the lives of pupils much of our education has been.”¹³⁶ He continued: “There are many exceptions and these are becoming commoner. Surely, the best education is that which begins with the materials at hand. A child knows a stone before it knows the earth.”¹³⁷ From the passages above, it was clear that the existing understandings of the student were not to be considered casually in the arrangement of nature study courses or in education generally. As other pedagogical approaches before and after made clear, the child was in many ways the beginning of the educational process. Fitting of the notion that instruction should begin with those things most familiar and common, nature study under Bailey required direct observation first and an understanding of principles, theories, and ideal cases second. He noted further: “The teacher should avoid starting with definitions and the setting of patterns...The old idea of the model flower is an unfortunate one, because the model flower does not exist in nature...In other words, the ideas should be suggested by the things, and the things by the ideas. ‘Here is the drawing of a model flower,’ the old method says; ‘go and find the nearest approach to it.’ ‘Go and find me a flower,’ is the better method, ‘and let us see what it is.’”¹³⁸ Student observations of common things found locally were the starting point in his plan for nature study. But observations were to be facilitated and Bailey was careful to redirect any suggestions of aimlessness. The ability of the nature study teacher to facilitate the program was a significant component, a real measure of effectiveness in the final analysis. With regard to teacher qualifications and subject-area knowledge, Bailey argued that standards should be set as high as possible. Illustrating the ideal, he wrote: “We need the very best teacher for nature-study – those who have the greatest personal enthusiasm, and who are least bound by the traditions of the classroom. The teacher, to be ideal, must have more time, more feeling, and more

¹³⁶ Bailey, *The Nature Study Idea*, 34.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

knowledge.”¹³⁹ From the passages, it seemed clear that Bailey found the charisma and character of the nature study teacher to be of certain importance. Without overlooking the very real need for subject-area knowledge and scientific understanding, willingness to approach the task with earnest was the more vital requirement. “It is better if the teacher have large knowledge of science,” he concluded, “but nature-study may be taught without great knowledge if one sees accurately and infers correctly from the particular subject in hand.”¹⁴⁰ For Bailey, then, the willingness to engage in somewhat non-traditional approaches and the ability to facilitate student investigations were the characteristics requisite for success in nature study instruction. To be sure, students engaged in Bailey’s brand of nature study were not to be left alone and set off to educate themselves. The nature study teacher was to maintain a marked degree of control with regard to direction and the overall aims and purposes of instruction. The following passage was revealing: “It remains for the teacher to pick out the fact or answer that is most significant. The teacher should know what is significant and he should keep the point clearly before him. One pupil says that the twig is long, another that it is brown; another that it is crooked; another that it is an apple tree; another that it has several unlike branchlets or parts...Stop the questioning and open the second epoch in the instruction – the reason why no two parts are alike.”¹⁴¹ Bailey continued with a second illustration regarding student observations of rock material. “Choose a stone. If similar stones are in the hands of the pupils, you ask first for the observation or the fact. One says that the stone is long; another, it is light; another, it is heavy; another, that the edges are rounded. This latter fact is very significant. You stop the observation and ask why it is rounded.”¹⁴² In both instances, he recommended a similar methodological pattern. Instructors

¹³⁹ Bailey, *The Nature Study Idea*, 39.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

were first to give students the opportunity to explore the world around them and to make initial observations about their experiences. Bailey characterized this portion of instruction as being relatively free-flowing and student directed. At the same time, however, within each illustration it was ultimately the instructor who came to guide the overall investigation. But whereas Bailey looked to the teacher to facilitate student learning and observation, he was not of the mind that the teacher was always necessarily in control of the final outcome. As facilitator, the nature study instructor could nonetheless take on the role of learner. Bailey explained: “It is not necessary that the teacher always know the reason. He may propose that they all find out and report. It is the strong teacher who can say: ‘I do not know.’”¹⁴³ In the end, nature study under Bailey was an exercise in exploration, for both teachers and students alike.

As unorthodox as was his focus on the student and the outdoor classroom was Bailey’s sense of pacing with regard to lessons and planning in nature study. As was true of the content, he did not intend the nature study course to be constant, but rather highly flexible from classroom to classroom and from one day to the next. The emphasis of nature study was to bring students into closer interaction with the natural world around them, rather than designing a course of a certain length and with particular subject-area content to address. “I should want it designed,” he noted, “to develop the observing and reasoning powers of the child and not to gorge the pupils.”¹⁴⁴ Bailey’s nature study was instead rather informal and emphasized habits of inquiry. With this in mind, he argued that nature study was in many instances conducive to the existing course of study, a method of instruction as much as a new competitor for curricular space. He noted:

Taught in this way, nature-study work is not an additional burden on the teacher, but may be made a relief and a relaxation. It may come at the opening of the school hour, or at the

¹⁴³ Bailey, *The Nature Study Idea*, 44.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

close of a hard period, or at other time when opportunity offers. It may often be combined with the regular studies of the school, and in that way it may be introduced in places where it would otherwise meet with objection. For example, the subject-matter of the natural lesson may be used for the exercise in drawing or in geography.¹⁴⁵

Although complementary to the existing course of study, Bailey did advocate the full inclusion of extended nature study courses where context deemed appropriate. The more formal course, he suggested, might make its first appearance in the high school.¹⁴⁶ With the above in mind, Bailey's nature study was designed and outlined as a critique of traditional schooling. Too much attention, in his view, was paid to information that had little bearing on the lives of students. Not unrelated, Bailey critiqued the traditional pedagogies for their lack of liveliness and failure to promote inquisitiveness. In short, he regarded nature study as a superior form of education. He argued that "Nature-study ought to revolutionize the school life, for it is capable of putting new force and enthusiasm into the school and the child...We shall learn much, and shall outgrow some of our present notions, and shall eliminate the vagaries."¹⁴⁷ Bailey continued: "This spirit stands for a normal outlook on life. It is the active and creative method. It is the developing of the powers of the pupil, not hearing him recite. In spirit and method, it is opposed to the pouring-in and dipping-out process."¹⁴⁸ Openly critical of certain aspects of traditional schooling, Bailey called on educators, and perhaps not solely in the sciences, to refocus their efforts. At his insistence, the school and the life of the learner were to be brought into closer proximity to better inform one another.

In addition to other fieldwork to take place in the immediate vicinity of the school, Bailey addressed the potential utility of school gardens, a developing American educational experiment at the time. Consistent with his commitments to nature study as an experience curriculum, his

¹⁴⁵ Bailey, *The Nature Study Idea*, 49.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

advocacy for gardens grew simply out of the belief that students benefitted immensely from actually growing things. To use his words, “Actually to grow a plant is to come into intimate contact with a specific bit of nature.”¹⁴⁹ But again, Bailey went beyond the subject-area knowledge in describing the potential value of the school garden. He remarked: “This knowledge means more than mere information of plants themselves. It takes one in the open air. It enlarges his horizon. It brings him into contact with living things. It increases his hold on life. All these facts were well understood by Froebel, Pestalozzi, and other educational reformers.”¹⁵⁰ As much to study botany or horticulture, Bailey intended for the school garden, and nature-study more broadly, to enliven what was otherwise the labor of school. Interestingly enough, school garden work was not an altogether complicated process. Bailey did not suggest, for instance, that interested teachers follow painfully precise processes. The mere effort, in many ways, could work to the advantage of the student. The following passage was clarifying: “The essential point is that there should be plants about the home, or in the school grounds, or in the schoolhouse windows. Even though children are not conscious that they are receiving any impression from these plants, nevertheless the very presence of them has an influence that will be felt in later life, even as the presence of good literature and furniture and the association of refined surroundings has influence.”¹⁵¹ The suggestion seemed to be that any exposure to the experience of the natural world was better than none at all. The school garden did not have to become an outrageously complex undertaking to confer an educational advantage. Once established, one purpose of the school garden was its function as an outdoor laboratory, not unlike the natural environment itself. In Bailey’s mind, “The real school-garden is for direct instruction. It is an outdoor laboratory. It

¹⁴⁹ Bailey, *The Nature Study Idea*, 78.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

is a part of the school equipment, as books, blackboards, charts and apparatus are.”¹⁵² In addition to all of these functions, Bailey described the value of school gardens in expanding the horizons of learners. He explained: “Farming introduces the human element into nature and thereby makes it more vivid in the child’s mind...More persons are engaged in farming than in any other single occupation. The children are taught much about the cities, but little about the farming country. The child should be taught something from the farmer’s point of view, and the teaching of gardening is one of the ways in which to begin.”¹⁵³ Bailey believed that garden work would encourage an appreciation not just for farming and life outside of the city, but in a general sense for nature itself. He clarified the position thus: “Every person is now supposed to know something of the country...It is not necessary to, and perhaps not even important, that the child be taught these subjects with the purpose of making him a farmer, but rather as a means of education and of interest to him in the out-of-doors.”¹⁵⁴ Consistent with other elements of nature study, then, the school garden was yet another way to bring the student into closer relation with the surrounding natural environment. Arguably, the experience of doing work in the garden was nearly as, if not more important than, the actual garden work itself. Although Bailey certainly did not rule out school garden work for rural school students, he tended to assume an urban setting at times in the discussion. That aside, he did address the needs of rural school students elsewhere in the text. In keeping with the philosophy that local contexts must be taken into account in the development and implementation of nature study, and perhaps schooling in general, Bailey was sensitive to the fact that the rural school conditions might pose unique challenges. His noteworthy efforts toward the redirection of the American rural school are addressed below in greater detail in Chapter 5. But in both contexts, rural or urban, Bailey’s nature study plans,

¹⁵² Bailey, *The Nature Study Idea*, 88.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 90-91.

whatever precise formation they assumed, he designed with the essential goal of bringing students into first-hand contact with the natural world around them. Whether through garden work or informal observation, relevance to the student's lived experience and to first-hand observation and inquiry remained primary concerns.

Frederick L. Holtz. As did others who drafted similar texts on the subject, Holtz, too, regarded the student as the center of the nature study project. In the first place, he suggested that nature study was designed to capitalize on the child's "innate curiosity."¹⁵⁵ The nature of the learner was critically important in the educative process, as was the larger social context of which the learner was a part. The two were inextricable. To clarify, Holtz believed that nature study must be organized toward the purpose of connecting the school and life. Noted Holtz: "Nature-study has a satisfactory *raison d'être* for the child, if presented in the manner suggested. The school life in a measure reflects the community life and enables him to live in that community intelligently."¹⁵⁶ In the end, the habit of inquiry that nature study provided space for served young learners directly. Moreover, as the power to question and reason developed further, not only the individual, but society at large, would be the beneficiary, a feature of nature study addressed more directly in a separate section below.

As noted of Bailey, Holtz recognized that nature study, even with its focus on the interests of the learner, was not a purely child-centered approach. In other words, the student was not to be left to do simply as he or she pleased. Holtz wrote that "The child should be given such educational material as suits his childhood interests and needs, [but] [t]his does not mean to let him learn simply what he likes and in his own way. He may like what is not good for him."¹⁵⁷ Without minimizing a student's desire and capacity to explore and self-determine interests, Holtz

¹⁵⁵ Holtz, *Nature-Study*, 3.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

suggested that nature study teachers were always obligated to facilitate the process and to ensure that learning was the result. Again, one of the overarching goals was to promote student inquiry.

A reflection of both a developmental awareness and his attention to curricular structure and articulation, Holtz recognized that nature study in the lower grades might be somewhat distinct in purpose from that of the later years. On this point, he was explicit, writing, “In the primary grades nature material is chiefly studied from a different motive than in the higher.”¹⁵⁸ More specifically, Holtz accepted the notion that as students reached the higher grades and their knowledge of the natural world would likely become more sophisticated; the degree of structure might increase proportionately. Lessons might become more formal in the higher grades, too. Nonetheless, despite any increase in formality and structure over time, he insisted that the student’s capacity to think and reason, to investigate, should always remain at the center. As he described the process: “The scientific method of study is: Do not take things for granted, but find out for yourself. This method trains students to think for themselves. Too much talking by the teacher allows the pupils’ minds to lie idle and passive. Exercise strengthens them.”¹⁵⁹ The motivation to promote the student capacity to inquire was consistent with the broader goals of nature study to move away from textbooks and out into the local natural environment. At every turn, then, Holtz’s brand of nature study sought to reposition the student at the center of the process. As further indication, he went so far as to establish rules for appropriate questioning during lecture. As Holtz described it:

7. NATURE-STUDY teachers frequently fail in attempting to bring out comparisons by using direct and suggestive questions. “Are the hoofs of the cow like those of the horse?”...are the wrong sorts of questions to bring out correspondence and differences.

¹⁵⁸ Holtz, *Nature-Study*, 22.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

Instead, ask the pupils directly to compare the hoofs of the horse and the cow,"...and then the pupil must work out the comparison for himself.¹⁶⁰

Holtz developed seven rules for effective questioning in nature study in total. In each case, his intent was to ensure student engagement; that is, Holtz insisted that students, not teachers, perform the bulk of the intellectual work. Like many of his contemporaries, he offered nature study as a reform measure which reoriented the student-teacher relationship to some degree. The learner, in Holtz's conception of nature study, was of paramount importance.

John M. Coulter, John G. Coulter, & Alice J. Patterson. Outlining a plan for nature study with sometimes explicit reference to the agricultural community, Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson, too, described an educational program uniquely suited to the lived experiences of the child. In essence, what they proposed was a curricular reform plan designed to bring students in agricultural communities into earlier and closer contact with agriculture-related principles. Interestingly enough, Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson stopped short of a call for manual or industrial training. In other words, the trio did not suggest an education designed to create young farmers. They explained the distinction thus:

In planning the lessons, the children rather than the subject must be given first consideration. They, rather than the subject, are to be taught. There is evidence that the enthusiasm of some leaders in agricultural instruction has tended to obscure this principle. Children must be met upon their own ground, along lines of their own interests. The problems that appeal to them; not necessarily problems that appeal to adult farmers. Lacking this consideration, the very purpose for which agriculture is being introduced into the schools will be defeated. Instead of keeping boys on the farm we may drive them away.¹⁶¹

Through the notion that "children be given first consideration," they implied that relevance in the curriculum was paramount. In the first place, the interests of the young learner were not to be overlooked as such curiosities were important sources of motivation, not to mention inspiration

¹⁶⁰ Holtz, *Nature-Study*, 31-32.

¹⁶¹ Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson, *Practical Nature Study*, 3.

for continued learning. In the larger sense, Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson called for a sort of community, or perhaps societal, relevance in curriculum making; that is, they desired a locally-fitted curriculum, one which matched the course of study to local community contexts, economically, ecologically, and the like. Yet both dimensions were critical to the overall development of the learner. By following the interests of the student, Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson suggested that habits of investigation might be developed. In fact, they noted that working to foster habits of inquiry might become the primary goal of the teacher. As investigative skills began to develop, the inclusion of more explicit agricultural instruction became more appropriate. “By the time children have reached the seventh and eighth grades,” Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson revealed, “they are ready to take up the applied lessons in nature directly connected with agriculture as an industry.”¹⁶² In all of this, they reasoned that students would not only become well informed adult farmers, but independent thinkers with an understanding of the world that extended beyond the agricultural. Explained Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson: “Then the work is educative from the outset; broadening, not narrowing. We do not want our country boys to become merely efficient farmers who have learned to do certain things that they make more dollars. We want them to be men who realize the larger applications of the laws and principles they are following, men who see and discriminate, who grasp situations, who think for themselves, and who have an abiding interest and enthusiasm for their professions...”¹⁶³ In their conception, nature study provided an appropriate avenue to these important student outcomes in that it moved beyond mere agricultural training to recognize both community and personal relevance in the curriculum, not to mention the student’s capacity to reason.

¹⁶² Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson, *Practical Nature Study*, 3.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 4.

In *Practical Nature-study*, Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson attempted to predict and forestall miseducative applications of nature study and, in doing so, reiterated a commitment to the learner which they believed to be inherent in the approach. Critical of parents, school leaders, and academics for their role in thwarting effective practice, they offered an equally harsh challenge to teachers. “It has been decried,” Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson reported of nature study, “as a fad that will die out, as a thing with no educative value, as an impractical and nerve-racking time killer.”¹⁶⁴ In no small part, such critiques were the cause of teachers whose applications of the approach had been ill-conceived, or worse, whose motivations were less than earnest. To correct this tendency, Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson offered a number of concise recommendations for the nature study practitioner. In the first place, they insisted that motivation, more than content understanding in the sciences or direct nature study training, was of central importance. Noted Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson: “The most obvious thing in a successful teacher of nature-study is an enthusiasm for the work, and enthusiasm is one of the most contagious things in the world. Moreover, the enthusiasm is not assumed, but real; the outward expressions of a feeling that the work is important and delightful. Without this feeling, the work becomes a task rather than an inspiration, and in such an atmosphere nature-study cannot live.”¹⁶⁵ The desire to succeed with nature study work was critical. Beyond motivation, they urged nature study practitioners to avoid trivialities. For Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson, assigning tasks simply to keep students busy was not consistent with the spirit of nature study. But they were quick to distinguish between the trivial and the commonplace, noting that the latter was in fact quite admissible. They wrote: “There seems to be an impression with some teachers that the most important things to observe even about familiar objects are those things

¹⁶⁴ Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson, *Practical Nature Study*, 30-31.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

most unusual to the pupil's experience. The fact is that the most important things are the most obvious, so obvious that it almost seems foolish to call attention to them. They are so common to the experience of everyone that they do not seem to need consideration."¹⁶⁶ More significant than the topic or subject under consideration, then, was the manner of consideration. Where the intent was to "mark time,"¹⁶⁷ Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson called for a reorientation toward observation, inquiry, and learning. Observation of the familiar was an ideal starting point and need not be complicated unnecessarily. Along similar lines, they drew a distinction in nature study between student understanding of key terms and their knowledge of the principles and objects represented. "There appears to be a common confusion," Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson suggested, "between 'terminology' and 'knowledge.'"¹⁶⁸ They continued: "A technical name explains nothing, and is merely a necessary evil and necessary only to specialists. To introduce technical terminology into nature-study is as much out of place as to introduce professional training."¹⁶⁹ As Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson had argued convincingly elsewhere, nature study was more about building skills in observation and inquiry and less about creating proper scientists, though the two were not altogether mutually exclusive. The concern was not that technical terminology held no value, but rather that, in practice at least, formal understandings potentially overwhelmed the learner's growing familiarity with the natural environment. The foregoing excerpt was clarifying: "It may be claimed that we know little more about most things than the names we have given them. This is very true, but we can learn to ask intelligent questions, which is far more important in this work than being supplied simply the answers to questions. The method is more important than the matter. This is the attitude of mind that nature-

¹⁶⁶ Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson, *Practical Nature Study*, 32.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

study should cultivate, rather than the idea that a name is the end-all.”¹⁷⁰ Aside from warning practitioners of the dangers of terminology over understanding, Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson cautioned against what they described as unnecessary “personifications and romances.”¹⁷¹ In short, they argued, nature supplied its own interest and to create avenues, however effective they might be, to artificially secure interest in nature study was to be avoided. Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson described such methods thus: “We sometimes find so-called nature-study exercises which consist of the exhibition of a flower or even a bird and the quotations of poetry about it. This may be a charming way of making literature more realistic, but it does not hold relationship with the nature-study here in mind.”¹⁷² They continued the critique further: “The race of so-called ‘nature fakirs’ thrives in this atmosphere. They weave their nature fancies with great skill, and their writings are very seductive. We acknowledge and enjoy their charm, but when they pose as interpreters of nature they are to be denounced as frauds.”¹⁷³ Again, for Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson, it was the local natural environment of the learner which provided all of the interest and fascination needed.

While Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson insisted that teachers should orient nature study around inquiry, a feature which nearly guaranteed multiple trials, mistakes, and the like, they warned practitioners against carelessness in the process of drawing inferences. This was true for teachers and students alike. In large part, Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson drew the point of caution from the belief that observations should be accurate and not offered haphazardly. They called for inference-making by students and teachers, but urged that conclusions were to be empirically based, not simply stories attempting to explain potentially complicated relationships

¹⁷⁰ Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson, *Practical Nature Study*, 34.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 34-35.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 36.

in nature. The following passage was illustrative: “The purpose idea has been greatly overemphasized. Such instances come up in nearly every lesson, and the continuous attribution of design as behind and precedent to the facts observed will form a fundamentally misleading habit of thought. The teacher, therefore, must be content to observe, to explain what is evident , to leave most things unexplained, to ask questions, to find failures;...To leave the impression that all things are understood would be the worst possible result.”¹⁷⁴ Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson saw uncertainty as inherent in nature study and science more generally. While the ultimate purpose might have been to reduce those uncertainties in some way, the educational process of doing so was not to be regarded as a casual one by teachers or their students. With effective and appropriate observational habits in mind, they identified yet another danger in delivery of nature study, which they referred to as “sentimentality.”¹⁷⁵ In short, Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson cautioned teachers against promoting emotional connections to nature over and beyond intellectual ones. As they phrased it: “What we are after, however, is not so much a feeling as a state of mind that compels observation, that is interested in the meanings of things, that is cautious in drawing conclusions, that is making continual progress. Sentimentality may degenerate into mawkishness, a kind of dreamy, unreal association of ideas that is ineffective and mentally enervating.”¹⁷⁶ Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson insisted that sentimental, emotional connections to nature were not inherently weakening and, in fact, that such attributes did hold value in the development of young learners. Potential benefits notwithstanding, they sought to prevent emotionality from becoming the sole motivation underlying student work in nature study.

¹⁷⁴ Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson, *Practical Nature Study*, 38.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

Above all, and in addition to each of the potential pitfalls indicated, Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson reminded practitioners that nature study was not about books or authoritative conceptions of the natural world. Though they called for a generalized respect toward those figures whose experiences lent wisdom, they also warned against leaning too heavily upon the experiences of others. Nature study called for doing and experiencing, not mimicking. Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson described the concern thus: “Respect for those who are in a better position to know should be enforced strongly at every stage of education, but this does not mean the suppression of all initiative, the possession of only second-hand opinions. It is not difficult to perceive that ordinary school methods enforce intellectual dependence upon many teachers as well as pupils. Leaning upon authority is a deadly habit, easily acquired and broken with great difficulty.”¹⁷⁷ For them, nature study involved personal development of reasoning skills as much as anything. Over-dependence on the experience represented in texts and figures could only thwart the efficacy of the exercise. Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson offered the same measured acceptance for course outlines, which they believed deserved only the most conservative usage. And further, without denying the value of collaborative work in nature study altogether, they understood that inquiries into the natural world were often most educative when independently arranged. Whole class observation often deviated from the larger purpose of creating environments in which the learner could develop his or her own skills and habits in reasoning. They wrote: “General exercises are often conducted in which some object is held up before the class, different things about it pointed out and named, and an occasional question asked. Under these conditions the pupils fall into four categories: those who do not listen, those who do not observe, those who do not answer, and few eager ones who do all the listening, observing, and

¹⁷⁷ Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson, *Practical Nature Study*, 40.

answering.”¹⁷⁸ For Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson, the goal was not to thwart group activity, but rather to promote and to ensure student responsibility and responsiveness. The participation of all students in investigation was critical to the entire endeavor. At times, this might be facilitated through collaborative work, if not whole-class observations. They indicated further that “Although individual work is spoken of in contrast with general exercises, this need not necessarily mean each pupil working alone. In fact, it is often a great advantage to break the class up into groups of two or three in the conduct of observations and experiments.”¹⁷⁹ Nature study was less concerned with who was working together than it was with ensuring that every learner was working toward developing the capacity to inquire believed to be innate. “A pupil working alone,” they concluded, “may be careless, inexact, or even untruthful.”¹⁸⁰

And finally, in addition to other general recommendations, Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson reminded novice nature study practitioners to promote the comparison of results that students derived from their observations. In pragmatic fashion, they recommended the testing of conclusions reached and in drawing comparisons, they reasoned, the greater utility of nature study as an approach to teaching and learning was evident. The following excerpt was illustrative: “When differences in the results of observation develop in connection with some subsequent exercise, there is more toleration shown, the tone of discussion or dispute is not so confident, and the appeal to reexamination is more immediate. To recognize the fact that other people may be right even though they seem to differ from one is making progress...Herein lies a way to the attainment of the scientific spirit, which is more important in education ten thousand

¹⁷⁸ Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson, *Practical Nature Study*, 52.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

mere facts of science.”¹⁸¹ In the spirit of Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson, nature study promoted not mere observation, but a process of investigation that was purposeful and ongoing.

In addition to an experience curriculum, *Practical Nature-Study* assumed what observers would reasonably regard as a child-centered approach, one that recognized the unique developmental needs of young students. Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson understood the young learner to be wholly distinct from the adult and, consequently, this understanding informed much of their approach to nature study. “Children live in a world all their own,” they wrote, “In order that we may act intelligently in arranging a course in nature-study for children we catch at least a glimpse of the world in which they live and move.”¹⁸² With that in mind, Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson called for a nature study plan that took into consideration the developmental aspects of children, recognizing that each individual had a particular set of needs. “It is far easier,” they noted, “to declare what we desire the children to become than it is to form any accurate conception of what the children really are at any period in their school life, and what nature-study has to offer that fits their needs at this particular stage of their development.”¹⁸³ Along those developmental lines, Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson reasoned that nature study provided, among other opportunities, the potential to unite home life and school life in the classroom. To divide the two created challenges for the learner, whose experiences, they insisted, emphasized home and family primarily. “[W]e have an excellent opportunity,” they concluded, “to keep the home life and the school life in close touch with each other and thus prevent forming the gap that so often exists...”¹⁸⁴ From the home-oriented perspective that Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson believed to represent the child’s experiences in the primary grades, nature study topics

¹⁸¹ Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson, *Practical Nature Study*, 58.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

were to move gradually outward. They explained: “As children grow older their outlook upon the world becomes broader. They begin to see interrelations and interdependence among objects in the nature world. They see themselves as part of this living, working universe. As a result new relations are established between them and their environment...They are interested in the life of the community as well as in the family,...”¹⁸⁵ From the family to the community, Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson predicted a general expansion of the learner’s world, all of which could be reflected in an articulated nature study curriculum. In addition to the broadening of the student’s world outward from the home and family, they anticipated a deepening sophistication and complexity in learning as well. What readers found in Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson was a representation of nature study which outlined in considerable detail the experiential, child-centered, and inquiry-based character of the approach. From their recommendations for teacher training to their cautionary advice for practitioners, they consistently situated the nature of the learner in close proximity to the educational utility believed to exist in nature study. Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson seemed to arrive at an advocacy for nature study through a pragmatic understanding of the learner’s needs.

Charles B. Scott. Not unlike Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson’s engagement with agricultural training and nature study, Charles B. Scott’s *Nature-study and the Child* went to considerable lengths to address the centrality of the learner. In short, for Scott, nature study dealt with the first-hand investigation of the natural world. With regard to the selection of materials in nature study, Scott recommended almost deceptively straightforward approach where he called for teachers to base instructional choices on both their own and their students’ interests. In the first place, he suggested that the teacher’s own interests and specialties served as appropriate

¹⁸⁵ Coulter, Coulter, and Patterson, *Practical Nature Study*, 78.

starting points for the initial work of nature study. “If teachers are fond of flowers,” he reasoned, “they will be more apt to awaken in the minds of their pupils a similar fondness.”¹⁸⁶ But this recommendation only served to set in place a foundation for further nature study work. As practitioners developed an approach to nature study, it was the student’s interest which was to become the guide. Scott offered the following explanation: “Teachers who are beginning this work will find it wise to study and be largely guided by the interest of the children. If some child has a pet squirrel in which he and his playmates are interested, have him bring it to school, and let the children watch it for a few days, studying its habits, the use of its different parts, and the way in which they are fitted for the work they have to do. Their interest in the squirrel thus aroused,...the squirrel may be the starting-point for a series of lessons on animals...”¹⁸⁷ The student’s own experiences as a guide, Scott added that “If it was found unusually difficult to interest the pupils in the material selected, then, in general, that was not the best material for those pupils.”¹⁸⁸ Beyond the student’s interest, he also recommended that practitioners recognize the motivations of parents. Ever aware of the innovative character of nature study, Scott, as did his contemporaries, seemed to sense the necessity of parental support. The following passage was indicative of just such a sentiment: “It is wise to consider in the selection of material, particularly in beginning work in nature-study, the interests and ideas of the parents. Nature-study is, unfortunately, new in most schools, and, like all new things, will meet with much opposition and criticism. A wise teacher can very often disarm the critic by a proper selection of material for study.”¹⁸⁹ Scott assumed, of course, that parents’ interests, like that of children, would often stem from localized contexts and concerns. To state it another way, he reasoned that

¹⁸⁶ Charles B. Scott, *Nature Study and the Child* (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1910), 297.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 298.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 299.

local contexts would inform parental interests and motivations for the curriculum and methodology in a significant way. The illustration below was clarifying: “In the manufacturing town, comparatively few parents will object to having their children study about machinery or iron,...In a coal-mining region, the study in the school of coal and its formation and mining and transportation, may be welcomed by the staunchest [*sic*] believer in the three R’s. In the country, the study of corn or wheat or oats, of fruit-trees, or of plant food and soil, or of insects, may not be regarded as a very dangerous innovation.”¹⁹⁰ With the interest of students and the support of parents secured, Scott reasoned that nature study topics could grow outward from an initial curricular focus that was highly localized and familiar. But while Scott suggested a gradual outward movement was possible with time, in his plan for nature study he did not recommend the removal of the familiar from the curriculum. In fact, though he opened the possibilities for the expansion of the nature study curriculum, he frequently reminded readers of the value of everyday phenomena and objects in nature. Explained Scott:

Remembering that all work with children must be based on sense-perception, apperception, and interest, too much emphasis cannot be placed on the importance of selecting for study material which each pupil can see or hear or feel and can study for himself, which is closely related to the every-day life of the boys and girls, and in which they are or can be interested...

It seems scarcely to add that that is best for study which is most common and familiar we are somewhat prone to think that we must go to distant lands to find wonderful and curious things. Nature-study should, first of all, show the children the wonders at their doorstep, the treasures and beauties on which they have been treading for years.¹⁹¹

To be sure, Scott encouraged a broadening of the curriculum beyond the immediate vicinity of the school; his nature study curriculum was not a narrow one. At the same time, and as illustrated through the extended excerpt above, he always held certain affections for those things in nature perceived by most observers to be commonplace. All of this, one might argue, stemmed from the

¹⁹⁰ Scott, *Nature Study and the Child*, 299.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 313.

underlying motivation in Scott's nature study approach to develop in learners the capacity and appreciation for inquiry. As much as its purpose was to build foundations for later science work, nature study was to encourage a spirit of investigation and an appreciation for the natural world everywhere including, if not with special interest, one's own backyard. Scott added:

At first they will think they must go or send miles for what they want. Later they will find just as good or better material in the trees under which they have walked for years, along the streets, in the back yards about the school. Even in great cities they will discover leaves and insects and stones in sorts of places before overlooked...

In general, that is best for study in any locality, other things being equal, which is most common, with which the children are most familiar. This is easiest to obtain. What is most important, it is best for the children...The children will thereby be led to see that school is everywhere. At the same time they will learn the importance of that which is nearest...¹⁹²

For Scott, then, familiarity and the immediate local environment always found great relevance in the study of nature. Without question, another significant component of his conception of nature study was built around first-hand experience with the natural world. Nature study was "not books, not mere reading or listening;..."¹⁹³ Instead, Scott concluded that the approach should be regarded as "a personal investigation" whereby "teachers and children [became] fellow-investigators of truth."¹⁹⁴ Like others, Scott intended nature study to address the needs of individuals over classrooms of students. Nature study, he wrote, "...deals with the individual child, and aims to develop each child as an individual."¹⁹⁵ For Scott, accomplishing such a task meant that teachers and students had to ask the all important question, Why? "The education of the past," he lamented, "has been too largely a study of what."¹⁹⁶ Without denying the value of factual knowledge, Scott urged readers to consider the notion that the development of the learner went well beyond the reading and memorization of books. He offered the following clarification:

¹⁹² Scott, *Nature Study and the Child*, 314.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 104-105.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 104.

“...[O]ur teachers and learning that knowledge, accumulation of facts, as an ultimate aim in education, is exceedingly low, narrow, and unsatisfactory. No matter how clear or how well fixed in the mind the knowledge may be, we are learning that knowledge of our physical environment, or of anything else, is not necessarily power. We need more than knowledge, or more than this kind of knowledge.”¹⁹⁷ What nature study needed, or perhaps schooling more generally, he added, was a greater attention to the development of the reasoning powers of students. And, as noted, Scott called on teachers to work toward the development of each child individually, particularly with regard to what he termed students’ “intellectual powers.”¹⁹⁸ The passage below was illustrative of the ideal: “A host of teachers have, however, realized the importance of a higher aim, and are insisting on personal, individual investigation, as opposed to mere book-work, as a means of developing the powers of the pupils, training them to see and think and express themselves.”¹⁹⁹ More than books or formalized fields of knowledge, nature study under Scott was an approach designed to guide students through an investigation of the natural world around them in such a way as to develop the student’s capacity to reason and to inquire.

Yet nature study was not a pedagogical panacea for Scott, far from an appropriate substitute for a holistic curriculum. He explained: “Nature-study is not all-sufficient. It has its limitations. Nature-study, or science, does not contain within itself the possibility of a complete or well-rounded elementary education. Harm may be done to the cause of education, and the progress of nature-study may be retarded, by emphasizing it too strongly at the expense of other studies equally important.”²⁰⁰ While Scott cautioned practitioners against the overemphasis on

¹⁹⁷ Scott, *Nature Study and the Child*, 105-106.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 107-108.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 135.

nature, he believed, nonetheless, that the uninhibited study of the natural world was perhaps the best first step in what would ultimately become a broader investigation of man and nature. “Man, as an intellectual being,” he proposed, “does not appeal to the little child.”²⁰¹ Again, however, notwithstanding Scott’s call for the introduction of subjects in stages deemed developmentally appropriate, the course of study had to move beyond nature alone and into a broader consideration of the arts, the social world, and the like. Scott discussed the transition away from investigations of nature thus: “At first the children must study nature just as they see it, putting all emphasis on personal observation,...Later, nature should be studied in its relation to man, - the discoveries man has made, the way in which he has grouped natural objects and phenomena, leading to systematic science;...and correlating the work with geography and history; the thoughts which nature has inspired in other minds, leading to literature and art.”²⁰² Nature study alone, however powerful an educational approach it might have been, was not, for Scott at least, sufficient to bring about the fullest and most complete development of the learner. A consideration of method was crucial.

A further indication of Scott’s commitment to the nature of the learner and to an experience curriculum was an effort to outline principles for learning. In the first place, nature study under Scott necessarily followed methods in practice that allowed for direct sensory experience. “By what we may call the law of sense-perception,” he explained, “we mean that the child must originally gain his ideas through his senses.”²⁰³ Scott added:

Teachers have learned to depend on books. In the writer’s experience with teachers, ne of the most common questions has been, “Where can I find a book which will tell me all about it?” Teachers have *given* to their pupils, instead of leading the pupils to *get* for themselves. In nature-study the first great struggle of teachers will be at this point, - to overcome the habits so firmly fixed; to allow the younger pupils, and encourage and

²⁰¹ Scott, *Nature Study and the Child*, 139.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 140.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 150.

compel the older pupils, to use and depend on their own senses, to really base their work on sense-perception.²⁰⁴

Overly symbolic, formalized learning, by contrast, was, for Scott, inappropriate for young learners and antithetical to effective nature study. As important as was experience through the senses in his nature study methodology was the connection of new observations and inquires into ideas, knowledge, and understanding previously held by the student. Again, Scott offered recommendations based upon what he perceived to be laws of learning and development in young people. More specifically, he revealed that teachers considering appropriate practice must engage in a consideration of what he termed the “law of apperception.”²⁰⁵ Scott defined the principle in the following manner: “The law of apperception is an expression for the fact that the mind receives and retains those ideas which are or can be related to what is already in the mind, and, further, that it changes what it thus retains, connects it with, and makes it like, what the mind had before.”²⁰⁶ He went on to indicate the manner in which apperception formed much of his overall approach to nature study. Perhaps most significantly, Scott linked student motivation and interest to apperception. In his words: “Interest is based upon apperception. The child is interested in that which appeals to him; that is, in that which can be related to something already in him. This is the reason why children are so much more interested in life and action than in mere form and structure,…”²⁰⁷ Accompanied by a variety of other considerations, of which imagination was but one example, apperception was perhaps the defining element of Scott’s nature study. In many ways, connecting new experiences to old drove the entire process of investigating the natural world. Again, as was true of many contemporary advocates of nature

²⁰⁴ Scott, *Nature Study and the Child*, 151.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 152.

²⁰⁶ Comstock, *Handbook*, 152; Similar concerns can be traced to Herbart and other early educational scholars. See Chapter 2.

²⁰⁷ Scott, *Nature Study and the Child*, 152-153.

study, Scott drew explicit connections between the lived experiences of the learner and the power of first-hand experiences in the process of arranging productive educational reforms. But beyond the value that the relatively atypical reform offered to students, a number of proponents positioned nature study as an elixir for practitioners as well.

Anna Comstock. Comstock's *Handbook of Nature-study* represented further the appeal of the nature study approach to teaching and learning in the sciences. A collection of practical nature study lessons, the illustrated handbook also included a rationale for the method itself. For Comstock, the larger educational purposes of the approach were rather clearly defined; that is, nature study was a means by which students might develop their skills in observation and ultimately come to know more about the natural world around them. "The object of the nature-study teacher," she wrote, "should be to cultivate in the children powers of accurate observation and to build up within them, understanding."²⁰⁸ As indicated in the lines above, Comstock enjoyed much company in this regard. Yet the student was not the only beneficiary, as she cited valuable rewards for the nature study practitioner as well. For the teacher, nature study offered new vigor, a departure from the routine of traditional schooling. Comstock explained: "I have had conversations with hundreds of teachers in the public schools of New York concerning the introduction of nature-study into the curriculum, and most of them declared, 'Oh, we have not time for it. Every moment is full now!' There nerves were at such a tension..."²⁰⁹ But she continued with the following hopeful promise: "To the teacher who turns to nature's healing, nature-study in the schoolroom is not a trouble; it is a sweet, fresh breath of air blown across the heat of radiators and the noisome odor of over-crowded small humanity. She who opens her eyes and heart nature-ward even once a week, finds nature-study in the schoolroom a delight and an

²⁰⁸ Comstock, *Handbook*, 1.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

abiding joy.”²¹⁰ And the benefits to the teacher were greater still. In addition to its powers as an “elixir of youth,”²¹¹ as she phrased it, nature study offered a solution to the perennial question of classroom discipline. “Much of the naughtiness in school,” Comstock wrote, “is a result of the child’s lack of interest in his work, augmented by physical inaction that results from an attempt to sit quietly.”²¹² Inherently active and interesting, nature study offered teachers assistance in both areas. In Comstock’s nature study, student engagement became a substitute for otherwise punitive disciplinary measures. In company with student learning, Comstock attached great reward to the innovative practice.

Summary. Across the nature study literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one found a pronounced emphasis on the nature of the learner, a feature of the approach difficult to overlook or discount. At every turn, proponents seemed to share an awareness that the lived experiences of the student were highly significant with regard to continued student learning. Though he was not alone, Scott’s *Nature-study and the Child* offered particular clarity where he illustrated his conception of the process of approaching new learning through understandings previously existing. And experience held still deeper meaning within nature study; that is, nature study advocates shared wide agreement on the significance of first-hand observation. Together, advocates insisted, the lived experiences of the learner and the commitment to first-hand observation created a nature study curriculum and methodology whereby local contexts, that of the home, school, and community, offered potentially rich opportunities for the development of student reasoning capacities. Combined with the local emphasis of the approach, nature study’s emphasis and the nature and needs of the learner

²¹⁰ Comstock, *Handbook*, 3.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *Ibid.*, 4.

position the movement as a rather obvious historical antecedent of modern place-based pedagogy.

Nature Study & the Community

Nature study promised much as a reform measure with regard to classroom practice and student learning. Proponents, however, were also very much in tune with the larger social purposes of the school and education more generally. Kevin Armitage, in his recent historical appraisal exploring the relationship between nature study and the American conservation ethic, did much to highlight the connections between the approach and some of the larger social goals the movement sought to address. To clarify, nature study authors often went well beyond arguments to demonstrate the potential of the approach to provide more educative experiences for young people. In addition to those important functions, advocates also hoped to address the health of the community of which the school was a part, if not society at large. Nature study's connection to a budding conservation ethos in the final decade of the nineteenth century was not insignificant, and restructuring the relationship between students and the natural environment was a goal shared across many nature study writers. In a more general way, however, and without minimizing the significance of an educational program partially geared toward environmental stewardship, nature study advocates also tended to share a belief in the power of the approach to develop stronger connections between the individual, the school, and the community. In that the reform movement fostered such bonds and the capacity of the learner to contribute in meaningful ways to the community, nature study arguably served functions as a form of citizenship education.

W. H. Hershman. With regard to the larger social purposes of nature study, Hershman represented an early illustration where he suggested that the overriding purpose of an education

was "...to enable [the student] to live completely."²¹³ Central, of course, to that process, in his mind, was nature study. He wrote: "Whatever may be my thoughts in regard to the rank of nature-study when compared with the educational values of other studies, or whatever may be said in reference to its relation or correlation with them, it cannot be denied that it has great educational value as a factor in the development of human character."²¹⁴ Clearly, Hershman moved beyond content learning and even reasoning prowess to outline the potential role of nature study in the character development of young people. In part, his rationale for nature study centered upon the notion that the learner should become aware of his or her surroundings. The following passage was clarifying: "...[S]o with the child. He, too, reaches upward toward an ideal. He is in the world to learn his place in nature that he may adapt himself to his surroundings. He touches nature. He is nature himself and all his acts are nature. The first few years of life are spent in exploring nature. He finds systems and plans in nature and his thoughts go out in search of the Great Systematizer and Designer..."²¹⁵ In his conception, nature study paralleled the natural thought processes of the learner; that is, the investigation of nature afforded opportunities for students to come to understand the world around them in an intimate way. Hershman felt this tendency to be a natural one, but he went further to highlight the spiritual significance of the approach. For Hershman, as evidenced through reference to the "Great Systematizer and Designer,"²¹⁶ essential to character development was the deep appreciation for life. An awareness of a unity of all things, "a universal spirit,"²¹⁷ in his words, was a central understanding to be attained, critical perhaps to complete living. He explained:

²¹³ Hershman, *Manual of Nature Study*, vii.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid., ix.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

When the child is led to see that life grows out of contrast, and that beauty is found in unified variety, that all nature is formed upon one common plan, and that the same spirit pervades all, he and nature will be blended into one, in which unity they will ever walk, each contributing to the support of the other...

Nature flows into the child's life, elevates his esthetic and ethical nature, while he in turn, thus strengthened, contributes to the life of nature and lifts it into grander beauty. Can such experience fail to prepare the child for complete living?²¹⁸

In addition to any subject-area knowledge that a nature study approach might afford the learner, a significant part of Hershman's rationale for the approach was always spiritual and aesthetic. A deeper appreciation, if not a stewardship, for the natural environment was an expected outcome, inextricable from his larger purpose toward the construction of character. And the potential connection stretched beyond the use of the local alone and into what might be regarded as an ethic of conservation. Though faint, Hershman's motivations towards the aesthetic implied the installation of certain appreciations, not only of living, but of the natural world as well. With regard to nature study advocates, Hershman was not alone in seeking purposes beyond the classroom.

Clifton E. Hodge. Hodge, too, sought to identify connections between nature study and what might be regarded as community or social improvement. In his discussions of the school garden, he identified the dual functions of the popular learning tool, both an outdoor laboratory and a practice ground for the improvement of the home garden. The two were, of course, complimentary. The school garden offered opportunities to observe the web of relationships that existed in nature, an extension of content understanding. Ultimately, however, knowledge of such relationships, he insisted, contributed to wiser horticultural practice locally. Hodge illustrated both the problem and possibilities:

But at present people do not even know the names of the insects and fungi that are doing the most harm in their own back yards, and scarcely one in a hundred has any conception of the things that are doing the most good. How can we lay the necessary foundation of

²¹⁸ Hershman, *Manual of Nature Study*, ix.

common knowledge of these forces in nature except through our system of universal education?

When a beginning is made, some of our greatest difficulties become most fascinating studies. For example, as soon as we realize that codling moths have ruined all the apples on our trees, and during the winter are hiding under the scales of the bark on their trunks, it is with a thrill of delight that we see a downy woodpecker industriously pecking into one scale after the other and extracting the larvae...And so it is with a thousand other things.²¹⁹

The school held a fundamental responsibility in the process of developing in young people understandings about the local, natural world. Among others, the school garden was a starting place, a place where students might be brought into contact with the surrounding natural world and its ecological workings. “The garden thus becomes,” Hodge insisted, “not only a vital part of a child’s education in itself, but the great center, the heart of vitalizing influences and interests that radiate in nature in every direction.”²²⁰ Yet again, more than experiential engagement and a greater affection for the natural environment, he saw potential connections to progress locally and in the home. In some instances, improvement referred to aesthetics. Hodge remarked: “I should like to see the nature-study course give to all boys and girls the knowledge and the power to surround their hands with the most useful and beautiful plants available, and actually to produce their living by rearing plants or animals, or both if occasion ever to require.”²²¹ From there, Hodge went on to highlight what was perhaps the most fundamental role of the nature study approach, the connection between school and the home. Hodge insisted that “the paramount value to be aimed at is “character, will to do good, power to create happiness.”²²² For him, nature study held the possibility for ethical, social, and spiritual development. In his mind, a greater appreciation for the natural world and its workings would ultimately translate into a more socially conscious individual, not to mention one more capable of promoting positive social

²¹⁹ Hodge, *Nature Study and Life*, 123-124.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

²²² *Ibid.*, 17.

change. The following passage was illustrative: “Nature is given as the great matrix with which we are to create, and to go through life with no attempt to gain knowledge of it, with no effort to learn its possibilities, is dull, dead atheism. The child that puts forth creative effort to make the world better, the child that plants a seed or cares for the life of an animal, is working hand in hand with nature and the Creator, and what higher religious development can we desire that that he become the ‘reflected image of God?’”²²³ With sometimes strong spiritual overtones, he argued that nature study was to serve a myriad of functions as a social reform initiative. Through garden studies, and nature study more broadly, Hodge sought to engage with and improve the local community through the endeavors of the school.

Liberty Hyde Bailey. Not altogether unconnected from his larger critique of schooling, Bailey, too, found social purposes in the development and practice of nature study. And his purposes extended beyond efforts to develop in students’ habits of inquiry and understandings of surrounding local ecologies. Beyond those important goals, Bailey shared with other contemporary proponents the belief that nature study offered promise for the development of what might be regarded as an ethic of conservation and sustainability. The passage below was revealing:

There is a large public and social result of simple and direct teaching of common things. It explains the relations between man and his environment. It establishes a new sense of our dependence on the natural resources of the earth, and leads us not to abuse or waste our resources. It develops a public intelligence on these matters, and it ought to influence community conduct. All teaching that is direct, native and understandable should greatly influence the bearing of the individual toward his conditions and his fellows, awaken his moral nature, and teach him something of the art of living in the world.²²⁴

In some sense, nature study under Bailey’s direction held as a long term goal the establishment of a more intelligent and informed appreciation of the connections that might exist between the

²²³ Hodge, *Nature Study and Life*, 31.

²²⁴ Bailey, *The Nature Study Idea*, 57.

natural environment and human societies, implying perhaps a consideration of conservation principles. It is not clear, however, that he called for direct instruction on such matters. Instead, Bailey sensed that nature study, by linking the school, life, and the local natural environment, might causally, but effectively, promote more intelligent living. “Nature-sympathy,” he concluded, “must come as a natural effect of actual observation and study of definite objects and phenomena.”²²⁵

Like Hodge, Bailey illustrated his understanding of the connection between nature study and the community through the context of the organization of the school garden. Bailey advised proponents to pitch the garden idea to school constituents as a sound means toward the improvement and beautification of the school. He added the following: “To improve the school-grounds should be a matter of neighborhood pride. It is an expression of the people’s interest in the things that are the people’s. We are ashamed when our homes are not fit and attractive children to live in; but who cares if at the school the fence is tumble-down...”²²⁶ Of course, Bailey assumed that the neighborhood naturally cared about the quality of its school, the school’s appearance being but one component of overall quality. From his descriptions, Bailey clearly regarded the school garden as an avenue through which nature study became at least partially a community affair. Among the first things to do, Bailey reminded, “...is to arouse the public conscious.”²²⁷ Or, as he reiterated elsewhere: “There is always at least one energetic man in the community who is ready to take the lead in such movements as this. Much of the value of improving the school-ground lies in its arousing of public interest.”²²⁸ In addition to involving the community and simultaneously drawing on them as school resources, Bailey recognized that

²²⁵Bailey, *The Nature Study Idea*, 54.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 86.

the collective effort to improve the school grounds might also stir up the interests of students for the second stage of garden work and its directly educational functions. Beyond community engagement at the local level, Bailey also linked nature study to the health of American democracy generally. In his 1915 address to members of the Nature-Study Society, Bailey outlined his understanding that the “spirit of scientific inquiry”²²⁹ thought to be an outgrowth of nature study was, in fact, an important tool in the maintenance and improvement of democratic living. With the Great War in the background, he wrote: “In the truth, there is no secrecy, no deals, no combinations, no conspiracy, no combinations, no favor, no courtesy, no high opinion. Whether there will be an eclipse does not depend on discussion nor even on agreements or any number of persons. Whether a species migrates in twos or in tens does not depend on what somebody “believes.” Whether the summer is wet or the winter is cold does not depend on the will of the king or the kaiser.”²³⁰ For Bailey, a commitment to empiricism was preferable to blind adherence to political wills or opinions. Eventually, he imagined, such an “intellectual attitude will express itself in political practice.”²³¹ Yet Bailey was not a naïve believer of truth and, in fact, expressed an understanding of some of the difficulties associated with knowing outright. “It is not to be desired that there shall be an end to argument and discussion,” he added, “but we ought to know that we cannot solve out questions by unscientific polemics, however much we may settle them for the time being.”²³² In Bailey’s progressive view, the role of nature study in a democratic society served a clear and definite purpose. While nature study held definite connections to a science education, oftentimes viewed as an elementary-level primer for scientific study, the approach also served the function of citizenship education. The commitment

²²⁹ Bailey, “The Science-Spirit in a Democracy,” *The Nature-Study Review* 12, no. 1 (January 1916): 2.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

²³² *Ibid.*, 4.

to inquiry, a feature inextricable from nature study, suited students as much to their roles as citizens as it did to the investigation of the natural world. From the conservation ethic to the engagement of the community in the school garden to the all important habit of inquiry, Bailey's nature study created a "bond of connection between the school and community"²³³ in a myriad of ways.

Frederick L. Holtz. Like Bailey and others, Holtz, too, valued the aesthetic and ethical dimensions he believed the approach to foster. All scientific, subject-area learning aside, Holtz argued that interacting with nature and thinking about the surrounding environment would ultimately promote happiness and a love for life. "Just as it is right to enjoy sensuously good music," he remarked, "just so is it right for us to enjoy nature through the senses, and to cultivate them so that we may enjoy more fully and intelligently."²³⁴ For Holtz, the natural environment was more than merely a collection of resources for human use. Similarly, the study of nature was to become more than just the learning of factual knowledge. In addition to refining skills in inquisitiveness, Holtz asked that students come to recognize nature as an important and inspirational source in the arts and in the "development of poetry, music, painting, and sculpture."²³⁵

In addition to developing aesthetic tastes, Holtz believed that efforts to move students and nature closer together would do much to instill an ethical stance, or perhaps a sense of stewardship, towards the natural world, though he never used such precise terminology. Rather than cruelty or carelessness, the relationship between youth and nature would become, through nature study, moral and thoughtful. Holtz wrote:

²³³ Holtz, *Nature-Study*, 89.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

... [B]ut one of the best things they get from nature-study is a sympathy and love for the lower animals. The care for pets is good nature-study and also good for moral training, for it teaches us to consider the wants of these animals. Children, however, should be taught to be kind also to the birds, the squirrels, frogs and toads, instead of cruel as they so often are. They should be taught to recognize the right of all harmless creatures to live. They should be made to feel that we and the animals are kin.²³⁶

Holtz went on to cite the benefits of growing plants in the development of ethical sensibilities in youth as well. Going further still, he suggested that nature study generally worked to quash ignorance, itself a form of immorality in his view. Holtz reasoned that “The study of nature has another very important moral aspect. Ignorance is a kind of immorality, especially where people ought to, or could, have known better. Through ignorance and, perhaps, absolute disregard for simple natural laws there result much loss and trouble.”²³⁷ For Holtz, the general, at times romantic, connection to better living seemed to be the projected outcome of nature study. Sanitation, intelligent farming techniques, and the wise use of natural resources were all affected. But another way, Holtz believed that nature study created more thoughtful, purposeful individuals, thereby reducing all manner of inefficiency and waste. Yet beyond those sensibilities, he attached to nature study the potential for a sort of spiritual uplift. In the process of interacting with the natural world, growing to appreciate life, and moving out of ignorance and into intelligent living, Holtz believed that a new, more spiritual perspective would ultimately develop. He explained: “The study of the wonderful things of the world, their beautiful fitness for their existence and functions, and the remarkable progressive tendency of all organic life, and the unity that prevails in it create admiration in the beholder and tend to his spiritual uplifting. He feels a greater reverence for the wonderful universe and its mysterious forces. He is compelled to think of the Why and Wherefore of it all, and he must think of the Great First

²³⁶ Holtz, *Nature-Study*, 18.

²³⁷ *Ibid.* 19.

Cause.”²³⁸ All interrelated, Holtz found spiritual, aesthetic, and ethical value in the practice of nature study. As implied through the discussion above, he was not alone among contemporary nature study advocates.

Charles B. Scott. Whereas an appeal to develop the intellectual powers of young learners beyond the memorization of factual disciplinary knowledge was arguably a departure from the traditional program in education, science education in particular, Scott had in mind higher ideals still. In short, Scott insisted that nature study should move beyond even the lofty educational goal of producing thoughtful students committed to reasoned inquiry to produce a class of young people “sympathetic”²³⁹ to the natural environment. This sympathy with nature, he argued, served to enhance further the child’s capacity to know, understand, and learn. He explained: “No; interest, power, knowledge, are not the highest aims in nature-study. Preceding these, along with these, more important than these, must come the cultivation of the sympathies of the child. “Love is fulfilling of the law” educationally as well as spiritually.”²⁴⁰ As suggested elsewhere, this extension of nature study teaching and learning represented what modern observers might label as a type of conservation-minded educational aim. To clarify, Scott seemed to attach to nature study something beyond the aim of a science education alone. He expected students to develop an appreciation for the nature world and to become agents of protection. To this end, Scott was explicit:

We shall find that we shall develop in the hearts of the children a sympathy with the world of nature in proportion as we lead them to care for or work for nature. We are apt to love best that for which we do the most, not merely, as is often assumed, that from which we receive the most. So keeping in view the cultivation of a sympathy and love of nature, we will give our children and pupils plants and animals to care for...

²³⁸ Holtz, *Nature-Study*, 20.

²³⁹ Scott, *Nature Study and the Child*, 112.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

Equally essential for the cultivation of sympathy with and love for nature is an understanding of what we receive from nature, an appreciation of what nature gives to and does for us.²⁴¹

Similarly, he suggested that nature study might develop in students an enhanced awareness for the beauty of nature. An aesthetic appreciation for the natural world only served to further the spirit of stewardship in the student of nature study. A deeper ethical sensibility was the ultimate outcome. Scott noted: “Along with this appreciation of the beauty of their surroundings, will there not come to the children a better understanding and better performance of that they owe their surroundings? Will they not be more careful of flower and bird or tree? And will not their ethical nature, their appreciation of duty, be thereby developed?”²⁴² From here, Scott’s motivations for nature study instruction assumed a clearly spiritual tone. Beginning with a shift away from traditional book-learning and into a form of study designed to encourage inquiry and thoughtful observation, his brand of nature study ultimately approached not only ethical, but spiritual aims. In Scott’s conception, the student of nature study was to become not only a steward of nature, but, in fact, an inspired observer of what he termed the “Author of nature.”²⁴³ Taken as a whole, these multiple purposes, he believed, best adapted students to their community and the world at large.

Anna Comstock. Like other advocates, Comstock suffered no loss of words with regard to the educational outcomes of nature study; the approach offered much to students, practitioners, and, perhaps society at large. From knowledge of the natural world to the imagination, educational outcomes in Comstock’s nature study were numerous. Not insignificantly, she seemed to hold the potential for the development, again, of what modern observers might term a conservation ethic in particularly high regard. The following passage was

²⁴¹ Scott, *Nature Study and the Child*.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 118.

indicative of such a sentiment: “But, more than all, nature-study gives the child a sense of companionship with life out of doors and an abiding love of nature. Let this latter be the teacher’s criterion for judging his or her work. If nature-study as taught does not make the child love nature and the out-of-doors, then it should cease. Let us not inflict permanent injury on the child by turning him away from nature instead of toward.”²⁴⁴ In addition to aesthetic appreciations for nature and the development of reasoning powers, Comstock’s nature study sought to instill an ethical and wise relationship with the natural world.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has investigated the American nature study movement from the early 1870s through the first decades of the twentieth century. A reflection of a larger Progressive Era, nature study was backgrounded by several interrelated sociopolitical developments. Nature study provided a spiritual outlet for some as it offered a hopeful avenue for the installation of aesthetic appreciations and perhaps a renewed sense for the enjoyment of living in the context of the uncertainty that industrial change sometimes stimulated. Not entirely unrelated, nature study was also attached to a growing ethic of conservation and sustainability across the nation. And finally, the nature study movement represented a reflection of a new scientific spirit in America.

The foregoing discussion has identified in nature study a powerful historical precedent for modern place-based educational theory and practice. Though in various expressions and combinations from one writer, pedagogue, or theorist to the next, nature study initiatives demonstrated a sound commitment to local study. From Agassiz’s early appeal to “study nature not books” to Bailey’s suggestion that “the environment should suggest the curriculum,” the localized character of nature study could not be overlooked. In each and every author reviewed in this chapter, from the early work of Straight and Jackman through the subsequent

²⁴⁴ Comstock, *Handbook*, 1.

contributions of Holtz, Hodge, Hershman, or Comstock, the unique contexts surrounding the school and neighborhood were viewed as important educational resources.

Beyond the local, the introduction of nature study in the American school threatened to reorient to some degree the relationship between the school and the learner. The unique needs and experiences of the student were at the center of nature study reforms. An emphasis on experience through tools such as the school garden, the field excursion, and school specimen collections, offered opportunities for student inquiry. This pedagogical shift represented a general appeal toward the rearrangement of the student-teacher relationship, one in which the learner's experience could assume renewed prominence in the educative process. For Scott, that equated to a consideration of prior knowledge, student interest for Comstock, and "intellectual powers" for Bailey. In each instance, the needs and nature of the learner gained close attention.

In addition to local study and the needs and nature of the learner, this chapter has also demonstrated that nature study at the turn of the twentieth century served a community responsiveness function. Proponents frequently described as a part of the overall nature study project objectives geared toward the establishment of an ethic of conservation. A future generation committed to stewardship was, for many engaged in the promotion of nature study, more than a tangential goal and, in fact, an essential outcome of that particular brand of school reform. In addition to a deeper sympathy with the natural environment, nature study proponents also recognized a relationship between educational programs and local citizenship, part of which was a consideration of school-community linkages. Hodge, for instance, wrote about the role of nature study initiatives in promoting neighborhood beautification, and Bailey echoed those sentiments with his call to encourage neighborhood pride. Bailey went further still to link the thought processes (e.g., inquiry, investigation, observation) refined through nature study

instruction to the general improvement of American democracy. And finally, while Holtz delayed direct civic action until the later grades, he, too, attached a community responsiveness function to nature study. In all, the combination of the local, the learner, and the community position the American nature study movement as a clear historical precedent for modern place-based pedagogy.

Following World War I, advocacy for nature study experienced significant decline, as did other progressive projects.²⁴⁵ But despite an incredible legacy of both theory and practice, Armitage was correct where he pointed out that “historians of education have ignored nature-study...”²⁴⁶ Of course, the same criticism could be leveled against modern place-based educational scholars as well. The oversight of the latter is arguably worse given the absolute reiteration of nature study that place-based education represents today. Going further, the apparent inattention to the nature study movement is all the more striking when one considers the rather close connection that modern place-based education has come to share with science and environmental education, both of which are clear, if incidental, relatives of the much older nature study predecessor. Nature study was a progressive educational movement which exemplified place-based pedagogical ideals and it predated its modern counter part by more than a century. As Chapter 4 seeks to demonstrate further, nature study was not the sole Progressive Era antecedent to modern place-based education. More specifically, scholars associated with geography education at the turn of the twentieth century also presented ideas consistent with the modern field.

²⁴⁵ Armitage, *The Nature Study Movement*.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

CHAPTER 4

THE NEW GEOGRAPHY

Introduction

Contemporary with developments in nature study education were similar reforms in the field of geography education. In 2009, in a contribution to *Theory and Research in Social Education*, Keith C. Barton offered a fresh perspective on the development of social education through latter nineteenth and early twentieth century geography education.¹ Within that larger project, Barton noted that historical work on the development of the American geography education has been imperfect, particularly with regard to the well known *expanding horizons* curricular framework. Of course, an examination of the historical development of American geography education holds equally great importance in this present effort to highlight curricular and theoretical antecedents to modern place-based educational models as well.

This chapter explores the transformation of American geography education beginning in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The discussion begins with the German *Heimatskunde* model and evaluates similar developments in American *home geography*. Following that introductory review, the historical sketch below traces the efforts of educational progressives to bring a “new geography”² into practice. The bulk of the chapter is arranged around the criteria established at the outset of the study; that is, particular attention is paid to the local, the learner,

¹ Keith C. Barton, “Home Geography and the Development of Elementary Social Education, 1890-1930,” *Theory and Research in Social Education* 37, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 484-514.

² It is not entirely clear who first used the phrase “new geography” or in what context. The phrase was incorporated by at least 1894 by Spencer Trotter of Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania. The phrase is used here to indicate the whole body of educational reform geared toward teaching and learning in American geography at the turn of the twentieth century. Interestingly enough, claims of a “new geography” have arisen in more recent decades as well, though contexts have changed considerably.

and the community in an effort to demonstrate the extent to which early twentieth century geography education represented a pre-incarnation of modern place-based pedagogy. Among others, the primary works of major figures in the reform of geography education, including Charles and Frank McMurray, William Morris Davis, William James Sutherland, and Harold Wellman Fairbanks, inform this chapter. In addition to those contributions, this chapter also reviews contemporary reports from educational commissions, relevant professional journals, handbooks and manuals for practice, and descriptions of contemporary normal school training. Aside from demonstrating the antiquity of place-based educational thinking through the historical precedent evidenced in early twentieth century geography education, the chapter also clarifies the sociopolitical contexts out of which such changes emerged.

Social & Political Contexts

In large part, the social and political contexts that provided space for the establishment of the nature study movement discussed at the outset of Chapter 3 could be applied equally well to the changes that occurred in geography education during the same era. To clarify, trends in geography education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries closely paralleled developments in American educational progressivism, such as the acute emphasis on the learner and scientific/systematic approach to educational problem solving. On the other hand, the reform of geography education was perhaps less rooted than nature study in conservation or aesthetic appreciations for life and leisure. But there were nonetheless larger Progressive Era forces at work, those in addition to the purely educational.

The establishment of a “new geography” beginning in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in America was in some sense a reflection of a growing scientific spirit. Inspired by European pioneers, particularly the earlier German influences of Alexander Von Humboldt and

Carl Ritter, the study of geography itself began to transform at mid-century into a scientific discipline. Geography began to appear in American universities by the 1890s and the nature of geographical thinking transitioned from an analytical compliment to an academic field of study in its own right. As Malcolm P. Douglass noted in his historical review of geographic pedagogy and literacy, “Geography...found itself torn between its past as an inquiry into the nature of the physical world and the new demands of developing empirical generalizations and even perhaps hypotheses and theories about spatial phenomena.”³ But there were other changes occurring still, and in addition to the general creep of scientific inquiry, there was a simultaneous trend favoring the careful investigation of human, social phenomena. In part, the impactful theoretical contributions of such figures as Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer inspired the appeal of the establishment of new “social sciences.”⁴ As Douglass described the transition, “The decades immediately preceding the turn of the century were witness, particularly, to an intense interest in studying human behavior modeled on the forms of scientific inquiry that were increasingly coming to characterize research in the natural sciences.”⁵ Although geography as a formal discipline would gravitate somewhere in between the natural and social sciences for some time, its rise to prominence as an independent field of study was a significant development, one inspired by a climate “of both discovery and specialization.”⁶ Similarly, whereas American geography in decades past had been largely descriptive, “with hundreds of *what* and *where* questions,” the “new geography” was concerned expressly with causality.⁷ Combined with

³ Malcom P. Douglass, *The History, Psychology, and Pedagogy of Geographic Literacy* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998).

⁴ Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961); Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum: 1893-1958* (New York: Routledge Falmer, 2004).

⁵ Douglass, *The History*, 53.

⁶ *Ibid.* 53.

⁷ Stuart G. Noble, *A History of American Education* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1954), 257.

similar adjustments taking place in the field of education, a new plan for geography study found its way into the American school.

German *Heimatskunde*

In May of 1885, Sir John Scott Keltie delivered a comprehensive report on geography education to the Royal Geographical Society.⁸ The society's inspector, Keltie addressed trends throughout European and North American schools, from the primary level to the university. Of particular interest to the present discussion regarding historical antecedents in place-based education, was the Scot's discussion of the German *Heimatskunde* model, variously presented as *Heimatkunde*.⁹

German Model Defined. With regard to geography education, Keltie reported that Germany "...may be taken as the model which all the other Continental countries are following."¹⁰ At the time of writing, geography as a formal area of investigation was still in its infancy as formalized scientific discipline. While German geographers had made considerable forward progress in the larger pursuit of transforming the study of geography and making for the discipline a unique place in the halls of the university, of equal importance were the efforts of nation's educators to reform geography education at the elementary level.

Keltie explained that the German model was based upon two related educational themes, *Heimatskunde* and *Anschauungslehre*. The former, he loosely assigned to the elementary stage of learning in geography, or elementary-level geography education. The general translation for *Heimatskunde*, typically indicated without the 's' as *Heimatkunde*, read in English as "local," or "home geography." Together with *Anschauungslehre*, which was a reference to "teaching by

⁸ J. Scott Keltie, *Geographical Education*, Report to the Council of the Royal Geographical Society (London: The Royal Geographical Society, 1885).

⁹ Spelling changes occurred over time, but the generalized English translations of "community study," "local study", or "local history" remained consistent.

¹⁰ Keltie, *Geographical Education*, 475.

actual observation,”¹¹ Keltie revealed much about nineteenth century geography education at the elementary level; that is, the German approach entailed both local and experiential, or observational, mechanisms. To clarify, *Heimatskunde*, which implied both a method of instruction and a geography curriculum, suggested that students begin with the local area and move outward.¹² Keltie offered the following explanation from an observation conducted in Leipzig, Germany:

In a Bürgerschule in Leipzig, I was present at another lesson in *Heimatskunde*. The map was a large colored plan of the town and neighborhood, every pupil having a corresponding map before him. First their knowledge of the points of the compass was tested practically; the directions of the principal streets; principle buildings and their positions with reference to squares, streets and other buildings;...Each suburb was treated in the same way. The boys were then sent to the map to point in reply to the teacher’s questions;...A boy was asked where he lived; he would give the suburb and street...Next he had to point out on the map his route to and from school, naming the directions he took ...¹³

The general plan, then, was to contextualize introductory geography learning within local and familiar settings. Later, as students gained knowledge of foundational principles and concepts, the scope of investigation broadened. “The method of *Heimatskunde*,” Keltie added, “proceeds from the town or immediate neighborhood to the district, then to the province, and so outwards to Germany, Europe, and the other parts of the world, in five classes.”¹⁴ From Keltie’s description, the German approach to elementary geography education was fairly well established by the time of writing. As further indication, he referenced textbooks localized by region. Drawing again on his experiences in Leipzig, Keltie reported a student text known as *Hugo’s Heimatskunde von Saxony*,¹⁵ or “The Local Geography of Saxony.” While it was not clear from

¹¹ Keltie, *Geographical Education*, 477; This seems to be a theoretical carryover from Pestalozzi and his conception of *Anschauung*.

¹² Again, these features were not unlike those represented in the work of Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Herbart, among other early educational thinkers. See Chapter 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 477-478.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 478.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

the description how widespread the publication of such texts was across the German provinces, the publication of local geographies was arguably an indication of the influence of *Heimatskunde* as a practice. Moreover, Keltie's appraisal that "...there are many special maps published for *Heimatskunde*, and many textbooks for the use of teachers,"¹⁶ arguably provided additional evidence of the relative importance of the approach.

Field Excursions. Beyond the localized texts and map representations that Keltie linked to *Heimatskunde* in practice was the use of the field excursion as a quintessential tool of the approach. In keeping with both its experiential, first-hand character and the emphasis on the local, the educational "excursion to the districts around the school"¹⁷ seemed a natural result of the underlying principles of community study. Keltie explained: "An essential part of *Heimatskunde*, as planned by Dr. [Freidrich] Finger, who may be regarded as its inventor,...is the taking of pupils on excursions to the districts around the school, and, if practicable during holidays, on somewhat distant tours...At the same time, both in the school neighborhood and elsewhere, opportunity is taken of practically illustrating the elementary facts and principles of geographical knowledge, and of making such observations and experiments in connection therewith as will be understood without difficulty."¹⁸ Despite the innovative practice of geography-related field-trips, portions of Keltie's descriptions of elementary German geography education emphasized the use of the textbook or, alternatively, an intense emphasis on cartography, features which modern observers might associate with traditional name-place geography instruction. Nonetheless, the German practice of *Heimatskunde* as whole was certainly innovative by American and other European educational standards of the day. As Keltie remarked of the French application, "Both in the earlier and more advanced stages,...there seems

¹⁶ Keltie, *Geographical Education*, 478.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 479

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

to me to be a lack of the variety and thoroughness which mark the teaching of geography in German schools.”¹⁹ For Keltie, at least, the German brand of community study remained exemplary by comparison.

In addition to the use of excursions and the emphasis on the local which helped to define the approach, German community study, a part of which was linked to the notion of *Anschauungslehre*, lauded the role of student inquiry in the learning process. Remarkd Keltie:

A very moderate portion is taken as the text of a lesson, or a sentence or two is read out in the class; this is expanded by the teacher from information obtained by him from works published expressly for the use of teachers. He is constantly encouraging the pupils to think for themselves, constantly endeavoring to draw out from them what they themselves know, or what they may be able to read in the maps, pictures, diagrams, ethnological pictures, reliefs, and specimens before them. Every teacher whom I saw at work had a supply of coloured chalk beside him, and made constant and effective use of the black-board, the slate maps, or slate globe.²⁰

However indirectly, Keltie’s illustration indicated that teachers and students shared roles and responsibilities for learning. Student inquiry and first-hand observation, together with the local community aspect, provided a rich environment through which elementary-level students might be introduced to geographical thinking. It is important to note that these characteristics of *Heimatskunde* were very much reiterations of the concerns identified by earlier European educational philosophers. As indicated in Chapter 2, writers such as Comenius demonstrated commitments to experience-based learning in local settings by at least the seventeenth century.²¹ Similarly, the connection between *Anschauungslehre* and Pestalozzi’s *Anschauung* were unmistakable. With European educators leading the way, the practice of designing elementary instruction around the unique experiences of the learner and the environments in which schools were located, slowly moving outward into a wider area of study, would ultimately come to

¹⁹ Keltie, *Geographical Education*, 500.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 482.

²¹ Barton suggests essentially the same though he did not consider the issue in depth.

represent the preferred mode of early geography instruction in the United States as well, whereby a similar practice of home geography would soon gain momentum.²² In addition, and of no lesser importance, the German model of *Heimatskunde*, characterized as it was by the local and experiential elements noted above, was, in a very real way, an approach which exemplified several of the central concerns voiced by modern place-based educators today. Strangely enough, despite unmistakable similarities, modern advocates of place-based education have not endeavored to consider this German pre-incarnation.

German & American Models Compared. Another depiction of the German prowess for geographic study was offered by Will S. Monroe of the State Normal School in Westfield, Massachusetts who offered a critical comparison between the German and North American brands of geography instruction in the late nineteenth century. In the first volume of the *Journal of School Geography*, published 1897, Monroe presented a striking comparison between the American and German traditions.²³ He reminded readers that while his purpose was “...not to glorify German methods and disparage American practices,” he nonetheless intended “to show what is done in the one country that seems to be rational, and what is left undone in the other that would be helpful.”²⁴ In the first place, and far more so than in American schools at the time, German geography education was a part of the curriculum that extended throughout the grades. “German students do not begin the study of geography in the university,” Monroe revealed, “...there has been an extended study of the subject in the elementary and secondary grades.”²⁵ In a comparison of the various types of German schools (e.g., *Burgershule*, *Realshule*, *Gymnasium*,

²² It may be the case that local study in American education was ever-present and pre-dated the era of educational progressivism. Nonetheless, it is clear that the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought renewed and broad interest in the types of reforms discussed here.

²³ W.S. Monroe, “Geographic Instruction in Germany,” *Journal of School Geography* 1 (1897): 10-14.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

etc.) and the typical American school, specifically the public schools of Boston, Monroe went on to demonstrate that in terms of both class time and distribution across the grades, the American schools offered considerably less instruction in geography. The same was true, of course, in normal school settings. Noted Monroe:

What is true of the elementary school and secondary schools is equally true of the normal schools. At Weimar, for example, where the students are admitted after completing the course of instruction in the elementary schools (8 years) a six-year course is provided in the normal school. Geography is given two hours a week the first, second, third and fourth years, one and a-half hours the fifth year and one hour the sixth year, or ten and a-half hours for the six years. At Bridgewater, Mass., which may perhaps be taken as a type of the better American normal school, geography receives five hours for one-half year.²⁶

Across the educational spectrum, then, from the elementary level to the normal school and university, Monroe illustrated the somewhat underdeveloped practice of geography education in America by comparison to the German program of the same era.

Monroe found similar inadequacies with regard to the relative practices of home geography in German and American schools, the former boasting far more experience with the localized, experiential approach. "Home geography," Monroe explained, "the study of local forms and forces within the observation of the child, preliminary to the more formal study of the book, is peculiar to Germany."²⁷ He illustrated the practice further:

Teacher and children make the excursion together during school hours. Sometimes it occupies a half-hour; sometimes two hours; sometimes a half-day. In a German town of 15,000 inhabitants I occasionally accompanied the second grade of a primary school on these geographic excursions; and more orderly, systematic instruction I have never seen ...Sometimes it was in crowded streets in the town,...but the children took no heed of the passers and passers paid no attention to the children, for they had been taught geography that way themselves when they were young.²⁸

²⁶ Monroe, "Geographic Instruction in Germany," 11-12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 12. This seems to contradict Barton's assessment to some extent as he suggested that the practice was widespread in both American and German schools.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

In short, local geography was a German institution. Monroe drew further distinctions with regard to the use of textbooks and the consideration of the human dimensions of geography study. With regard to the former, Monroe noted that “Learning from the book – committing geographic facts to memory – so characteristic of our work in the United States, is almost unknown in Germany.”²⁹ To the latter, to human geographical study, he reported the following: “The study of people – the human side of the study – receives larger consideration there than here. It was not uncommon to find German children knowing much more about the American Indians, for example, than I. The social and industrial life of the different races, with the physical and mental characteristics, is studied by the aid of descriptions, pictures and charts. Völkerkunde, the races of man and their geographic distribution, begins early in the school course and continues through the university.”³⁰ The anthropological consideration of physical and mental characteristics would ultimately draw criticism and undergo considerable disciplinary revision, yet the fact remained that the German model placed far greater emphasis on the human dimensions of geography than the American educational counterpart at the turn of the twentieth century. Of course, the American model, at the insistence of Monroe and others, would soon undergo its own transformation, adopting many of the attributes long theorized and practiced in Germany.

American Home Geography

Barton has suggested that American educators began to call for the wider use of the local environment in the study and teaching of geography by at least the middle nineteenth century. “In the mid-nineteenth-century,” he reported, “American educators...argued that students should draw conclusions from concrete geographic details, and that instruction should begin with the

²⁹ Monroe, “Geographic Instruction in Germany,” 13.

³⁰ Ibid.

immediate vicinity – an approach that was known at the time as ‘local geography’ - and gradually expanded to include the entire county, continent, or world (McMannis, 1911).”³¹ Early advocacy for a localized approach to geography education would gain renewed momentum in the last decade of the nineteenth century as disciplinary geography itself underwent a process of clarification and reinvention and with the onset of the era of educational progressivism. Within that new project, a number of core themes emerged that today, for the modern reader, represent themes essentially similar to those represented in the field of place-based education. Progressive era geography reform represented, for instance, a local focus that recognized a certain educational utility in local, geographical phenomena. In addition, American geography reform in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries highlighted the potential of local contexts to provide students with opportunities for first-hand observation and inquiry, an alternative to academic formalism. And finally, for some advocates at least, the new geography informed the discussion about the relationship between the school and the community through its emphasis on the social elements of a geography education. In this way, the transformation of geography education in American educational circles at the turn of the twentieth century very much paralleled the central characteristics that one finds today within the domain of place-based education. The discussion below addresses these themes in greater detail.

New Geography as Localized Curricula

Home geography, an important part of the new geography orientation, was inherently local in scope. The investigation, almost without exception, began with the historical, cultural, and physical geographical settings within the immediate vicinity of the school and the student’s neighborhood. In 1894, C. C. Long published *Home Geography for the Primary Grades*. In some sense a forecast of subsequent writing on the subject, Long’s position was essentially that

³¹ Barton, “Home Geography,” 488-489.

geography education in the elementary school might be best thought of as a range of topics spanning from the learner's immediate locale on the one hand and the world as a whole on the other. "Geography," he noted, "may be divided into the geography of the home and the geography of the world at large."³² Of course, this fundamental understanding also did much to define his recommendations for practice. In the earliest years of introduction to the field, students were to engage in the study of local geography. "The first work,..." he noted, "is to study that small part of the earth's surface lying just at our doors. All around are illustrations of lake and river, upland and lowland, slope and valley."³³ For Long, local settings played a significant role in the development of geography instruction.

Following a brief introduction outlining the function of home geography in the larger pursuit of geographic learning, Long dedicated some fifty chapters to practical recommendations for the classroom teacher. Direction, map-reading, the elements, basic landforms, and common animals were among the chapter topics that he offered. Although Long's geography was primarily geared toward physical geographic understanding, he also addressed human geographical subjects; that is, his early contribution to the field represented somewhat of a bifurcated approach (i.e., human and physical) even at the earliest stages.³⁴ Human geographical investigations dealt primarily with economic modes of living, namely occupations, commerce, and trade. Whether physical or human geographical, his practical suggestions for the classroom were very consistent with the broader rationale for home geography as a localized tool for elementary geography instructors. The excerpt below illustrated the type of localized, context specific format that Long recommended:

³² C.C. Long, *Home Geography for Primary Grade* (New York: American Book Company, 1894), 3.

³³ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁴ Of the approximate 150 pages of text, in fact, only two chapters, roughly twenty pages in total, were committed to human geography.

Did you ever see the sun rise? Point to the place where you saw the sun rise. The direction in which the sun seems to rise is called the *east*...

When coming to school this morning, in what direction did you see the sun? If we walk so that the morning sun shines in our faces, in what direction are we going? What direction is behind us?...

In what direction from the schoolhouse is the playground? What is the first street or road north of the school? The first street or road east? South? West?

In what direction is your home from the school? The school from your home? The nearest church from the school? The post office from your home?³⁵

Though the passage was generalized and applicable across the wide range of imaginable school settings, it nonetheless illustrated Long's general approach to incorporate local, neighborhood experiences into the study of geography. Of course, Long was among many others in his effort to design and promote a revised plan for elementary geography education.

The Committee of Fifteen on Elementary Education. Established in 1893 by the National Education Association, the Committee of Fifteen was instituted for the purpose of addressing a series of educational problems ranging from teacher education to the best formulation for the elementary course of study. The Committee delivered its final report in February of 1895 and the published version was made available through *Educational Review* in March of the same year, titled *The Report of the Committee of Fifteen*. Of particular relevance to the present discussion was the Committee's attempt to address the "distinct pedagogical value"³⁶ of the various curricular disciplines, of which geography was one example. The *Report* drew several important and related conclusions regarding the organization of the elementary course, including geography, in such a way that not only reflected, but perhaps solidified, contemporary trends in the field.

The *Report* reached the general conclusion that "...psychology will furnish important considerations that will largely determine the methods of instruction, the order of taking up the

³⁵ Long, *Home Geography*, 12-14.

³⁶ Committee of Fifteen on Elementary Education, *Report of the Committee of Fifteen on Elementary Education* (New York: American Book Company, 1895), 11.

several topics so as to adapt the school work to the growth of the pupil's capacity, and the amount of work so as not to overtax his powers by too much or arrest the development of strength by too little."³⁷ The Committee carried these general assumptions throughout its recommendations for elementary study in geography. From the starting point of the learner's familiar environment and then outward was the expected transition. "The child commences with what is nearest to his interests," the *Report* stated, "and proceeds gradually toward what is remote and to be studied for its own sake."³⁸ While the Committee did not successfully endeavor to provide an extended consideration of the utility of the home and neighborhood in the teaching of geography, in fact denying much what the Herbartian and child study advocates offered to that end,³⁹ the *Report* nonetheless revealed a commitment to local geography in the overall elementary plan. At the very least, the Committee of Fifteen seemed to follow the general pattern for Progressive Era geography education, one that called for an outwardly expanding curriculum with an initial emphasis on the local.

Henry Button may have been correct in his critique that for the Committee of Fifteen "...the individual was a subsidiary concern."⁴⁰ Despite the overall failure of advocacy for a more individualized set of reforms for the elementary school curriculum on the part of Herbartians like Charles and Frank McMurry, or child study advocates such as Colonel Francis Parker, notable representatives of the Committee all, principles related to such educational concerns as prior knowledge, student interest and motivation, and curricular articulation were evident nonetheless. Those concerns and the attention paid to local, familiar settings in elementary geography education were very much in keeping with contemporary efforts directed toward the reform of

³⁷ *Report of the Committee of Fifteen*, 43.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

³⁹ Henry Button, "Committee of Fifteen," *History of Education Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (December 1965): 253-263.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 261.

the field in American schools. Without overlooking the subtexts of Committee of Fifteen and the philosophical debates that arose regarding its findings, the *Report* arguably did much to solidify and institutionalize the growing momentum toward an expanding horizons approach to geography education.⁴¹ A significant development in the history of American education, the trend also represented an important chapter in this historical appraisal of place-based education, as Progressive Era approaches to teaching and learning in geography contained some of the same foundational themes underlying the modern model.

William Morris Davis. A Harvard scholar, William Morris Davis was another significant figure in the transformation of American geography education in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Like his contemporaries, a significant feature of Davis' reform agenda revolved around the installation of local geography. In his conception, local study was not simply a program designed to teach young learner's about their home environments, but to "...present clearly enough the real meaning of geographical forms..."⁴² Davis was critical of what he perceived to be a lack of rigorous geographical investigation, as well as the deficit of emphasis on "systematic and serious"⁴³ examination of the physical world. The remedy for practicing and pre-service teachers alike, he insisted, could be found through a greater emphasis on local environmental contexts. Davis explained that "More attention to the home district is demanded even in the earliest classes. Better training is therefore needed in the appreciative recognition of the meaning to the physical features of the land immediately about us; for wherever the teacher goes, his geographical laboratory is in the fields about him, and he must be prepared to solve its

⁴¹ See Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge Falmer, 2004) for more on the controversy surrounding the Committee of Fifteen.

⁴² W. M. Davis, "The Teaching of Geography," *Educational Review* 1 (May 1892): 423.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

problems and present them properly to his classes.”⁴⁴ Deep consideration of local geography was of considerable importance.

Charles A. McMurry. Like Davis, Charles A. McMurry was a force in the reform of Progressive Era geography education. First published in 1895, his *Special Method in Geography*⁴⁵ was but one part of an expanded series on elementary education designed to invigorate traditional practice. His intention was in part to achieve the aim “...of making geography thoroughly instructive and stimulating to children.”⁴⁶ To do so, McMurry offered a sample course of study for the third and fourth-grades in geography, a central component of which was local geography. As the name would suggest, McMurry’s home geography asked young learners to investigate their immediate surroundings through all of the various dimensions that comprised the field. To clarify, McMurry’s local study emphasized both physical and human-cultural issues.

McMurry’s effort to outline the sub-parts of his geography reform plan were instructive.

He outlined relevant themes in the following manner:

There are seven principle topics that may be thus experimentally studied in home geography:

1. Food products, and occupations with them.
2. Building materials and related trades.
3. Clothing materials used, manufacture, etc.
4. Local commerce, roads, bridges, railroads.
5. Local surface features. Streams, hills, woods, etc.
6. Towns and county government. Court-house, etc.
7. Climate and seasons. Sun, wind, storms, heat.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Davis, “The Teaching of Geography,” 424.

⁴⁵ Charles A. McMurry, *Special Method in Geography: Third and Fourth Grades*, 4th ed. (Bloomington, IL: Public-School Publishing Company, 1899).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

McMurry noted that practitioners need not feel obligated to follow in lock-step the outline he offered, although the emphasis on local context was perhaps inexorable, as was the understanding that home geography must encompass both physical and human domains.

A compliment to *Special Methods in Geography*, McMurry published in 1903 a revised text by the same title in which he offered suggestions for an articulated elementary course of study. As he had elsewhere, McMurry highlighted his preference for the outward movement of the geography curriculum from the local to the global. The sample third-grade course contained ten elements in total, again spanning both physical and cultural geographic domains. As instructed, McMurry based the topics under consideration almost unanimously around locally available objects and activities. For instance, McMurry called for a number of visits to local gardens and farms. Along the way, he added that there would likely be "...opportunity for incidental observation of the open country, fields, woods, streams, hills, soils, roads, bridges, and various occupations and industries."⁴⁸ In addition to farms and gardens, McMurry suggested visits to local industries related to the manufacture of clothing, the observation of a home under construction to observe "different kinds of trades and tools employed in building," and excursions to shops, stores, and local parks.⁴⁹ Each of these observational visits, he suggested, provided students with locally available experiences which practitioners might build upon in the classroom.

The local focus of the McMurry's third-grade geography course also included "local map-making."⁵⁰ He explained the practice thus: "Beginning with the schoolhouse and grounds, make a simple map of the town and neighborhood, with two or three streets and a few roads leading into the country. The creek or river is included and the railroads to neighboring towns.

⁴⁸ McMurry, *Elements of General Method*, 167.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 169.

Use sand maps also to express surface irregularities, and let the points of the compass be taught incidentally. After a little practice the maps can be drawn to a scale.”⁵¹ McMurry went on to describe the relevance of local history in geography work. “Local history, grandfather stories, family histories, leading men and families,” he added, were all worthy of attention in the third-grade course. Practitioners might also include consideration of “Indian stories,...Historical relics, public buildings, monuments, and museums,...” and other “Places of historic interest.”⁵² But while his third-grade home geography was most focused on the locally available objects and practices, it was not exclusively so. To clarify, McMurry called on elementary-level teachers to introduce “The study of the world-whole,”⁵³ by which he intended an initial entrée to the spatial geography of the earth’s surface. Perhaps more revealing was McMurry’s emphasis on “Primitive peoples and occupations.”⁵⁴ An early foray into the traditions and practices of peoples and cultures of the world, third-grade students might begin with indigenous North American groups, especially the “Eskimo of the North,...The Indians as described by Parkman, Starr and other travelers; and the Zuni Indians of the Southwest and Mexico.”⁵⁵ From there, McMurry recommended the use of several popular world cultural texts. “The ‘Seven Little Sisters’ and ‘Each and All,’” he reported, “furnish simple descriptions of life in the chief regions of the world for third-grade children getting their first notions of distant peoples and countries.”⁵⁶ With this in mind, McMurry’s plan for geography in the third-grade was absolutely localized, but also preparatory for an outward, global focus in later years of study. This expanding horizons model was evident throughout his work, though he never utilized the phrase formally.

⁵¹ Charles A. McMurry, *The Elements of General Method Based on the Principles of Herbart* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1904), 169.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 170.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

In McMurry's fourth-grade course, excursions into the school surroundings continued. He emphasized "Local physiography," by which he meant the "landscapes, hills, valleys, streams, and tributaries"⁵⁷ within the vicinity of school. "Local commerce,"⁵⁸ too, gained attention and McMurry offered the following description: "The town as a local trade centre. Roads leading into the country. Products of farms, gardens, and forests brought into town. Railroads, freight offices, and shipment of goods. Local factories and their shipments. Goods retailed to town and country people. A small town is the best illustration for children of a trade centre. A county-seat is usually the best examples of a trade centre for the all the roads of the county."⁵⁹ From local commerce and physiography, he transitioned to discuss to the significance of investigation into "Local government."⁶⁰ In the local geography study, McMurry explained, "...government should deal with well-known people and objects which illustrate the facts of law-making, taxes, election, office-holding, and other duties of magistrates."⁶¹ Aside from those three areas (e.g., physiography, commerce, and government), McMurry's recommendations for the fourth-grade recommended intermediate areas of study; that is, those areas of study between the local and the global. More specifically, the state, the region, and the nation represented an increasing portion of elementary geography, as did investigations into Europe and the world generally. This outward-moving trend was all the more pronounced from the fifth-grade onward. By the seventh and eighth grades, for instance, any topics that observers might even casually regard as a part of a home geography study were replaced by European and global topics.

McMurry's contributions to the transformation of geography education were significant. His efforts to provide an articulated course of study and his attention to a holistic consideration

⁵⁷ McMurry, *Elements of General Method*, 171.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

of geography were noteworthy. In addition, one also found in McMurry's work an outwardly expanding curriculum, whereby the earliest investigations were based within a full range of locally available phenomena. An early leader in the field, the essential features in McMurry's plan enjoyed wide appeal.

Oswego Normal School. First published in 1896, *The Oswego Normal Method of Teaching Geography* illustrated a concise, and somewhat rare, description of American geography education in an era when effective practice in that domain had gained considerable attention among disciplinarians, educational scholars, and practitioners alike. Contributed by Amos W. Farnham, a teacher of geography methods and organizer of the practice school attached to Oswego, the text was offered as a sort of manual of best practices for pre-service and practicing teachers alike. E. A. Sheldon further clarified purposes in his prefatory remarks: “[*Method of Teaching Geography*] is not designed for memory work. It is full of good suggestions for the teacher; not a guide for him to follow blindly and implicitly, but rather to point out directions in which he may lead his pupils,- outlines of work to be executed in accordance with the conditions and circumstances, the environments and thought or ingenuity of the teacher.”⁶² Aside from Sheldon's laudatory remarks, Farnham himself identified several overarching purposes for his conception of effective geography education. Among the reasons for teaching geography, he offered the following abbreviated list:

1. To explain the development of man...
2. To cultivate the imaginative and aesthetic nature...
3. To explain and illumine history...
4. To develop a broad philanthropy...
5. To develop a spirit of investigation...
6. To temper man's judgments with regard to human weaknesses caused by natural environment...
7. To develop man's reverence for human progress...

⁶² Amos W. Farnham, *The Oswego Normal Method of Teaching Geography* (Syracuse, NY: C.W. Bardeen, 1896), 5.

8. To furnish the basis for other sciences...
9. To influence character...⁶³

While several of the goals noted, particularly the vague references to the relationships between race and environment, were later refined by professional anthropologists and geographers alike, the overall force of Oswego's agenda for geography education was largely consistent with that of other contemporary reformers. Perhaps most importantly in the context of an historical evaluation of place-based educational theory and practice, Oswego's central goals for geography education, specifically the emphasis on local study, situate the method in close proximity to what is here presented as its modern counterpart.

Farnham's illustration of the Oswego method read more or less as a course syllabus across the grades, from fourth through ninth-grade geography. In the earliest grades, his descriptions of content and methodology followed a clear course of local geographical study. Much of the emphasis, Farnham placed upon direction, distance and other similar spatial concepts, all of which students were to gain an understanding of through the school grounds, and soon after, through an investigation of the neighborhood. The recommendations offered for location, direction, and distance were illustrative of a localized study: "The term location as it used in these outlines, implies direction and distance. Children should make thorough and frequent application of the ideas of cardinal and semi-cardinal directions during their study of the city and its surroundings. They should also make actual measurements of distance...Children should learn first-hand the length and width of the city blocks, and then they should use these dimensions in calculating city distances."⁶⁴ Farnham went on to reveal the explicit connection to home geography within the Oswego method of geography instruction. Citing the German scholar, Carl Ritter, he noted that "The very first step in a knowledge of geography, is to know

⁶³ Farnham, *The Oswego Normal Method*, 11-12.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

thoroughly the districts where we live.”⁶⁵ In the case of fourth-grade instruction at Oswego, local study implied geographical description of the city, including its bridges, buildings, parks, and key organizations. Oswego geography also called for an investigation of local industry, occupations, and the various nationalities of its inhabitants. Weather patterns, principal rivers, and the general topography of the city were also central concerns. In every way, then, whether physical or human geographical in scope, the Oswego plan for the elementary grades was based almost entirely around local geographical phenomena. As demonstrated through its articulated course outlines, the localized nature of geography instruction at Oswego gradually waned in the latter grades. In the fifth and sixth-grades, the subject of study moved into deeper considerations of atmospheric processes, the water cycle, and the orientation and character of the earth. While Farnham did approach the fifth-grade emphasis on the water cycle and hydrology through a field lesson near a local brook basin, the sixth-grade, by contrast, contained little reference to the local environment at all, either physical or cultural. In the seventh, eighth, and ninth-grades, the Oswego model made virtually no reference to the local, as topics under consideration were largely world geographical in scope. In addition to highlighting the perpetuation of an expanding horizons approach, Farnham’s report on Oswego demonstrated the institutional support that a highly localized elementary-level course for geography received at the turn of the twentieth century. The installation of local study at the normal school level was significant and, in comparison to modern place-based education, the teacher education component was far more developed. It is not clear, however, that modern place-based educational scholars have considered the connection to Progressive Era geography reform, nor the ways in which initiatives at Oswego might potentially inform modern practice.

⁶⁵ Farnham, *The Oswego Normal Method*, 26.

The New Basis of Geography. A fellow of the Royal Geographic Society, Jacques W. Redway, too, pointed to the value of local study in the context of geography education. In a 1901 publication entitled *The New Basis of Geography*, Redway identified an important connection between geography education and contemporary work in nature study. Beginning in the fourth-grade, he recommended that nature study give way to observational work under the heading of home geography. “In the fourth year,” he explained, “...the field work should be made systematic, taking the topics that commonly are included in ‘home geography,’ that is, the geography that may be studied in the vicinity of the home and the schoolhouse.”⁶⁶ In addition to basic weather study, distance, and direction, economic geography was among the potential localized content Redway assigned to the fourth-grade. In the fifth-grade, too, readers found at least a partial emphasis on local study. Clarifying the practice of out-of-door studies, Redway recommended that “The emphasis of course should be placed on the geographic features within the pupil’s horizon.”⁶⁷ In the sixth-grade, observational work intensified to some degree to include, in addition to other subjects, local forestry. In the seventh and eighth-grades, too, local study endured. As Redway offered in his discussion of the eighth grade course, “In work of this kind it is, of course, necessary to remember one’s own neighborhood; the study of geography, like charity, begins at home.”⁶⁸ Redway’s curricular recommendations ended with the eighth grade and it was not at all clear what role local study was to play in the high school. Through his suggestions for curriculum and instruction across grades four through eight, however, readers found a consistent reliance on local phenomena, not to mention an effort to layout an articulated course of study.

⁶⁶ Jacques W. Redway, *The New Basis of Geography: A Manual For the Preparation of the Teacher* (London: MacMillan Company, 1901), 188.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 203.

In addition to his analysis and recommendations for an articulated geography curriculum, Redway provided a critique of teacher education. “The most difficult task that confronts the grade teacher of geography,” he concluded, “is the matter of preparation for teaching the subject.”⁶⁹ Recognizing the pressures of tradition and “compulsory examinations,”⁷⁰ Redway outlined several of the key features he deemed necessary to reform practice. Among the changes recommended, he believed that teachers needed a deeper understanding of geographical content knowledge. “First of all, one should possess a general knowledge of the peoples of other parts of the world and the countries in which they live,”⁷¹ he insisted. In addition to careful reading and content preparation, Redway reasoned that “...if the teacher can spend even a single vacation among foreign peoples, in a foreign land, the help will be very great, and of the most practical kind.”⁷² Accompanied by deep and broad understanding of human-cultural geography, Redway suggested that teachers also work to develop the same depth of knowledge in the physical domain of the discipline. Here, he illustrated a learning process framed in laboratory work and local study, not unlike his recommendations for the grade-school pupil in geography. Redway offered the following:

The field work should be that of the neighborhood, and should include a pretty close study of all the forms and processes that appear to have given it shape. A good working knowledge of the physical geography of the neighborhood is necessary in two ways. Not only must the teacher draw upon it for illustrations required in the class room [*sic*], but it is highly necessary in mastering the general principles of geography. For instance, a student may have become thoroughly acquainted with the illustration of some physiographic feature or process without knowing much about the general principles involved; but when the latter are investigated in their broadest relation, the student has the mental picture of the illustration already at hand. Moreover, it often happens that the actual field investigation of one form or process renders the descriptive study of another quite as easy to comprehend as would be the actual field study of it.⁷³

⁶⁹ Redway, *New Basis of Geography*, 206.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 206-207.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 207.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 209.

Redway believed that practitioners should engage in a consideration of the neighborhood geography in their preparation for the classroom in a way that was not unlike his plan for students. His extensive discussion of relevant texts for geography study implied quite strongly that he intended for teachers of geography to become dedicated students themselves. Redway was thoroughly dedicated to utilizing local contexts in the pursuit of geographic learning and the energy that he put into describing the function of teacher education revealed much about the challenges of carrying out effective and lasting reform in the field.

Localized Geography Texts. As further indication of the growing prominence of the emphasis on local context and home geography in the early twentieth century, was the publication of area-specific geography texts that became available to practitioners. Published in 1903, one such illustration was *Home Geography: Greater New York Edition*. Authored by Ralph S. Tarr and Frank M. McMurry, the brother and colleague of Charles McMurry, the text intended to serve the purposes of an instructional aide to New York-based teachers and students. Additionally, and of particular importance for the present discussion, *Home Geography* represented a clear rationale for the significance of the local in elementary study in the field. Tarr and McMurry subdivided *Home Geography* into three distinct sections, entitled “Home Geography,” “The Earth as a Whole,” and “The City of New York,” respectively. Each of the constituent parts contained detailed descriptions, maps, and illustrations on a wide variety of physical and human geographical topics, in each case highlighting the interconnectedness between human societies and the environment. For example, where they included discussion of the various climatic zones and the distribution of solar energy between the poles, a consideration of the potential impact on human culture was equally close at hand. To this end, Tarr and McMurry offered the following justification: “According to the definition of geography, - which

treats of the relation between man and the earth, - a hill or a lake is worthy of mention only because it bears a relation to us, the men upon the earth; considered by itself it is not a part of geography. Therefore each chapter which takes up one of the above subjects, either closes with the bearing of the given topic upon mankind, or it deals with the human relationship throughout.”⁷⁴ Tarr and McMurry’s conception of geography was a holistic one and equally significant was the inclusion of numerous recommendations for the localization of study. At the conclusion of each geographical discussion, nearly thirty in total, they offered a series of probing questions, sample excursions, and experiments that might work to encourage local investigations. Excerpted from a section on the valley as a geographical feature, the following extended passage illustrated the form of suggestions offered:

- (1) Find a tiny valley and watch to see if it is changed in any way by a heavy rain.
- (2) Find a still larger valley in your neighborhood.
- (3) Find the divide on each side of it.
- (4) Show that the street and roads are so made that they have a watershed...
- (6) Where is the largest valley in your neighborhood.
- (7) Is your home in one of the very large valleys, or in a small one?...
- (10) Why should swamp land that has been drained raise uncommonly good crops?...
- (12) Find some beautiful views in your neighborhood...
- (14) Write a story telling how valleys have been formed.⁷⁵

Elsewhere, following a discussion of industry and commerce, they added the suggestions listed below: “... (7) Visit a general store in the country. (8) Visit a factory, a blacksmith shop, or a mill. Describe the visit. (9) Make a list of the articles that you use which were probably brought from a distance on the railroad or on water. (10) Find out where some of them came from. (11) What is meant by the word *ford*? The last syllable in the name of a great many towns is *ford*, as

⁷⁴ Ralph S. Tarr and Frank M. McMurry, *Home Geography*, Greater New York Edition (London: MacMillan Company, 1903), vi.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

Hartford, Stamford, and Rockford; what does that suggest to you?...”⁷⁶ Recommendations such as those sampled above illustrated the local emphasis characteristic of suggestive materials, experiments, and questions provided by Tarr and McMurry. The numerous offerings were highly relevant to the overall methodological emphasis on the neighborhood and community which undergirded much of their approach. To state in another way, Tarr and McMurray’s elementary geography, as evidenced through *Home Geography*, was localized with regard to both content and methodology. Even where the content highlighted was not uniquely local, as was the case with much of Part II of the text which addressed the physical properties of the earth as a whole, Tarr and McMurry made concerted efforts to localize instruction by providing suggestions for the classroom which offered first-hand experiences for learners within the confines of the immediate surrounds of the school and community, a feature of their work addressed in greater detail in a subsequent section.

Of course, much of *Home Geography* was, in fact, uniquely localized with regard to content. Part III, for instance, entitled “The City of New York,” provided an exhaustive geographic consideration of the physical and cultural geography of one of the nation’s largest city. The topography, the waterways and harbors, transportation systems, history, and key sites of interests of New York were among numerous topics discussed by Tarr and McMurry. They also provided an independent discussion of the people and lifeways of New York. Under the heading “The People and How They Live,” Tarr and McMurry outlined the city’s famous boroughs and generalized descriptions of each. The passage below was illustrative: “There are factories in all the boroughs, though most of them are in Manhattan and Brooklyn. In many parts of the city, not only are factories grouped together, but particular trades or occupations are found in the same neighborhood. Thus the financial, or money district, is around Wall or Broad streets.

⁷⁶ Tarr and McMurry, *Home Geography*, 38.

The wholesale jewelry district is on and near Maiden Lane. That for wholesale dry-goods is west of Broadway, from chambers street to Canal...”⁷⁷ At other times, they moved beyond the commercial character of the various city districts to discuss such issues as wealth, providing a momentary glimpse into the lives of New Yorkers. Tarr and McMurry reported: “The homes of Manhattan are not for the wealthy or well-to-do alone. There are districts where the houses are so crowded with people that there are as many in a single block as in some towns. The rooms are small and often poorly lighted. These people usually work very hard, and do much for the prosperity of the city.”⁷⁸ The expository nature of the selected passage was more or less representative of the whole. At the same time, however, Tarr and McMurry elsewhere assumed a somewhat more explanatory style. In the excerpted passage below, for instance, they offered a preliminary explanation of the complexities of immigration in the New York area and the perceived significance of the school as a socializing institution. They wrote:

When an immigrant lands, he naturally wishes to go where the people understand his language and way of living. But those who come from the British Isles can get along anywhere in this country. Why? Many people have come from the southern countries of Europe and they have often made little cities of their own in the midst of the great city. If you walk through the streets of these neighborhoods, you will hear the older men and women speaking strange words. Their clothing is different from yours...By what magic are children who here, knowing nothing of our law, customs, or language transformed into Americans? Every few blocks you will see a handsome building with the flag of our country floating above the roof. It is a public school.⁷⁹

More telling than the character of the interpretation provided by Tarr and McMurry was the presence of interpretation itself. In other words, the vivid picture of New York City contained in *Home Geography* was arguably intended as more than a descriptive text alone; it was offered by the authors to practitioners in their efforts to produce a starting point for geographic inquiry into the social relationships characteristic of the home area of the learner. These initial

⁷⁷ Tarr and McMurry, *Home Geography*, 163.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 167-168.

understandings would ultimately transform into a wider consideration of the discipline. Tarr and McMurry's area-specific text was an artifact of the wider appreciation for local study and holism in the reform of geography education at the turn of the twentieth century. Along similar lines, the presence of area-specific texts seemed to be indicative of the appeal of local study at the turn of the century.

William James Sutherland. Published in 1909, William James Sutherland's *The Teaching of Geography* provided yet another illustration of the types of curriculum and practice idealized by many educational progressives in the early decades of the twentieth century, including the localized approach so widely advocated. Echoing the critique leveled against traditional geography education in the decades prior, Sutherland expressed concern over what he perceived to be a general reluctance on the part of practitioners to vitalize the use of the discipline in the school. "Their view of the subject, their method of teaching it," he noted of teachers, "restricts its value and curtails the interests which it ought to enlist from pupils."⁸⁰ As Sutherland viewed the problem, the barrier to educational progress stemmed in large part from the ill-conceived notions of the discipline that he believed so many elementary teachers held. In large part, he intended *The Teaching of Geography* to be corrective in a dual sense. In the first place, the text offered a reconceptualized view of geography. Sutherland added to that mission the complimentary function of practical classroom suggestions, much of which was informed by local context.

Of particular value in the pursuit of an historical consideration of place-based educational theory and practice, was Sutherland's evaluation of the role that familiar settings played in geography education. In short, his plan was one which incorporated local settings into the introductory phases of learning. Home geography, which he sometimes referred to as

⁸⁰ William J. Sutherland, *The Teaching of Geography* (Chicago: Scott Foresman, 1909), 3.

“observational geography,”⁸¹ was to provide an introductory experience for elementary learners. Prior to the fourth year, Sutherland explained, elementary-level students were to engage in the fairly informal investigation of the home community. In large part, this function could be achieved through effective work in nature study, a domain he deemed to be highly complementary. Sutherland wrote: “The introduction of the formal study is or should be made through the study of nature. The object of systematic nature-study in the lower grades is to put the child into full sympathy with his immediate environment.”⁸² Like Redway and others, Sutherland’s emphasis on local phenomena brought his reform plan into practical union with certain elements of nature study, an educational practice discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Lastly, Sutherland also addressed the role of local knowledge in the effective preparation for teachers in his analysis of geography education. Among general content understandings explored, he implored practitioners to become well acquainted with the community of which the school was a part. “A good preparation,” Sutherland wrote, “must include the ability to interpret geographical features in one’s own environment. How often people are wholly oblivious to the interesting features of the neighborhood?”⁸³ The following excerpt was perhaps indicative of the type of geographical knowledge he demanded: “Suppose again that one passes a stream in Iowa and notes that the banks are nearly on a level with the water...; or crosses the Illinois and observes its bluffs and banks...; and finally crossing the Fox observes the features..., what interpretations will he make of these varying characteristics? And these are familiar and typical aspects of the Upper Mississippi valley.”⁸⁴ The passage above reflected Sutherland’s station in

⁸¹ Sutherland, *The Teaching of Geography*, 39.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 132-133.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 134.

Wisconsin, but expressed the general notion that knowledge of local geography was critical preparation for the type of instruction he advocated nonetheless.

Summary. Through the several texts considered above, the prominence that the local geographical settings attained in the education of young learners in the geography classroom was apparent. By at least the last decade of the nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth century, scholars concerned with the reform of American geography education consistently initiated their reform plans within those familiar contexts in the immediate vicinity of the school. The practice was apparently widely shared and there was strong indication that the approach enjoyed institutional support, as evidenced through conversations surrounding normal school training, area-specific textbooks, and arguably the findings presented by the Committee of Fifteen on Elementary Education. Like its German precursor in *Heimatskunde*, the home geographical aspect of the new American geography was a localized practice. The local, often regarded as an effective entrée for elementary-level geography students, slowly transitioned into the wider context of the region, the nation, and the world. This expanding horizons framework, which has persisted even to the present, has been in practice for more than a century. Despite the longevity of practice, it is unclear that place-based educators have ventured to evaluate the significance of the important developments that grew out of Progressive Era geography education, a clear antecedent to the modern field. Of course, the attention to local contexts in geography education were oftentimes based upon certain understandings about the needs of students and the nature of learning itself and this feature of Progressive Era geography reform lends further credence to its position as a significant historical predecessor of modern place-based education.

New Geography & the Learner

The localized and outwardly expanding characteristics of Progressive Era geography education did not represent instructional choices at which reform advocates arrived haphazardly. Much to the contrary, educational reforms proposed for the discipline were often couched in considerations of the nature of learning and the unique needs of the student. More specifically, geography educators typically emphasized local contexts in an effort to provide for students an experiential learning environment, one in which first-hand observation was central. Similarly, and in part a reflection of assumptions regarding the purposes of geography as a discipline, reform-minded writers in the field hoped to arrange curriculum and instruction around problem-solving and inquiry, a strong contrast to the academic traditionalism that was so predominant. And lastly, an element of the new geography education was based in the progressive educational notion that student motivation and interest were often outgrowths of familiar contexts.

C. C. Long. An early representation of a localized plan for geography education, Long's plan was based on a consideration of student interest, which he believed could be gained almost naturally through an investigation of familiar settings and phenomena. "...[F]orms must be actually observed by the pupil," he wrote, "mental pictures obtained, in order that he may be enabled to build up in his mind other mental pictures of similar unseen forms."⁸⁵ From his initial focus on student interest, Long explained that a sort of transition occurred whereby the student's imagination, built upon experiences locally, could serve as the foundation for understandings of non-local geography via the creative impulse. The following passage was illustrative of such a transition:

The hill that he climbs each day may, by an appeal to his imagination, represent to him the lofty Andes or the Alps. From the meadow, or the bit of level land near the door, may be developed a notion of plain and prairie. The little stream that flows past the

⁸⁵ Long, *Home Geography*, 3.

schoolhouse door, or even one formed by the sudden shower, may speak to him of the Mississippi, the Amazon, or the Rhine...Thus, after the pupil has acquired elementary ideas by actual perception, the imagination can use them in contrasting, on a larger scale, mental pictures of similar objects outside the bounds of his own experience and observation.⁸⁶

From first-hand experience to imagination, Long built his recommendations for geography study around local environments in the earliest years of study, later expanding to build new experiences upon older ones. Although Long did not use the phrase himself, this expanding horizons framework was essentially similar to other contemporary reforms in progressive era geography education.

In some sense, Long's call for local study was a critique of traditional practice. Rather than books and classroom work alone, he supplemented elementary geography with "short excursions in the neighborhood," and "out-of-door study."⁸⁷ Long seemed to recognize that direct experiences might be in many cases context-dependent, but he nonetheless placed the full force of his suggestion behind the worth of first-hand observation in the learning process. He noted: "In the case of children who have little opportunity for observing nature, a drawing, a photograph, or a model will be helpful in giving them a proper idea of the matter. It must not be forgotten, however, that actual observation by the pupil is necessary to seeing clearly and intelligently."⁸⁸ In addition to excursions, Long urged practitioners to organize the student collection of natural materials to be used in the classroom as instructional aides, again with the intent of building on the interest and observational powers of the learner. The latter point was particularly significant, as he insisted that his home geography plan was "...not to impart information," but rather "to awaken and stimulate interest."⁸⁹ He recommended that elementary

⁸⁶ Long, *Home Geography*, 3-4.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

practitioners avoid thinking of geography education as something confined to the school and to school hours. Instead, Long urged practitioners to promote independent student investigations, the results of which might be shared in the classroom subsequently. The student "...should be encouraged to obtain information by his own searching," he explained, "without guidance, and report the results."⁹⁰ Beyond independent observation, Long concluded that drawing, modeling, and writing about experiences would be supportive measures in the practice of geography. In sum, what readers found in his early contribution was an emphasis on the lived experiences of learners, their interests, and the educative power of observation. Moving outward from locally available, familiar contexts, Long reasoned that students could recognize connections to larger geographic phenomena. These themes were not unique to Long's conception of geography education.

William Morris Davis. Whereas Davis' motivation may have been in part to create novice scholars of geography, his reform plan, like Long's, also seemed to represent a critique of traditional academic practice and the perceived tendency for schools to emphasize the symbolic form over inquiry and understanding. Above all, whether clay or sand models, excursions into the neighborhood, or historical narratives, he insisted on a form of instruction which offered "...a sense of reality," or, at the very least, something other than "barren recitation of geographical names."⁹¹ As indicated previously, Davis's geography began in the local environs within the immediate vicinity of the school grounds. In part, the emphasis on local geography was based on a broader conception of the nature of geography as a discipline. To clarify, Davis made clear his belief that world geography was essentially the synthesis of local geographies across the earth. He wrote: "...[G]eography as whole is hardly more than a compilation of innumerable local or

⁹⁰ Long, *Home Geography*, 5.

⁹¹ Davis, "The Teaching of Geography," 426.

home geographies. However the home geographies of different places may vary, the distant ones can always be better appreciated if the local one is consciously observed and understood as a member of the class to which it belongs.”⁹² Davis’ explanation suggested a connectedness between all places as well the universality of geographic principles. In both instances, the pragmatic route to geographic learning began in the student’s home neighborhood.

Davis also maintained the rather commonsensical understanding that local topics bred interest through familiarity and that such a relationship might hold value pedagogically. “Actual examples of geographical facts and relationships,” he wrote, “are to be seen on every hand. No teacher need be entirely dependent upon a text-book. When geographical facts are taught from text-book alone they are bereft of their natural foundation and fail to develop that interest in the child that should be aroused and that can be aroused if geography is based on personal observation.”⁹³ First-hand observation within familiar contexts was a significant part of Davis’ rationale for the reform American geography education.

Aside from his discussion of the value of observation, Davis also offered brief vignettes to better describe the form that such an outlook might assume. A number of his illustrations addressed issues of geology and physical geographic process, but he also broached the human geographical side of home study. Davis offered the following description: “A village is an admirable subject for observation of human conditions. Notice the increasing closeness of the houses towards the center, around the stores and offices; note the larger open spaces about the border of the village. See how the roads converge towards it from the surrounding country...All of this should be taken, not merely as local fact, but as an example of a way in which some of the

⁹² Davis, “The Teaching of Geography,” 2-3.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

people of certain country in the world live.”⁹⁴ From these sorts of observations of local human-spatial arrangements, Davis suggested a broader investigation to include causes and possible explanations of cause. And the village was not the only site worthy of exploration. Quite the contrary, he was explicit in pointing out that local circumstances would shape the nature of investigations, be it the village, the town, or the city. On the possibilities provided by the city, he added: “It is sometimes said that in the schools of large cities, observational study is impossible; but this is a serious mistake. It arises from the failure to perceive that a city belongs in one of the most important sub-classes of geographical facts. Consider, for example, what may be seen on a single street...Remark the activities of the street; the varying streams of people, passing this way and that, crowding the sidewalks at certain hours, deserting them at others...This all exhibits the way in which people live at certain places, called cities, where for some reason many thousands are crowded on a small area.”⁹⁵ “Through these observations and questions,” he continued, “the human element of geographical study is prominently brought forward, as it should be.”⁹⁶ In very direct ways, then, Davis’s reform plan incorporated observational work around both the physical and the human-cultural dimensions of geography in the education of young learners. The entire investigation began locally, of course, in the homes and neighborhoods familiar to students. “The attentive cultivation of home geography,” Davis concluded, “taking advantage of the many examples of the two classes of geographical facts that spread about us, affords a natural, observational, rational basis on which the larger aspects of the study may be securely founded.”⁹⁷ Observation and inquiry into the geographical phenomena close at hand captured the essence of

⁹⁴ Davis, “The Teaching of Geography,” 5.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

Davis recommendations for elementary geography education, common themes in the reform agenda for geography education in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Charles A. McMurray. As did others, McMurray urged practitioners to provide students with opportunities for exploration and first-hand observations in the pursuit of geographic learning. A reformer, he hoped to invigorate the study of geography by reorienting instruction around purposeful investigation. Rather than the textbook, the excursion became the preferred instructional method. As McMurry imagined it, “The work will consist in the main of excursions and later of discussion of these in the class, - excursions into the home neighborhood to secure a close and accurate view of many objects and occupations, and discussions in class to bring out more fully their meaning and relations.”⁹⁸ The program he proposed was, of course, context specific and highly localized in character as “...the season, the neighborhood, the size of the class, and the local opportunities for excursion,”⁹⁹ would almost necessarily vary from place to the next.

McMurry’s attention to first-hand, sense experience was based upon certain assumptions about learning and the needs of students. To clarify, there was, for McMurry, value to be found in familiar settings and he seemed to suggest, as did many of his contemporaries, that a consideration of student interest and motivation was inextricable from the learning process. Moreover, McMurry implied that practitioners could gain and maintain student interest by beginning with those experiences that were familiar and local. Not unrelated, McMurry adhered to a theory of learning whereby new knowledge and understanding were best built upon existing knowledge and understanding. The following passage did much to illustrate his theoretical orientation: “The imagination must be our chief helper in constructing geographical pictures after

⁹⁸ McMurray, *Special Method*, 5.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

leaving home. But the imagination cannot construct pictures out of nothing any more than a builder can construct a house out of air. The imagination works with the materials of experience already gathered. It is not expected that we should gather all the experimental facts we may need, in third-grade excursions. We can but little more than open the door into life and its varied forms, but we can make a useful beginning.”¹⁰⁰ This apperceptive approach, as it might be termed, was the foundation of much of McMurry’s approach to geography education. Throughout *Special Methods*, he described a reform plan for geography whereby the home, the familiar, and the local were slowly replaced with an examination of the broader, unfamiliar, non-local elements of the field. McMurray explained in his broad recommendations for the third-grade course:

Besides the seven topics of the home environment, there should be, in the oral work of third-grade, a discussion of *the world as a whole*...

There are several reasons why children’s horizon of geographical study in third-grade should not be limited to the immediate home neighborhood...[G]eographical study in the third-grade must be both analytic and synthetic. It must begin at home and work outwards gradually, and it must also grasp the earth as a whole and begin to analyze into parts...¹⁰¹

A hallmark of the era, the general progression of student investigation that McMurry outlined was from the home and then outward, slowly building new experiences out of those existing.

Aside from the outward expansion of geographic subject matter from local to global, McMurry’s approach was similarly characterized by its use of what he referred to as “types.” Types were objects and phenomena which represented pathways into much broader geographic principles and understandings. It was around types, that McMurry built his conception for reform in the elementary study in geography. “A clear and detailed comprehension of a typical object in geography (however small this object may be),” he wrote, “is the key to a large area of

¹⁰⁰ McMurry, *Special Method*, 14.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

geographical knowledge.”¹⁰² As examples of types, *Special Method* contained the following suggestions, many of which were more or less specific to the Midwestern United States: a coal mine, the Illinois River, prairies, a lumber yard, a hard wood forest, Lake Superior, and a cotton plantation. While not exhaustive, McMurray attached to each of these types a thick geographic description which addressed the multitude of ways in which each was connected to other aspects of a given locale, economically, historically, or ecologically. The investigation of a single coal mine in the home area or region of the student ultimately moved well beyond the coal mine itself. As a type, the coal mine provided opportunities for the consideration of the natural process of coal formation, the harvesting of coal, the architectural construction of mines, the economic cost of mining, the transportation of coal to market, and the commercial usage of coal as an energy source.

While McMurry’s type was itself valuable as an area of study, it was the relationship to others which marked its worth. McMurray explained the purpose best himself where he stated that “The study of a type is therefore a short avenue to the interpretation of a large body of knowledge.”¹⁰³ Again, as was true of the installation of local study and the call to invoke the interests of the student through existing experience in familiar settings, the type, too, McMurry intended as a partial remedy for an otherwise bland tradition of abstraction in the school. “[T]here is a powerful realism,” he explained, “in this kind of study which gives a healthy tonic effect. The worst criticism that can be brought to bear upon our present teaching of geography, is that it is abstract and unreal. It is formal and dry. We are not to forget, however, that, while such a type is very real and concrete, it contains a general truth of wide

¹⁰² McMurry, *Special Method*, 186.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 187.

application.”¹⁰⁴ The type and local contexts together gave geographic study a purpose by uniting learning around a common focal point whereby natural interdependencies could be highlighted and new experiences built upon old.

Richard E. Dodge. Like many of his contemporaries, Dodge’s writing demonstrated an effort to augment the traditional focus on description in geography with a new mode of thinking which emphasized cause and effect and the relationship between human societies and the natural environment. “For the purposes of the paper we have in hand,” he wrote, “let us define geography as the study of the earth in its relation to man. In other words, it is the study of all those features, characteristics and conditions of the earth that influence or have influenced man in his history, development, exploration and life.”¹⁰⁵ With this in mind, Dodge moved to consider the significance and appropriateness of geography in the education of young learners. “[W]hat shall be our aims,” he asked rhetorically, “and what shall we strive to give to the child.”¹⁰⁶ In his conception, the reorientation of geography education involved the near abandonment of studying the discipline in its entirety. From a practical standpoint, Dodge understood that “a complete study of the earth at the present moment”¹⁰⁷ was an extraordinary task. Instead, he focused on the skills and capacities of students to gather information and to develop some understanding of geographic principles.

Dodge’s plan for the reform of geography education was based upon inquiry and first-hand experience. “We must aim to give a certain amount of information,” he explained, “but we should aim above all, to give the ability to gather information; in other words, we should develop the knowledge of principles through the knowledge of facts...We must in our early work study

¹⁰⁴ McMurry, *Special Method*, 187.

¹⁰⁵ Dodge, “Some Suggestions Regarding Geography,” *Journal of School Geography* 1 (1897): 14-15.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

facts not singly and in a separated manner, but in their relations in time and space so as to lead the child to appreciate that there are one or more underlying truths which make explanation of the fact easy; then we can generalize.”¹⁰⁸ In sum, Dodge appreciated the consciousness of the interconnectedness of geographical information far more than the mere memorization of factual content alone. In doing so, he reasoned, “...we develop in the child the ability to discover and apply principles, we give him the power to gain knowledge, and not merely unrelated items of knowledge.”¹⁰⁹ In Dodge’s conception, the student’s “...power to use his own mind,...is a power that will go on increasing in use and will be ever helpful to that child through his life.”¹¹⁰ Going further and drawing on his own experiences as educator, he reported: “I have seen pupils of eleven years reason out right conclusion in geography, by such a method as I have suggested, with much more accuracy and far greater confidence, than much older pupils who had never had such training; who had been taught to remember, not think.”¹¹¹ Dodge called for reasoning over remembering in seeking to reform geography education.

Very much related to his emphasis on inquiry and observation was Dodge’s appreciation for field excursions, an instructional tool he considered at length in an 1896 article published by the American Geographical Society of New York. “Excursions,..” he suggested, “for both teachers and students, ought to be a necessary part of geographic training. Excursions are bound to come sooner or later, and this short paper is a plea for inauguration at once – wherever possible.”¹¹² Like others, Dodge was a strong advocate of first-hand experience. Confident that geographic excursions were both inexpensive and pedagogically sound, Dodge endeavored to

¹⁰⁸ Dodge, “Some Suggestion Regarding Geography,” 16.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 18-19.

¹¹² Richard E. Dodge, “Geography from Nature,” *Journal of the American Geographical Society of New York* 28, no. 2 (1896): 148.

evaluate the organization and practice of effective field excursions. With regard to the general process, his best recommendation was to begin with brief classroom introductions and then move outward into whatever forms, features, and processes might be locally available. He wrote: “In the conduct of field excursions the following plan seems to me, from some experience, to be the best. After a series of elementary introductory exercises and lectures in the house, the class should be taken out to see those processes in action that can best be studied in the region.”¹¹³ In the end, across all of the possible field trips highlighted by Dodge, the central goal was to enliven the study of geography through first-hand experience. Of equal significance, he insisted that excursions in geography provided opportunities for the development of the elementary learner’s inquiry and general thought-processing skills. Through the excursion, Dodge remarked, “Children are taught the value of alertness and of a questioning mind, ever ready to follow the suggestions Nature offers.”¹¹⁴ He noted further: “At the present time there is a great awakening in the methods of geographic teaching, and now is the time for superintendents, colleges, geographers and geographical societies to be of vast help to the schools by helping in the matter of excursions. The children, if possible, and at any rate the teachers, should be given the chance to study home geography, not from text-books, but from the only perfect geography reader – Nature herself.”¹¹⁵ Not unlike contemporary nature study writers, Dodge insisted that the textbook could hardly match the utility of the excursion where first-hand experience, observation, and inquiry became guiding educational principles.

Henry McCormick. McCormick insisted that geography, in addition to its inherently multidisciplinary character, was highly valuable as a part of an elementary course of study given its almost equally natural fittedness to the experiences and developmental readiness of young

¹¹³ Dodge, “Geography from Nature,” 148.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

learners. More specifically, he found great import in the study of geography and its utility in the development of observational skills and habits of inquiry. “It affords an excellent opportunity for the training of the observing powers,” McCormick wrote, “as in its early stage it deals with objects that can be found in nearly every community, and that may be seen by the young tyro. For this reason, it should appear early in the course, when the senses are most active and eager to grasp everything that comes within reach.”¹¹⁶ Of course, as McCormick perceived it, the standard practice of schooling was not exactly geared toward student engagement or investigations into the surrounding local geography.

In McCormick’s view, practitioners traditionally bypassed direct student inquiry for the distribution of the textbook and other symbolic representations of the discipline. He expressed those frustrations clearly in the following passage: “A book is placed in their hand before they are prepared...The pupil is compelled to express his thoughts, if he has any, in phraseology which the teacher has copied from some book and written on the blackboard, instead of being permitted freedom of expression which is so natural to children and which should characterize all teaching in the primary school.”¹¹⁷ A critique of academic formalism, McCormick believed that the psychological value of a reformed plan for geography instruction would lay in its ability to connect new learning to old. “The value of geography in exercising the memory,” he wrote, “lies in the fact that it deals with related truths,...and that these truths are associated with objects that lie in the pupils field of vision”¹¹⁸ Beginning with the learner and with those objects and phenomena accessible through the pupil’s field of vision, McCormick argued that a sort of geographical analogy could be created in the mind. Thus, while the home and neighborhood were critically important to geographic learning, a local focus did not prevent, but rather

¹¹⁶ Henry McCormick, *Suggestions on Teaching Geography* (Bloomington, IL: Public-School Publishing, 1899), 28.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

supported the development of understanding of non-local places, phenomena, and principles. The following passage served to illustrate McCormick's assumption:

They may never see the Ganges river nor the stately temples that rear their domes and minarets above its placid waters, yet we do not wish to have them grow up in ignorance of either. So we aid them to build a Ganges of their own from the geographical facts acquired by the home stream, and adorn its banks with religious edifices erected out of the notions obtained from the home church. Imagination takes these concrete notions, and modifying them by what is read, by the instruction given by the teacher, and aided by maps and pictures, builds them into ideal forms.¹¹⁹

In that certain elements of geography study were found to be ubiquitous across space and time, McCormick was able to imagine a local stream and home church as useful analogies for students in the process of coming to understand the less familiar Ganges River. Students would ultimately highlight clear distinctions between the two, but the understanding of the familiar potentially informed investigation of the unfamiliar, in McCormick's mind, in ways that were educationally meaningful. As he concluded elsewhere, "...the home neighborhood...is the world in miniature."¹²⁰ Of course, McCormick was not alone in this belief, and perceived connections between the local and the global in geography education had a quite a range of supporters throughout the era of educational progressivism.

Jacques W. Redway. Despite the perceived need for reform in American geography education, Redway reported that a number of positive changes had been made or were in the process of being implemented. Available texts and materials, popular interest, normal school training, and reformed supervision were among the positive changes Redway outlined. In turn, he added, "...in the near future, there will be no necessity to apologize for the geography teaching in the American school."¹²¹ Of particular importance, he explained, "One of the best features that has come into modern methods of education is the disposition to stimulate the observational

¹¹⁹ McCormick, *Suggestions on Teaching Geography*, 32.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹²¹ Redway, *New Basis of Geography*, 173.

powers of the child.”¹²² “As a rule,” Redway appraised, “the child was a passive entity – a sort of receptacle into which a measured amount of graded and useful misinformation was to be ingested.”¹²³ Like others before and after him, Redway called for reform, in both the curriculum and geography instruction, which he hoped might better account for the learner’s capacity for observation and inquiry. For Redway, an effective plan for geography education was to develop the “faculties of seeing and interpreting.”¹²⁴

Though he was openly critical of its implementation, Redway pointed the practice of nature study in the elementary grades as an indication of the types of educational utility that might stem from an expanded investment in observational geography. “The observational work called, perhaps unwisely, Nature Study is now a recognized feature in almost all schools,” he reported. Going further, Redway argued that while much of that elementary work was, in his mind, “in the hands of novices and poorly trained teachers,..more or less wasteful, injudicious, and even ridiculous,..”¹²⁵ that the final educational result was typically a net positive for the intellectual development of the learner. Even where poorly executed, the move to provide first-hand observational experiences for students in the context of geography education could provide intellectual benefit. More critical perhaps than other advocates of the approach, Redway nonetheless reasoned that “Anything that gives one self-power to discover and acquire knowledge is good;...”¹²⁶

Observational work was of central importance for Redway, but the point should not be overstated. In addition to observation work, Redway was not averse to textbook learning. To that end, he was explicit. “Necessary as the observational, laboratory and field work may be,”

¹²² Redway, *New Basis of Geography*, 180.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 184.

Redway wrote, “it cannot take the place of a certain amount of book study and general reading.”¹²⁷ Similarly, and without overlooking the value of local, observational study, Redway believed that world geographical investigations required supplemental work as “No scholar,...can acquire all his information by observation...”¹²⁸ Despite Redway’s suspicion about the applicability of localized, observational study beyond the elementary years, his reform agenda was largely consistent with contemporary appeals for inquiry, observation, and a deeper sympathy for the student experience.

Harold Wellman Fairbanks. Yet another illustration of the discontent surrounding traditional academic practice, Harold Wellman Fairbanks, author of *Home Geography for the Primary Grades*, insisted that geography education at the turn of the century was ill-suited to the learning needs of elementary-level students. “Many of the so-called primary geographies,” he reported, “are really not primary.”¹²⁹ More often than not, Fairbanks continued, geography texts and the instruction that followed was overly factual and symbolic and largely outside of the natural interests of young learners. Rather than factual knowledge alone, he argued, elementary geography would do better to instill habits of investigation and an appreciation for geographical relationships. In his words: “Childhood is a period of active memory, but this is no reason why we should attempt to cram the mind with details of geography. Facts themselves are of no value. It is only in their relations that they become significant.”¹³⁰ Along similar lines, Fairbanks added to his recommendations for elementary geography instruction, a deep consideration for the unique lived experiences of young learners. Overly abstract and symbolic representations of the field were ill-suited, in his mind. Fairbanks explained that what was required in the primary

¹²⁷ Redway, *New Basis for Geography*, 205.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ H. W. Fairbanks, *Home Geography for Primary Grades* (New York: Educational Publishing Company, 1902), 5.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

grades was an attention to student interest and level of development. “For the child of ten years,” he wrote, “it is not sufficient that facts be presented in their relations, but that these relations be such as will arouse the interest through connection with the child’s own experiences.”¹³¹ While relationships and the promotion of a holistic understanding of geography was the aim, Fairbanks reminded practitioners of the role that the lived experiences of the student might play in the process.

The student’s immediate environment served at least two educational functions for Fairbanks. In the first place, the student’s lived experiences were built up and out of the cultural, historical, and ecological environment of which s/he was a part. The learner’s environment represented the context and framework of knowledge in the earliest years of learning. With this in mind, local geography study for Fairbanks worked to further engage the learner through a familiar, localized curriculum. Secondly, but of equal importance to larger understandings within the field, fundamental geographic trends, objects, and principals, often applied equally well to places within close proximity or at considerable distance from the learner. Fairbanks explained: “In the home surroundings we can get the materials which, if properly used, may be the basis for the superstructure in geography...The home is a little world. Here in miniature are the features of the great world outside. The forms of land and water, the animals and plants, the occupations and industries of men are represented. When these are understood in their simple relations the child can reach out and take hold of what he has not seen.”¹³² To clarify, geographic learning in one’s home area, very nearly approximated, in a general, intellectual, or theoretic sense, geographic investigation at a great distance. While the investigation itself might ultimately appear quite different, the process of thinking geographically, Fairbanks and others implied, was quite

¹³¹ Fairbanks, *Home Geography*, 5.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 5-6.

consistent. Home geography trained the learner's initial observational habits in the familiar, later widening the investigation and moving into more distant areas. Local geography study provided both sustaining interest and useful exercise in geographic inquiry which the student and teacher alike could invest toward future learning. The learner gained special attention in the process.

James Franklin Chamberlain. James Franklin Chamberlain, of the State Normal School in Los Angeles, California, added to the conversation of geography education in the early twentieth century through his critique of the larger purposes of the school. In short, Chamberlain believed that the role of the school was to prepare the learner for life “as a present and future member of society,”¹³³ a function which he believed the schools were generally performing poorly. Going further, he argued that the reformed model should take into fuller regard the “life interests of the learner”¹³⁴ as such an understanding he viewed as tantamount to student development. Geography, Chamberlain reasoned, was an important part of the conversation as study of the field “...can and should make out of pupils closer observers, clearer thinkers and better reasoners [*sic*].”¹³⁵ At the very least, he continued, study in geography would better meet the charge of schools than that of subject areas such as Latin, German, or French.

The problem with geography, in Chamberlain's mind, had less to do with the presence of the field in the course of study than with the implementation of practice and the conception of the field's purposes. In particular, Chamberlain suggested that a critical challenge to effective practice was the failure to recognize the potential of the discipline to tap into the lived experiences of the learner, a progressive educational notion to be sure. “The great problem of

¹³³ Chamberlain, “Geography in the Life of the Pupil,” *The Elementary School Teacher* 8 (1907): 65.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

geography,” he wrote, “is how to make the subject enter into the conscious experience of the child,...”¹³⁶ And Chamberlain had recommendations to that end as well. He noted:

The subject must do more than offer information through the medium of the printed page; it should encourage the pupil to *experience* geography, and to contribute these experiences. Such opportunity as geography offers for the exercise of the constructive faculty should be used to the fullest extent. This can be carried out in the making of maps, charts, sketches, graphs, and models of various kinds. Where these conditions are not realized the results must always be meager, superficial, unsatisfactory.¹³⁷

Geography under Chamberlain was an active endeavor. Inquiry over memory was his preference, and Chamberlain recommended that the interests and experiences of teachers and students dominate the introductory phases of geography instruction. Local geography study offered a partial solution. In the first place, it presented a picture of daily life, which Chamberlain understood to be inherently engaging to young learners. But investigation of the home area, the community, and the neighborhood, also offered a window into more profound geographic understandings. Chamberlain noted: “The story of the necessities of life runs back and forth on bands of steel or over ocean wave, connecting the most distant lands and peoples with the community, with the pupil himself. This is home geography in the largest sense, for the home cannot be understood unless its relation to remote areas is seen. The people of a community and of the world are held together by the chains of mutual industrial, and social interdependence slowly forged through centuries of development in the habits and demands of daily life.”¹³⁸ Like others, Chamberlain began with the home area and reasoned that deeper, global understandings could ultimately be reached in time.

Chamberlain also recognized the value of the field trip, which he referred to as the geographical “excursion.” “The great value of the excursion,” he explained, was that “Nothing

¹³⁶ Chamberlain, “Geography in the Life of the Pupil,” 66.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

else can give such life and value to geography.”¹³⁹ In many ways, the field trip relieved “...the difficulty experienced in placing geography among the life-interests of the child.”¹⁴⁰ In combination with pictures, stereoscopic images, school museums, and personal travel, to name but a few of the other sources of inspiration identified by Chamberlain, the field trip provided valuable first-hand experiences for students, valuable in the sense that he regarded direct observation as a most vital component of learning. Whether through excursions or other methods, Chamberlain concluded that elementary-level practitioners approach the subject in ways that connect most “...directly and vitally with the actual daily life of each pupil, not only as applied to the home, but as applied to the world as well.”¹⁴¹ The ultimate purpose, of course, was to garner the interests of the student towards geographic learning, or, as Chamberlain phrased it, “to enlist [the pupil’s] conscious and purposeful participation in its study.”¹⁴² Though his views were widely shared among contemporaries seeking reform within the field of geography education, Chamberlain’s effort to outline a student-centered rationale, one which emphasized first-hand observation, inquiry, and the lived experiences of the learner, was among the most explicit.

William James Sutherland. Among the many other recommendations offered by Sutherland was the notion that geography instruction should be arranged around a purpose. “When [geographic] facts are learned independently of their antecedent causes,...” he warned, “the fact side alone is uninteresting and insignificant.”¹⁴³ As Sutherland illustrated elsewhere, “Facts concerning the present crust should be studied, not as an end in themselves, but as data

¹³⁹ Chamberlain, “Geography in the Life of the Pupil,” 70.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 72.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Sutherland, *The Teaching of Geography*, 23.

which explain organic adaptation.”¹⁴⁴ In other words, students learned best when they felt the relevance of the material under study, when geography was taken as a mode of inquiry, not a set of discreet, disconnected facts and figures.

For Sutherland, first-hand experience within the surrounding natural environment was an important foundational element in the study of geography. Like a number of his contemporaries, Sutherland called for an ever-broadening investigation over time, one that moved outward from the local; that is, once students gained experience with elements of local geography, the scope of investigation expanded. He explained:

Advancement to the study of geography proper is then in full accord with the accepted principles of pedagogy. The child’s circle of information is extended, not in a formal way, but in a manner that appeals to the child’s understanding and established a permanent interest...

Observational geography and nature study furnish the rational extension of the child’s mental horizon; it furnishes that training in perception, imagination and memory which a further study of the subject demands; and it supplies the mind with typical basic ideas...¹⁴⁵

Like other curricula touching the home environment of the learner, Sutherland’s conception of local study in geography was informed by his particular understanding of the manner in which young people learned. In other words, he adhered to an educational philosophy which assumed that interest in the learner was typically rooted in the home, and further, that interest was a chief concern in the educative process. In his description of the relative worth of geographic study, Sutherland suggested that “The needs of the individual in his life relations”¹⁴⁶ should earn consideration. The student’s lived experiences, as well as the process of learning and building new experience, practitioners were not to consider lightly. In addition to an emphasis on the local and the familiar, Sutherland added that another measure through which teachers might provide

¹⁴⁴ Sutherland, *The Teaching of Geography*, 23.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

and interesting and relevant learning environment was through the use of problems. “Cannot the essentials be brought to the pupils in the form of pertinent problems?” he asked.¹⁴⁷ In a move that represented a shift away from strict reliance on the textbook or traditional forms of instruction, he offered the following:

In their life experience, all are interested in geography. Problems of production, transportation and consumption – one or all – affect every individual. Problems of agriculture, forestry, irrigation and road building command universal interest and attention, yet, withal, the study of geography is general formal and empirical....

If pertinent problems could be so presented to pupils, that their solutions would necessitate the interpretation of good maps, charts and graphs; the reading and sifting of selected articles in newspaper and periodicals; the comparison of statements in texts and reference books and the selection of a “consensus of opinion”; and the expression of results by means of maps, models, graphs and written essays, it seems that the whole situation could be changed for the better.¹⁴⁸

Rather than stilted lectures, an alternative to geography education, and perhaps education generally, was to base instruction around student inquiry, an immediate avenue to which was problem-solving. From Sutherland’s description, the problem-solving approach to teaching and learning in geography was one with which he had gained experience in practical settings. Citing a sample problem designed to engage students in a consideration of the relationship between water bodies, weather patterns, and agriculture in the Midwest, Sutherland reported “...fairly satisfactory results” whereby “No [direct] teaching was done expect that necessary to lead to an understanding of the particular problem at hand.”¹⁴⁹ “Substituting active investigation for passive reception,”¹⁵⁰ Sutherland concluded that problem-solving as an organizing framework was most likely to meet the needs of young learners and to provide “definite motives”¹⁵¹ in the study of geography. Sutherland’s reform plan started with the local available geographic contexts and

¹⁴⁷ Sutherland, *The Teaching of Geography*, 139.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 140-141.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

paid particular attention to the pedagogical value of problem-solving. Experience and inquiry-based, the approach he described was thoroughly rooted in an understanding of the nature of the learner.

E. Ehrlich Smith. E. Ehrlich Smith, of Richmond Public Schools, provided an interesting perspective on the continued reform of American geography education in the early twentieth century. First published in 1921, *Teaching Geography by Problems* represented a continuation of the curricular and methodological reforms recommended by educators in the previous decades. As the title would suggest, Smith's recommendations emphasized the role of problem-solving in the geography classroom.

Like others before him, Smith was deeply critical of what he perceived to be the traditional emphasis on the memorization of geographical content information, often times through textbook study. Despite reform efforts, Smith lamented the persistence of traditional practice where he wrote:

School geography, very gradually and with difficulty, is getting rid of some foreign matter with which it has been obscured in the past. While there are a number of reasons for this development, the one which appears to be of the greatest importance is the popular disclosure of that wonderful story of what man has accomplished in various portions of the world. This progress has been sufficiently interesting to gain and hold the attention of many; but somehow teachers have missed this element of interest in the geographical story, and for many years have been teaching in classrooms a mass of facts devoid of interest and lacking in most of those elements which create a zest for knowledge.¹⁵²

An alternative to traditional practice for Smith was an inquiry-based, problem-centered mode of instruction. Principal rivers, mountain ranges, and capitals held less significance than geographical reasoning and problem solving under Smith's plan. "As a matter of fact," he wrote, "it is not nearly so necessary for one to know where Melbourne is, as it is essential that one know how to find out where it is; and when one has found this out, to know immediately a good deal

¹⁵² E. Ehrlich Smith, *Teaching Geography by Problems* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1923), xv.

about Melbourne because of the very knowledge of the location.”¹⁵³ Smith also worked to outline the process of selecting appropriate problems. “Thoughtful and extensive reasoning forms the basis for teaching by problems and projects,” he insisted. “The greatest difficulty in the way of securing problems lies in the fact that too much dependence is put upon the text and not enough inspiration and information gained from other authoritative sources...”¹⁵⁴ Smith also reasoned that the nature of the learner should have some bearing on the selection of problems. “In selecting a problem,” he explained, “one must take into consideration not only what information is to be secured, but also how the information can be related to present-day interests; and the closer these interests are to the interests of the children, the better.”¹⁵⁵ Smith’s program for problem-solving in geography was built around inquiry, a significant part of which was informed by a concern for the nature of the learner.

While Smith’s clarification of a problem method in geography was somewhat of a unique rethinking of geography education, the commitment to inquiry and problem-solving was actually reiterated time and again in the decades prior as the discussion above has revealed. This was true not only within the field of geography, but across many progressive educational writers as well. In a broader educational sense, instructional projects designed around problems were outlined, perhaps most famously by William Heard Kilpatrick of Chicago who had offered his “project method” in 1918. Smith recognized as much himself, incorporating Kilpatrick’s project classification scheme into his own work.¹⁵⁶ Solid foundations in place, *Teaching Geography by Problems* nonetheless served the purpose of expanding the use of problems and projects in geography in ways arguably more explicit than contributions before that time. But perhaps most

¹⁵³ Smith, *Teaching Geography by Problems*, xix.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

importantly, Smith's suggestions illustrated the longevity of commitments to both local study and inquiry in the reform efforts geared toward geography education throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Summary. The several works explored above spanned nearly three decades of progressive educational thinking and in many ways paralleled some of the central developments of that era. Throughout the writing surrounding the reform of curriculum and practice in geography education, for instance, observers found a thoughtful attention to the nature of the learner. More specifically, geography education reforms often reflected the belief that the lived experiences of the learner deserved special attention, a concern that contributors to the field often stated quite explicitly. Not unrelated, reform-minded geography proponents were almost unanimously critical of traditional academic formalism, a feature of contemporary schools regarded as out of synch with the unique needs of young people. As an alternative, those advocating change called for a renewed attention to first-hand experiential, observation, and inquiry-based learning, the latter of which was a reflection of changes in the wider discipline in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In many instances, as noted previously, theoretical assumptions about the learner and his or her needs led to an emphasis on locally available geographical concepts and phenomena. Moving outward from the local, reformers did much to outline an articulated course of study, an expanding horizons approach, which is in some sense still evident today.

The emphasis on experiential learning, inquiry, and local context were themes represented throughout the writing of Progressive Era geography reformers. Of course, those same trends did much to anticipate the essential characteristics of modern place-based education as well. Whereas those several points of intersection suggest an important historical relationship,

one which may inform a modern place-based educational agenda, the similarities may be broader still. In brief, Progressive Era geography reformers also addressed the relationship between the school and the community, a feature that further situates the field as an historical precedent of place-based pedagogy.

New Geography & the Community

In addition to the utilization of locally available geographic phenomena and the deep consideration for the nature and needs of the student in the learning process, a number of geography reformers in the early twentieth century spoke to the potential connections between the school and the community. Perhaps somewhat less pronounced, what readers typically found were discussions regarding the manner in which geography study might affect the improvement of the of either the individual citizen or the larger community directly.

William James Sutherland. Sutherland addressed the relationship between school and the learner's home community in a discussion of what he deemed "social phase" of geography education. For him, the social phase contained much of what contemporary observers might term human geography, a feature of geography education which Sutherland suggested might be developed by practitioners and students throughout the learning process. As a part of this social investigation, he included the study of one's home area. Equally relevant for Sutherland was the establishment of a deep knowledge of the interconnectedness of one's home area to others peoples and places. "When we study the methods by which ourselves and our neighbors are fed, and clothed," he remarked, "the idea of doing for others, of being socially helpful, again appeals to us. So butcher, baker, and candlestick-maker, each in his own way, renders some social service..."¹⁵⁷ Embedded in the passage was a call for what might be regarded as a type responsiveness to community. Through an investigation of peoples and places near and far away,

¹⁵⁷ Sutherland, *The Teaching of Geography*, 49.

and a better understanding of both, Sutherland seemed to suggest, however implicitly, that a sentiment of social duty might be fostered in young learners through the study of geography. He explained further: “The pupil may come to see that no individual or community can, independently of other individuals or communities, live as well or produce as much, as is possible through the reciprocal helpfulness of exchange. Such an outlook, it would seem, will make the future citizen more rationale in his industrial pursuits, and more democratic in the exercise of his civil rights.”¹⁵⁸ Social geography under Sutherland, then, promoted a form of citizenship education which emphasized the importance of interconnectedness in democratic life.

Without identifying an explicit mechanism to unite geography study and direct community action, Sutherland nonetheless outlined a citizenship education function for geography study. And while he suggested that the most “...important geography for any individual is his local geography,”¹⁵⁹ it was also the case that Sutherland maintained somewhat of non-local, or even global, outlook which seemed to promote an engagement with peoples and places beyond the immediate reach of the student. As important as it was for students to develop an understanding of how their own communities functioned, such an outcome was not the sole mission of Sutherland’s social geography.

Lastly, in Sutherland’s discussion of the relationship between geography education and the community, he offered yet further clarification of his plan for citizenship education. In short, Sutherland remarked that an inquiry-based, hands-on exploration of social geography promoted rational thinking, a feature of geography education which he viewed as critical to meaningful civic involvement and thoughtful living generally. After all, he noted, “Citizenship cannot be effective until the individual is rational, and is disposed to an impartial consideration of social

¹⁵⁸ Sutherland, *The Teaching of Geography*, 104.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

and civic problems.”¹⁶⁰ Above all, Sutherland insisted, “The effective citizen must be humane and altruistic. He must live and let live.”¹⁶¹ Again, while Sutherland stopped short of extended discussion regarding the direct civic responsibilities for students as members of local communities, he provided clear indications that a localized, inquiry-based approach to geography education played an important role in the development of effective citizens. An indirect route to be sure, Sutherland nonetheless paid close attention to the potential connections between geography study in the school and the improvement of the communities served.

E. Ehrlich Smith. In Smith, too, readers found a consideration of the manner in which geography education might unite the school and the community. Written in the recent memory of World War I, Smith called for a shift towards an instructional model which better recognized global cultural and environmental diversity, not to mention the mutual interconnectedness between peoples and places. With that in mind, he noted: “The importance of geography to our nation is increasing. Whether we would have it or not, we are no longer a provincial people. The very fact that we entered the World War has helped to banish isolation and provincialism. Rapid transportation by railroad, by steamship and by air, has also assisted in bringing to the minds of thoughtful people the futility of continuing to adhere to such a policy. We may not play the role of recluse any longer.”¹⁶² Smith continued by pointing out that “Every question presented to the Conference at Versailles had a geographical background,” and further, that “As a commercial nation, we must feel the necessity for developing knowledge of those principles which govern the production of raw materials and their distribution to the markets of the world.”¹⁶³ Of course, all of this led Smith to conclude that “...the essential problems of civilization are matters

¹⁶⁰ Sutherland, *The Teaching of Geography*, 105.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁶² Smith, *Teaching Geography by Problems*, xvi.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, xvii.

concerned with human geography,”¹⁶⁴ a determination which naturally implicated geography curriculum and instruction in the installation of certain global citizenship qualities.

Smith attached to geography education the potential for societal change and improvement. Implicit in that belief, of course, was an understanding that geography education would promote certain values and sensibilities regarding social problems. “In the broad sense of thinking about morality as thought and action that promote the improvement and satisfaction of human needs,” he stated, “geography lends itself to the specific treatment for the appreciation of such a principle.”¹⁶⁵ Perhaps more so than Sutherland, though, Smith pointed at times to specific venues with which the geography student might engage. Conservation received special attention. Drawing again on the interconnectedness of society globally, Smith recognized that “Enlarged production for the needs of the world and wise consumption of the world’s supplies offer many new and increasing problems.”¹⁶⁶ In his view, geography study might ultimately confer a direct benefit on society by promoting in students an awareness of principles surrounding environmental stewardship and conservation. The primary understanding to be gained, Smith concluded, was that “...in order to supply the needs of the world, men must use the resources about them in the most economical way; that they must increase production by means of conservation; and that, by wise consumption, they must make the wealth of the world ‘go around’ to all.”¹⁶⁷ Although he wrote little about the role of students of geography in the process of identifying and enacting solutions for local problems, an investigation of social relationships was nonetheless of central importance in Smith’s geography. Contained within Smith’s plan was

¹⁶⁴ Smith, *Teaching Geography by Problems*, xvii.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

a direct consideration of the process through which geography study in the school might intersect with the needs of the community, global though it may have been.

Harold Rugg & John Hockett. In their effort to determine the most appropriate reform path for the study of geography, Harold Rugg and John Hockett, together with Emma Schweppe detailed their experiences at the Lincoln School of Teachers College.¹⁶⁸ In the first place, Rugg and his colleagues, like others before them, questioned the importance of developing in students an encyclopedic knowledge of geography, specifically the names and locations of capital cities. They questioned: “Is Bucharest the capital of India? Is Warsaw in China? Should educated men and women be able to answer such questions as these? Is it of any importance that college students do not know where Havre, Zurich, or Barcelona are? Nineteen college students out of one hundred and twelve located Colombo in Columbia. Is that a matter of concern?”¹⁶⁹ Rugg and Hockett insisted that the perceived lack of knowledge of American students in geography was in many ways problematic. But more important than factual content knowledge perhaps, was the anticipated ability of students to address the problems they might face as adult citizens in a democratic society. “We know,” they lamented, “that – excepting a few who will be compelled by practical needs later to learn the basic facts- the great majority will be barren of information, thoroughly stupid, in fact, when faced with the need of exercising intelligence about contemporary problems.”¹⁷⁰ Hardly an endorsement of the efficacy of American geography education, the problem, as they viewed it, was the failure to develop capable citizens.

Written in 1925, Rugg and Hockett’s contribution demonstrated the longevity of advocacy for inquiry, problem-solving, and home study in the American geography curriculum.

¹⁶⁸ Harold Rugg and John Hockett, *Objective Studies in Map Location*, Social Science Monographs No. 1, With Emma Schweppe (New York: The Lincoln School of Teachers College, 1925).

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

At the same time, Rugg and Hockett's rationale for the "study of society"¹⁷¹ moved the conversation surrounding geography education somewhat further. More specifically, while readers could observe many of the central themes in the recommendations offered by Rugg and Hockett in the work of others contributing to the reform of geography education in decades prior, the close attention to social action was arguably somewhat unique. In short, Rugg and Hockett called for direct civic action on the part of the student. In their words, "constructively but critically, students will be influenced to put their ideas sanely into action."¹⁷² With regard to the relationship between the school and the community, then, Rugg and Hockett's plan for geography study was perhaps more immediate and direct than others writers of the era.

Like other scholars seeking to the reform geography education in the first several decades of the twentieth century, Rugg and Hockett emphasized the interdependence and holistic nature of geographical information. Moreover, as a part of a larger social studies curriculum, they viewed geographic study in terms of its relevance to preparing students for their adult roles as citizens in a democratic society. The essential educational problem was one of "producing a generation of informed, thinking, socially-disposed citizens."¹⁷³ In part, this goal was to be achieved through the development in learners of a sense of commitment to the improvement of their own communities. "The very essence of representative government," Rugg and Hockett wrote, "is that the masses of people shall be both well informed and keenly interested in the carrying on of their community affairs."¹⁷⁴ In a significant way, these challenges required an investigation of contemporary social problems and issues. At the same time, and not unrelated, Rugg and Hockett called for "A curriculum which is built around a core of pupils' activities –

¹⁷¹ Rugg and Hockett, *Objective Studies in Map Location*, 8.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

studies of their home community, special reading and original investigation, a constantly growing stream of opportunities for participation in open-forum discussion, debate, and exchange of ideas.”¹⁷⁵ Although they did not belabor the point, that value that Rugg and Hockett placed upon “...studies of local needs...”¹⁷⁶ revealed a belief in the potential educational utility of local study and reinforced, to some degree, a commitment to fostering in students a desire to participate in and improve the community.

Summary. The community responsiveness function in the writing surrounding Progressive Era geography education was arguably less pronounced than other characteristic features of the field. There was, however, some indication that scholars recognized the potentially valuable role that geography study played in the solution of social problems. While few scholars pointed to the direct ways in which students might engage in the improvement of the community, there was a general appreciation for the citizenship education function that the study of geography provided. In some instances, that appreciation was reflected in the desire to promote an appreciation for the interconnectedness of peoples and places throughout the world. Elsewhere, geography study developed effective citizens through the establishment of the capacity to inquire and engage in thoughtful problem-solving. In a few instances, writers linked direct civic action in the local community to geographic knowledge. In the context of an historical review of place-based education, the relationship between the school and the improvement of the local community is an important consideration, and although geography reformers in the early twentieth century emphasized direct community improvement only sporadically, the attention to the relationship between the school and citizenship education was

¹⁷⁵ Rugg and Hockett, *Objective Studies in Map Location*, 17.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

significant. Coupled with the emphasis on the local and the learner, Progressive Era reforms in geography education represent an important historical precedent for place-based pedagogy.

Chapter Summary

The developments surrounding the reform of American geography education that took shape in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reflected the transformation of geography as a field of study. Rather than a purely descriptive field, the “new geography” was a scientific field concerned with the causes underlying spatial phenomena. Surrounding by a mood of scientific inquiry, the transformation of geography in the late 1800s also placed particular attention on the scientific investigation of human social and cultural arrangements. But beyond the reformation of geography as a field of study and the installation of the discipline in American colleges and universities, Progressive Era geography reform also affected theory and practice designed for the elementary and secondary-level schools. Of course, the same reforms also represented an important chapter in the history of place-based educational thinking as well.

This chapter has demonstrated through the contributions highlighted above a localized approach to geography education at the turn of the twentieth century. Informed by the German *Heimatskunde* model, American home geography evidenced an approach to elementary curriculum and instruction that placed special attention on locally available objects and phenomena. Early reformers like Long called on practitioners to look beyond the traditional classroom to those geographic phenomena “just at our doors.” A noted geographer, Davis, too, found educational value in the “land immediately about us.” For Redway, it was “neighborhood geography” and, for Sutherland, the “geographic features in one’s own environment.” At Oswego Normal, students were encouraged to “know the districts we live.” Across the numerous selections reviewed, the local received special attention in the reform plan for geography study,

particularly in the earliest years and at the elementary level. With this in mind, geography education at the turn of the twentieth century represented an important precedent for modern place-based educational theory and practice.

In addition to the local, this chapter has highlighted the efforts to move away from the traditional emphasis on the rote learning of disciplinary content knowledge and to bring geography instruction into closer sympathy with the needs and nature of the learner. Geography reforms emphasized experientialism and inquiry and those ideas enjoyed a notable level of institutional support. Redway called for the development of the students “observational powers,” while Sutherland and Smith emphasized the role of problem-solving. The field excursion, too, as evidenced through Dodge and Long, became a preferred method. Consistent with progressive educational trends in child study, the interests and needs of the student also gained close attention in the reform of geography education. Fairbanks insisted that geography instructors take better account “the child’s own experiences” which Chamberlain echoed where he discussed the “life-interests of the child.” A better indication still, the entire expanding horizons approach to geography instruction was more or less framed around student development. To begin with the home and move outward into the wider world implied an appreciation for the learner’s present experiences and importance of attaching new learning to old. Progressive Era geography education was often informed by the nature and needs of learners, a feature which further clarifies the position of such reforms as historical antecedents for modern place-based theory and practice.

Finally, this chapter has indicated that a number of Progressive Era geography educators attached to their reforms notions of community responsiveness. In Tarr and McMurray’s manual for geography education in New York, for instance, students were asked to investigate local

problems, particularly immigration. Similarly, Rugg and Hockett imagined that “studies of local needs” might become important goals of a new geography education. For other writers, talk of community improvement was somewhat more generalized. In Sutherland, as one example, social change (and good citizenship) would come as a result of the student’s ability to think rationally. Unlike its modern counterpart in place-based education, geography reformers in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries stopped short of discussing the specific ways in which students and teachers might become directly involved in their local community. Nonetheless, given the attention to social problems and the notion that students might gain the capacity to carry on social and community affairs, it is reasonable to suggest that geography reform in the Progressive Era maintained some degree of responsiveness to the community and to society. Combined with the allegiance to the local and to the learner, the school reforms that grew out of the “new geography” beginning in the late nineteenth century clearly represent an historical precedent of place-based education.

Modern place-based educators have neglected the reforms that took shape in geography education beginning in the late nineteenth century. Given the emphasis on local context and the attention to the nature of the learner, this gap within the literature appears to be particularly glaring. Although the two fields arguably diverge to some extent with regard to community responsiveness, the points of intersection between modern place-based pedagogy and Progressive Era geography education are unmistakable. And Progressive Era connections to place-based education stretch still deeper. Beyond the important developments in nature study and geography education described in Chapters 3 and 4, the contemporary educational reforms implemented throughout rural America also bore close resemblance to the defining criteria of the modern field. Those connections are considered below in greater detail.

CHAPTER 5

THE COUNTRY LIFE MOVEMENT

Introduction

Contemporary with the place-based educational precedents explored in Chapters 3 and 4 surrounding the nature study movement and the “new geography,” this chapter highlights developments geared specifically toward the reorientation of the country school. Progressive Era reform at the turn of twentieth century was broad in scope and touched virtually all aspects of American life. But the experience of industrialism, not to mention the progressive response, was not a singular one. This was particularly true across the wide division that might be drawn between rural and urban life. The problems facing the American farmer in the 1890s were often distinct from those that challenged city dwellers of the same era. And the responses to social, political, and economic problems varied as well. Of course, reforms geared towards rural education were also somewhat distinctive.

Whereas the curricular and instructional reforms discussed in the two previous chapters were generalized to some degree, educational reform plans also existed which addressed the needs of American rural schools in particular. Part of a larger Country Life Movement, this rural wing of educational progressivism contained within it many of the essential characteristics found in place-based pedagogy. Despite what appears to be a close theoretical relationship, place-based

educators have typically neglected consideration of Country Life educational reforms in any detail.¹

This chapter investigates the educational practices of the Country Life Movement as an historical antecedent of modern place-based education. In the discussion that follows, the development and purposes of Country Life reform are outlined in an effort to highlight the unique political and social circumstances which gave rise to the movement. With contexts established, the chapter shifts to consider the findings of the Country Life Commission and the particular educational reforms that took shape consequently. Organized around the defining criteria of place-based education established at the outset of this larger investigation, the chapter examines the extent to which Country Life educational reform emphasized the local, the learner, and the community. The discussion provided below is based upon a variety of primary works representative of the Country Life Movement, including the *Report of the Commission on Country Life*. In addition, the educational writings of noted country lifers such as Liberty Hyde Bailey, Harold Waldstein Foght, O.J. Kern, and Jessie Field, among others, inform the conclusions drawn. This chapter reviews evidence ranging from theoretical pieces promoting change in the country school to practical manuals designed to guide instruction directly.

Social & Political Contexts

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the American countryside witnessed marked depopulation as once rural agriculturalists began to migrate to the nation's more populous cities and townships. Prompted by increasingly mechanized agricultural production techniques, improved and more numerous transportation networks, and the growth of the urban-industrial complex nationwide, Americans began to abandon rural farming as a mode of living. As Cremin

¹ One in-house publication on the Country Life connection to place-based education does exist. See Julie G. Canniff, "On Living Well in Our Place: Earlier Reform Movements," in *Toward Place and Community*, ed. Vito Perrone (Annenberg Rural Challenge Project, 1998).

phrased it, "...the cheap land was gone; the jobs, the money, and the opportunity had moved to the city."² For many observers, this transition was cause for great alarm. Concern surrounding rural-to-urban migration and the growing perception that rural lifeways were deteriorating ultimately consolidated by the early twentieth century, transforming into what ultimately came to be regarded as the Country Life Movement. In *The Country Life Movement in America*, perhaps the most comprehensive historical appraisal available to date, William L. Bowers described the movement as "...an effort to promote measures which would make the social, intellectual, and economic aspects of rural life equal to those of urban living, the movement was in reality a complex mixture of rural nostalgia, the desire to make agriculture more efficient and profitable, humanitarianism, and economic self-interest."³ Motivated by a range of economic, ideological, and political concerns, advocates nonetheless shared the general perception that the dwindling appeal of rural life in America was problematic. As Bowers noted, "...[M]any believed that something deficient in rural life was driving people to the cities. They therefore sought to remedy the situation by advancing proposals to increase the attractiveness and efficiency of country living."⁴ Despite consensus on the nature of the problem, there was perhaps less agreement regarding solutions; that is, Country Life reformers did not always seek to achieve the goal of increasing the attractiveness of rural life in America in uniform ways.

A traditionally rural pursuit and the cornerstone of most rural economies, it was not surprising that agriculture received a great deal of attention from Country Life reformers. By the early 1900s, American agriculture had experienced quite a number of changes, the culmination of a range of evolving initiatives launched in the decades following the American Civil War

² Lawrence Cremin, *Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957*. (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1961), 75.

³ William L. Bowers. *The Country Life Movement in America, 1900-1920* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1974).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 3

(1861-1865). Technological and methodological innovation resulted in greater efficiency and agricultural productivity, accelerating the commercialization of farming. New agricultural strategies and techniques were not adopted unanimously, however, and whereas prosperity was elevated for some rural farmers, others experienced a loss of independence and social mobility, rising costs, and a challenge to rural knowledge systems and values.⁵

Not unrelated to the changes experienced in agricultural practice was the perception of growing disparity in living conditions between rural America and other parts of the nation. As Bowers reported:

...[T]here was accumulating evidence that rural areas were deteriorating in relation to other parts of the nation. Roads were nearly as bad as they had been in the pioneer days, schools were poor, health and sanitation measures were meager, household conveniences lacking, and credit and banking facilities were inadequate. Moreover, there was some truth to the charges that farmers suffered inequalities of taxation, the tariff, discriminations in transportation, exploitation by middlemen, and the monopolistic control of natural resources.⁶

Each of these elements, Country Life advocates feared, contributed to rural abandonment, and, if left unchecked, would result in serious consequence for the nation as a whole.⁷

Seeking to improve the appeal of rural living and thwart trends in outmigration, Country Life proponents designed and implemented initiatives to address issues ranging from agricultural marketing and scientific farming, to the rural church, infrastructure, and banking. Not unlike the more far-reaching Progressive Movement to which it was connected, many also invested a significant amount of energy into a variety of reforms intended to improve rural schooling.⁸ They “looked to the school as a means of addressing social problems.”⁹ Before turning to education

⁵ Bowers, *The Country Life Movement*, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸ Cremin, *The Transformation of the School*.

⁹ Susan F. Semel and Alan R. Sadovnik, “Schools of Tomorrow,” *Schools of Today: Whatever Happened to Progressive Education*, History of Schools & Schooling, vol. 8. (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 4.

and features of the movement reminiscent of place-based theory and practice, a brief consideration of Theodore Roosevelt and his organization of the Country Life Commission is warranted as those forces were significant and lasting.

The Country Life Commission

Without glossing over the many important contributions of country life advocates on scales both large and small, individually and collectively, throughout the early twentieth century, few could deny the significance of Theodore Roosevelt's advocacy in invigorating calls for rural reform. Raised in affluence in the elite circles of New York, Roosevelt was hardly an agriculturalist himself. From his youth, however, Roosevelt was an aspiring naturalist and his well known affection for the outdoors remains a part of his persona even today. Moreover, his appreciation for nature and his somewhat exemplary concern for conservation positioned Roosevelt as powerful political ally for rural reform. His involvement also did much to encourage the wide institutional support that rural improvement, educational or otherwise, ultimately received.¹⁰

Not unlike many other country life supporters, Roosevelt apparently held a deep appreciation for the challenges of rural living and lamented the growing trend toward urban migration. As historian Clayton Ellsworth concluded, "The farmer was Roosevelt's last hero as he was Jefferson's first."¹¹ "As [Roosevelt] saw it," he continued, "upon the farmer rested the responsibility of the preservation of the fertility of the soil, and of the feeding of a world which 'is never more than a year from starvation.' The farmer, moreover, represented the best hope that America had of perpetuating a mighty breed of men. Farmers were, as a class, law-abiding,

¹⁰ Bowers, *The Country Life Commission*.; Clayton S. Ellsworth, "Theodore Roosevelt's Country Life Commission," *Agricultural History* XXX (October 1960): 155-72.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 156.

intelligent, energetic, and deeply devoted to the family and private property.”¹² As Roosevelt himself explained, “We were founded as a nation of farmers, and in spite of the great growth of our industrial life it still remains true that our whole system rests upon the farm, that the welfare of the whole community depends upon the welfare of the farmer. The strengthening of country life is the strengthening of the whole nation.”¹³ Hints of romanticism notwithstanding, Roosevelt seemed to view the farmer, and by association, rural agricultural life, as something approaching the foundation of American society and central to the nation’s prosperity.

In the summer of 1908, Roosevelt moved to establish the Country Life Commission, whose purpose it was to investigate the challenges of rural life and to offer recommendations for rural advancement. Under the leadership of Liberty Hyde Bailey, *The Report of the Commission on Country Life* established a comprehensive plan for the renewal of country lifeways. In the first place, the *Report* identified key sources of leadership among which included the United States Department of Agriculture, the nation’s agricultural colleges, state experiment stations, and national agricultural organizations.¹⁴ To that list, the Commission added that “With these agencies must be mentioned state departments of agriculture societies and organizations of very many kinds, teachers in schools, workers in church and other religious associations, travelling libraries, and many other groups, all working with commendable zeal to further the welfare of the people of the country.”¹⁵ Key players identified, the Commission also highlighted perceived deficiencies and opportunities for a way forward. Among the various challenges highlighted, the *Report* underscored two deficiencies, in particular. In the first place, Commission authors stated that, in large part, rural peoples suffered as the result of an incomplete understanding of modern

¹² Ellsworth, “Theodore Roosevelt’s Country Life Commission,” 156.

¹³ The Country Life Commission, *Report of the Commission on Country Life*, Senate Document no. 705 (Washington, D.C.: Washington Printing Office, 1909), 10.

¹⁴ *Report of the Commission on Country Life*, 18.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

agricultural practices. More specifically, “A lack of knowledge on the part of farmers of the exact agricultural conditions and possibilities of their regions” was reportedly a central cause of rural deterioration.”¹⁶ In addition, Bailey and his associates insisted that a “...lack of good training for country life in schools”¹⁷ was cause for great concern. To be sure, the rural school and agricultural knowledge were not the sole areas of need identified by the Commission. As the *Report* stated: “Other causes contributing to the general result are: Lack of any adequate system of agricultural credit, whereby the farmer may readily secure loans on fair terms; the shortage of labor, a condition that is often complicated by intemperance and incentives that tie the laboring man to the soil; the burdens and the narrow life of farm women; lack of adequate supervision of public health.”¹⁸ While the noted causes of rural decline were numerous and not exhausted by the preceding passage, the Commission nonetheless returned to agricultural science and the rural school in their efforts to recommend solutions.

Amidst the various problems and remedies cited by the Commission, the *Report* addressed four underlying principles thought to be relevant to any and all rural improvement initiatives. Guiding elements in the successful reform of rural living included *knowledge, organization, spiritual forces, and education*. With regard to knowledge, the report pointed again to agricultural science and problem solving. “To improve any situation,” the *Report* revealed, “the underlying facts must be understood. The farmer must have exact knowledge of his business and of the particular conditions under which he works ..., [specifically], knowledge of his own soils, climate, animal and plant diseases, markets, and other local facts.”¹⁹ Another component in the reform process was the organization of farmers around collective interests. As phrased in the

¹⁶ *Report of the Commission on Country Life*, 19.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

Report: “There must be a vast enlargement of voluntary organized effort among farmers themselves...If they do not do this, no governmental activity, no legislation, not even better schools, will greatly avail...They need a more fully organized social and recreative life.”²⁰ Without denying the individual farmer’s independence, perhaps a near sacred characteristic of rural living, the Commission recognized a certain value in collective efforts.

Spirituality also severed an important role in rural reform. On *spiritual forces* the Commission remarked, “The best way to preserve ideals for private conduct and public life is to build up the institutions of religion.”²¹ Cognizant of the centrality of the church in rural America, the *Report* identified the institution as a potentially powerful ally in the promotion of Country Life ideals. “The church has great power of leadership,” the Commission recognized, “The whole people should understand that it is vitally important to stand behind the rural church to help it to become a great power in developing concrete country life ideals. It is especially important that the country church recognize that it has a social responsibility to the entire community as well as a religious responsibility to its own group of people.”²² Perhaps aware that advocates would have to sell the message of reform to church leaders, the rural church was nonetheless a source of incalculable value to the overall mission.

Not unrelated to principles of spirituality, knowledge, and organization, the Commission, and, subsequently, many Country Life reformers on the ground, maintained a great deal of interest in the role that education might play in rural improvement. “There is no such unanimity on any other subject,”²³ proclaimed the Commission of education. While it was not particularly surprising that a reform movement containing social, legislative, technological, and economic

²⁰ *Report of the Commission on Country Life*, 27.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 28.

²³ *Ibid.*, 121.

dimensions might find value in the schools as a useful outlet for change, the nature of the discussion surrounding education was utterly significant. To clarify, the Commission called for a particular type of education, one tailored to the lived experiences of rural students. The *Report* stated:

There must not be only a fuller scheme of public education, but a new kind of education adapted to the real needs of the farming people. The country schools are to be so redirected that they shall educate their pupils in terms of daily life...

There is to be a well developed plan of extension teaching conducted by the agricultural colleges, by means of the printed page, face-to-face talks, and demonstration or object lessons, designed to reach every farmer and his family, at or near their homes, with knowledge and stimulus in every department of country life.²⁴

In the years immediately preceding the *Report of the Country Life Commission* and throughout the first several decades of the twentieth century, reform of the rural school received great attention. Although the *Report* perhaps added momentum and gave new life and legitimacy to the movement, it was certainly not the singular impetus for rural school reform. The lines below provide a fuller discussion of the theoretical underpinnings and practical applications of school reform during the Country Life Movement. In particular, a review of relevant historical illustrations from the era demonstrate that educational reforms were highly localized, sensitive to the unique needs of rural students, and designed with the intent to improve the communities in which schools themselves were situated.

Country Life Reform as Localized Curricula

Reforms proposed to redirect the rural schools during the Country Life Movement were often localized in their outlook. More specifically, there was wide consensus among those affiliated with the educational wing of the movement that the rural school should reflect the day-to-day life circumstances and the peoples served. In many instances, this commitment was reflected in a plan for curriculum and instruction that was oriented around the agricultural

²⁴ *Report of the Commission on Country Life*, 26-27.

circumstances specific to the region or locale. Where the primary crop among family farmers was corn, the school reflected such. In short, reforms worked to infuse farm life into the traditional academic curriculum. The representations highlighted below demonstrate further the emphasis on local context in Country Life educational reform.

O. J. Kern. Published in 1906, O. J. Kern's *Among Country Schools* represented one of the earlier book-length publications geared towards educational reform in rural America during the Progressive Era. Designed to "...show a practical way of interesting 'farm children through farm topics,'"²⁵ the text was perhaps intended as much to inspire as it was to guide rural school teachers and supervisors. For Kern, an Illinois school superintendent, the value of country living was in need of refurbishment and that revisioning required a renewed commitment to farm life in the development of rural reform. Kern argued that country youth deserved educational opportunities equal to that of city children and all that such a transformation entailed. "Thou shalt enrich and enlarge the life of the country child,"²⁶ the superintendent proclaimed. But reforming the rural school to keep pace with its urban counterpart did not imply the transfer of city school models to the country. Instead, Kern called for a context-specific approach, one intimately addressed the uniqueness of rural living. "There is a difference of environment," he noted, "that must be considered. The country school for its specific work should be just as efficient as the best city school is for its specific work."²⁷ Kern did not reject the traditional academic curriculum in its entirety, but added that a purely academic curriculum was designed for the city child, not to mention city occupations. He continued:

The educational uplift, in its fullest sense, cannot come to the country child from "three R's" alone. These certainly need to be better taught; but to claim that these alone are

²⁵ O. J. Kern, *Among Country Schools* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1906), vii.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

sufficient is a refusal to see progress. As well ask the farmer to make a success of life with the machinery and methods of thirty years ago...

However much we may disagree as to the ways and means, any one [sic] who has given any serious study to the country school in all its relations must conclude that there is a need of increasing its usefulness. Yes, there is a wide gulf between the alley of a great city and a country lane; the children loitering along each have to be reached in different ways.²⁸

A single educational program could not be expected to meet the needs of all students. For Kern, linking the school and country living almost necessarily implied a greater attention to agricultural science. "...The scientific discoveries in the domain of the new agriculture, with reference to soil and plant and animal life, shall receive some attention from the older pupils at least."²⁹ Like contemporary nature study advocates, Kern was also a proponent of the school garden, an addition he believed would not only beautify rural school grounds, but provide an engaging and relevant resource for rural students. An educational innovation which received support throughout the nation, the school garden, for Kern at least, held particular value for more rural settings. From his perspective the purpose and potential were clear. The gardens, and the direct engagement with agriculture, represented a close approximation to one critical dimension of country living. Whereas as the school garden could become a valuable asset to the city learner as well, bringing an experiential component to the study of nature, Kern insisted that the rural school garden was uniquely suited to the "material and social environment"³⁰ of the county. The gardens were a close approximation of certain dimension of local, rural lifeways.

Within his advocacy for localized instruction, Kern seemed to recognize the potential challenge hidden in the adoption of certain educational innovations. In the first place, he pointed to the obstacle of teacher training, or lack thereof. "I am aware that the average country school-

²⁸ Kern, *Among Country Schools*, 18-19.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

teacher is not as well trained as she should be,” Kern reminded skeptics, “and she is generally underpaid...This is not what you would call an educational ‘square deal.’”³¹ To that end, a wide variety of resources were offered as a remedy, including citations for key pieces of literature, bulletins of various sorts, and contacts for cooperating state agricultural and educational institutions. Of course, Kern also reminded teachers directly of the realities of adopting new forms of instruction. “This is what I would say to teacher,” he proclaimed, “the thing *now* to *do* is to dig and plant and to learn by doing these very things with the children.”³² In addition to the challenges surrounding teacher education in his reform program, Kern also recognized the potential for the outright rejection of localized instruction, specifically the school garden. The following passage was revealing: “To be sure, there is inertia to overcome and prejudice. We get so in the habit of doing nothing, and our success in this direction is so phenomenal, that it requires some energy to make a new departure. We are afraid that people will say: ‘The school garden! – another fad. It’s all froth and contrary to the sacred course of study.’”³³ Obstacles notwithstanding, Kern nonetheless concluded that “the best way to have a school garden was to have it.”³⁴ The rural school required an invigorated course of study more directly related to the circumstances of country locales and gardening was a central element in that plan.

In addition to the school garden, Kern also tried to localize rural education through experiment clubs and field-trips, both of which he intended to reinforce the curricular emphasis on agriculture and the study of the local natural environment. Introduced under the heading of “extension work,”³⁵ experimental clubs were extracurricular agricultural groups composed of both area students, generally boys, and, not infrequently according to Kern, those who had left

³¹ Kern, *Among Country Schools*, 67

³² *Ibid.*, 66.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.

the school or did not attend regularly. As he detailed of the Winnebago County experiment club: "...Agricultural College extension work has a duplicate list [of students enrolled], and from each office go circulars, bulletins, and literature of various kinds, the main object being to keep in touch with the boys, and to interest them more deeply in the beauty of country life and the worth, dignity, and scientific advancement in agriculture."³⁶ Typically supported by local agricultural offices or state agricultural colleges, Kern described the experiment clubs as powerful extracurricular reinforcements in the overall effort to reform rural education around concerns relevant to agricultural life. And, for the most part, the specific subjects of study in the experimental clubs and in the schools were to mirror local crops and agricultural issues. For Kern, the practice of local study made perfect sense. "Some teachers allow or require their pupils to commit passages about tropical fruits, and perhaps make a perfect (so-called) recitation about the banana or the cocoanut. But to investigate and study a plant growing just outside the school yard, - 'why that is not education.' Yet there are more country children who will make their living by growing corn than by growing tropical fruits. Not less knowledge, perhaps, of things far away, but more study of things in the environment of the country child is necessary."³⁷ From the passage, it seemed clear that Kern was not dismissing the value of studying issues that were non-local. Knowledge of bananas and other tropical fruits were not void of value, according to Kern, but the local was not to be dismissed either. Kern urged educators to discover what was new and vibrant locally with regard to agriculture and bring those real-world concerns into the curriculum. Although geared specifically toward agriculture, a central component of rural living, he also suggested a place-based approach to agriculture and science study that would ultimately touch the entire curriculum. "Find out from your own Experiment Station what variety [of corn]

³⁶ Kern, *Among Country Schools*, 132.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

is suitable,” he wrote, “get an ear or two, and begin some experimental work with your pupils. It will vitalize your language and composition work, your arithmetic, your drawing, your nature study, and will surely quicken the educational interest of the patrons of your district. It will require courage and some study on the part of the teacher to do this; for it is so much easier to go on asking questions from a book.”³⁸ In addition to the potential for agricultural and science learning, Kern added student development in writing and composition. He pointed again to illustrations from Winnebago County, Illinois.

The boys are encouraged to keep memoranda of their corn growing and to write letters about their experimental work...These letters are sent to the County Superintendent and are published in his annual report and sent into every country home. The teacher in the regular work of the school can make the experimental work a basis for letter writing and thus be of great assistance to the boys in improving their power of expression...

There is abundant room for improvement in the mechanics of letter writing, such as the use of capitals, punctuation, and paragraphing; but if the boy has something to write and is not merely required to write something, there is more likelihood of his taking greater interest in what he generally considers a nuisance.³⁹

Hinting at the perceived connections between interest, motivation, and purpose, Kern understood that the localized approach was not subject specific, but capable perhaps of invigorating the entire curriculum.

Kern believed that the rural student “...should visit places and see things for himself” and was openly in favor of what he termed “the educational excursion.”⁴⁰ In part, his affection for field trips stemmed from an understanding about the nature of the learner and the potential value of first-hand experience, a subject discussed in greater detail in a subsequent section below. But Kern’s support for the educational field visit was also reflective of his localized, context specific approach to teaching and learning; that is, the type of visit appropriate for a given school or classroom would necessarily vary from one locale to the next. In an important, if

³⁸ Kern, *Among Country Schools*, 146.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 158.

commonsensical admission, Kern noted that “there are many things worth knowing in an excursion of an hour or so in the neighborhood of the district schoolhouse.”⁴¹ Going further, in a selection from the *Pantagraph*, a Bloomington-based newspaper, observers recommended the expansion of the field trip throughout the rural school districts. “Their spirit and methods,” the paper read, “should be studied, emulated, and adapted to local conditions by other would-be-successful workers in similar fields.”⁴² While it is unclear how well Kern’s suggestions for the educational excursion transferred to rural educators outside of Winnebago County, Illinois, the superintendent’s success with the method, not mention his zeal, was evident. Whether through excursions or school gardens, a central concern for Kern in his work with rural schools was a curriculum reform plan designed with local contexts in mind, that “...important educative material peculiar to the environment of the country child.”⁴³

Liberty Hyde Bailey. Cornell University’s Liberty Hyde Bailey was perhaps the most central figure to emerge during the Country Life Movement and this was as true of his engagement with educational reform as it was of his efforts to address rural problems generally. Among his most important contributions, *The Country Life Movement in the United States* was perhaps the most holistic appraisal of the movement outside of the *Report of Commission on Country Life*. At the heart of Bailey’s reform work was a desire to improve and redirect rural education. “It is perfectly apparent, he noted, “that the fundamental need is to place effectively educated men and women into the open country. All else depends on this.”⁴⁴ Not only was education fundamental in the broadest sense to rural improvement, but Bailey called for a particular sort of school reform. On this matter, he was explicit. “The schools, if they are to be

⁴¹ Kern, *Among Country Schools*, 160.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 162.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁴⁴ Liberty Hyde Bailey, *The Country Life Movement in the United States* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1911), 61.

really effective, must represent the civilization of their time and place. This does not mean that school is to introduce all the subjects that engage men's attention, or that are capable of being put into educational form; it means that it must express the main activities, progress, and outlook of its people."⁴⁵ Like others, Bailey explicitly promoted the localization of schooling in such a way that the curriculum was to be tailor-made and well-fitted to the community of which the school was a part. For rural schools, this localized brand of education required a certain attention to agriculture, a key component of rural lifeways. Bailey added: "Agriculture therefore becomes naturally a part of a public-school system when the system meets its obligation. It is introduced into the schools for the good of the schools themselves. It needs no apology and no justification; but it may need explanation in order that the people may understand the situation."⁴⁶ Bailey refined his educational reform plan further in an effort to distinguish between mere agricultural training and a localized education informed by agricultural living. He wrote:

An internal danger is the giving of instruction in colleges of agriculture that is not founded on good preparation of the student or is not organized on a sound educational basis...There is also danger that new institutions will begin their extension work in advance of their academic educational work;...It is no longer sufficient to call persons together and exhort them and talk to them. We have come about to the end of agricultural propaganda. All field and itinerant effort should have a follow-up system with the purpose to set every man to work on his own place with problems that will test him..."⁴⁷

Bailey's did not simply push for agricultural training, but rather an education with a solid commitment to agricultural study, a feature he believed would better reflect local farming proclivities.

Whereas farming was generally considered men's work, a characteristic seen throughout the writing of Country Life reformers, rural women were believed to hold power primarily over domestic affairs. Reflective of the times, this gendered feature of the movement was evident in

⁴⁵ Bailey, *The Country Life Movement*, 63.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

Bailey's prescriptions for the rural school as well, a feature in keeping with his localized approach. In many ways, his educational recommendations for women were akin to that of men. "I think it is necessary also," he wrote, "that the woman of the farm, as well as the man, have a real anchor in her environment. It is as necessary to the woman as to the man that her mind be open to the facts, phenomena, and objects that are everywhere around her, as the winds and weather, the plants and birds, the fields and streams and woods. It is one of the best resources in life to be able to distinguish the songs and voices of the common field, and it should be a part of the education of every person..."⁴⁸ Elsewhere, Bailey more directly insisted upon educational reforms that addressed the traditional pursuits of country women, namely homemaking. In his remarks on the distinctions between a rural education for women and that for men, he remarked: "If customary subjects in a college of agriculture are organized and designed to train a man for efficiency in country life and to develop this outlook, so also is a department of home economics to train women for efficiency and to develop her outlook to life."⁴⁹ But again, while Bailey specifically addressed what he termed "women's work," specifically "'home economics, household economics,'...and 'domestic science,'"⁵⁰ equal educational opportunity was clearly a motivation. "I would not limit the entrance of women into any course in a college of agriculture," he insisted, "on the contrary, I want all courses open to them freely and on equal terms with men...On the other hand, I do not want to limit the attendance of men in home economics; in fact, I think it will be found that an increasing number of men desire to take these subjects as the work develops..."⁵¹ Above all, and in addition to his recognition of the gendered lives of rural Americans, it is important to reiterate Bailey's plan for reform was very much based in a

⁴⁸ Bailey, *The Country Life Movement*, 93.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

thoughtful consideration of the circumstances shaping rural life. His approach was a localized one.

The Corn Lady. A noted practitioner and advocate of rural educational reform during the Country Life era, Jessie Field's *The Corn Lady* was certainly one of the more widely circulated examples of a reformed rural curriculum in practice. Published in 1911 as a collection of letters to her father, the contribution was essentially a recounting of her practice in the country schools of Page County, Iowa. With the text, Field's recounted her efforts to implement a form of rural education whereby the unique attributes of country living were situated in close proximity to the country school curriculum. As she phrased her purposes in an introductory letter: "I am going to try, in my country school, to teach children in terms of country life. I want to make it of real service to the district – to the farms and the homes. I will write and tell you in the old "Honest Injun, cross my heart and hope to die" way just how I succeed."⁵² Field's subsequent letters suggested that her efforts were successful. Reading materials, for instance, engaged students in farm-related topics. The inclusion of poems such as *Farmer John* and *The Boy with the Hoe* provided two examples of her localized, culturally specific approach. As further illustration, early reading instruction in Field's school utilized reading guides and charts identifying such common vocabulary as "ear" and "corn," all of which was accompanied by narratives of rural Iowan life. As one reading chart read:

I found a good ear of corn.
Papa tested and planted it.
I had even rows.
I like good corn and some day
I will grow it on my farm.⁵³

⁵² Field, *The Corn Lady: The Story of a Country Teacher's Work* (Chicago: A. Flanagan Company, 1911), 17.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 26.

This illustration was hardly unique and Field often described, in considerable detail, her methods of instruction, everywhere with an emphasis on the local and familiar. She recounted, for instance, her handling of an early October “Seed Corn Picking Day.” Field recalled:

October tenth was set by our State College of Agriculture as Seed Corn Picking Day. I explained how important it was that farmers pick their seed corn early...and asked pupils...[to] pick for me the best ear of corn they could find and bring it to school the next morning...Then I asked one of the fathers,...to come and talk to the children on the good points of an ear of corn for seed...You should have seen their eyes shine – the children’s – who found this information about real things most interesting...

The next day, for language, we wrote an account of what we had learned about corn. I never had secured before such clear expression...

In geography, we have drawn maps of all the farms, showing the fields and what had been planted in each of the past four years...

We have drawn maps of the township, indicating the amount of products along every line, as shown in the assessor’s book at the county auditor’s office. The we drew the county...And we did the same for the state...⁵⁴

Field’s attention to Iowan farm experiences was a trend throughout the exercises she described and did much to clarify her localized reform approach. Of equal significance, the passage seemed to reveal a multidisciplinary approach; that is, Field’s methodology was one she found to be of use across the curriculum.

Of central concern for Field was agriculture, the primary occupation in her rural Iowan community. Field did not indicate what percentage of instructional time was spent in agricultural study, though it was evident from her illustrations that the subject did find its way into the course of study on numerous occasions. Describing further her methods and materials, she wrote: “We are taking up a text-book on agriculture and this, together with experiments and observations in the neighborhoods, talks by prominent farmers, and use of the farm bulletins, makes our work more interesting.”⁵⁵ Her school was not wholly an agricultural one, but her continued efforts to reflect local lifeways in school work was an important aspect of her approach which cannot be

⁵⁴ Field, *The Corn Lady*, 31-34.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

overemphasized. Field's endeavor to rearrange rural mathematics instruction was particularly illustrative. Portraying for her father her interaction with a student's father, Field remarked:

One German father stopped me in the road the other day to tell me how glad he was that his boy was learning arithmetic down at the school that he could use. "Why," he said, "John used to come home at night and I would give him the scale tickets to figure up and he couldn't do it – nor the cream checks, either...He used to say when he was trying to figure out his problems for to-morrow, 'Pa, do you times this, or is it into?' He don't ask such silly questions now. You've taught him to really know what he is doing in arithmetic...I am mighty thankful to you for it, too."⁵⁶

From the student's father's perspective, the difference seemed to be found in the approach. Field's rural mathematics dealt with those contexts familiar to students. In a supplemental section entitled *Farm Arithmetic Problems* in the same text, Field provided readers with a wide array of additional mathematics tools for the rural classroom. One sample word problem read as follows:

2. A crib of corn 10 feet wide is made up of three 16-foot sections. Two of these sections are full to the top, 10 feet high throughout. The third 16-foot section is 8 feet high with corn at one end sloping off to 4 feet* at the other end. How much corn in each of the full sections, and how much of this last one partly full? How much corn altogether?⁵⁷

Additional samples in the supplement included problems surrounding labor, crop rotation, dairy, drainage, spray mixtures, and a variety of other practical and farm-related topics. In all cases, Field's underlying assumption was that mathematics instruction, and the same could be transferred to other subjects of study as well, should be contextualized. More importantly, those contexts should be localized, familiar, and consistent with the experiences of in the community of which the school was situated.

Harold Waldstein Foght. Rarely cited, Norwegian-born Harold Waldstein Foght was another notable contributor to the reform of rural education in the initial decades of the twentieth century. Foght authored several texts on the subject of rural school improvement, both domestic

⁵⁶ Field, *The Corn Lady*, 59.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

and international, and remained active in the area of school practice. He also reportedly “organized the first department in the United States for the specific training of rural teachers”⁵⁸ as a faculty member of the State Normal School in Kirksville, Missouri and went on to direct state educational surveys throughout the United States for the Bureau of Education. By all accounts, Foght’s dedication to the study and to the improvement of the rural school was a lifelong pursuit.

In *The American Rural School: Its Characteristics, Its Future and Its Problems*, published 1910, Foght proclaimed that “...no other subject is now engaging so much public attention as is the movement to organize rural life.”⁵⁹ Dedicated to rural school practitioners, who Foght believed “...must bear the brunt of the change,” the text hinged on the “...conviction that teachers should be more conversant with rural school history and know more about the educational problems now looking toward solution.”⁶⁰ Foght’s work was holistic, arguably covering the full spectrum of educational concerns.

Of particular import with regard to a review of place-based conceptions of teaching and learning were Foght’s words on the significance of ecological study and the school garden in the rural school. In part, his intention was to address the perceived importance enhancing the aesthetic appeal of the rural school grounds, “the dignified modern structure.”⁶¹ But the beautification of the schoolyard was not the sole source for Foght’s affection and his deeper intent was to reinvent the rural school curriculum. Overly formal and out-of-touch with rural living, operation of the rural school deserved rethinking. “All our work has been too formal and bookish,” Foght explained, “We have all along relied too much on text-books to the neglect of real living nature...Paradoxical as it may sound, the farm child has lived in the very heart of

⁵⁸ “Harold Waldstein Foght,” *Journal of Education* LXXXIX, no. 17 (April 1919): 473.

⁵⁹ Harold W. Foght, *The American Rural School: Its Characteristics, Its Future and Its Problems* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1910), viii.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, viii-ix.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 154.

nature and yet remained a stranger there.”⁶² Ultimately, Foght hoped to reunite school practice with the uniqueness of rural living.

Like a number of other rural school reformers, Foght described the inclusion of nature study in the country school curriculum as a part of an overall plan for change. In his mind, however, investigations of nature did not represent an additional course of study, but rather as “...a leaven infused into old forms.”⁶³ “It applies in great measure to the entire course of study,” he added, “since it is possible to encourage the child to close and careful observation of nature through a properly directed lesson in English composition as readily almost as through lessons in geography and elementary science.”⁶⁴ Essentially a method of study, Foght outlined in detail the potential advantages of such a multidisciplinary approach for rural students. Although he avoided a specific outline for what precisely rural teachers should include in their efforts to implement nature study, Foght did provide exemplary syllabi and offered generalized recommendations. Nonetheless, despite his advocacy, he maintained a commitment to localized implementation. “Just what topics should be included in the nature-study course in rural schools and what left out,” he explained, “will be determined by the essential and fundamental things in rural life. They will center largely about the useful and practical in the local environment...”⁶⁵ Illustrating a program for learning within the immediate surrounds of the school, Foght remained committed to a localized curriculum and methodology within the larger project of rural educational reform.

In addition to nature study, though not altogether removed, Foght was a fierce supporter of the school garden, another foundational piece of his plan for country school reform. Detailed

⁶² Foght, *The American Rural School*, 154.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 155

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 161.

charts and diagrams regarding the design of school grounds could be found throughout *The American Rural School* and Foght offered recommendations on everything from vine and shrub types, to soil preparation and toad aquaria. He also dedicated an entire chapter to the school garden itself, its history and its appropriateness in the American rural school. And Foght recognized that the tool was hardly a “recent innovation.”⁶⁶ He reported:

The Greeks held them in high esteem by reason of the aesthetic influence that they asserted. The immortal Plato taught his disciples in the famous Academic Garden near Athens; while Plato the broad-browed, in imitation of the master, taught eager listeners under the shady oaks of the Lyceum Garden. Christian teachers of the Middle Ages gave garden culture a practical turn...All the great educators from Comenius to Froebel have emphasized the importance of nature study and school gardens...⁶⁷

From Foght’s perspective, the school garden was nearly ubiquitous in early educational settings.⁶⁸ Cognizant of earlier models, his renewed promotion called for the establishment and expansion of similar methods in American rural schools. According to statistics compiled by the United States Department of Agriculture, an estimated 75,000 school gardens were in operation in American schools by 1906, concentrated primarily in the rural school and in the Midwestern states of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and Illinois. Foght went on to reveal that Ohio, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Colorado were similarly touched by the movement.⁶⁹ Regardless of appearances, Foght nonetheless argued that the value of school gardens had yet to be realized and was in need of a more widespread acceptance in the rural schools across the nation. “Two difficulties must be met before school gardening can become an integral part of our educational system,” he explained. In brief, Foght revealed that the lack of “popular attention” and the

⁶⁶ Foght, *The American Rural School*, 179.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁶⁸ See Chapter 2 for similar discussion regarding the use of local settings and contexts in the educational philosophies of early thinkers.

⁶⁹ Foght, *The American Rural School*, 195.

availability of “trained teachers able to face and surmount any obstacles thrown in the way...”⁷⁰ were the greatest obstacles to school gardening initiatives. Foght found the same to be true in his larger appeal for the adoption of nature study in the rural school. But he was not without solutions.

To address the issue of public indifference, Foght insisted that rural school managers embark on what he referred to as “A campaign of education,”⁷¹ essentially a public relations effort designed to build momentum and to ensure district-wide participation. Alongside the call to garner public support for the rural school garden, Foght also addressed directly the problems of rural teacher education, interrelated concerns in his mind. To this end, he identified a variety of potential resources for teachers and other practitioners considering the inclusion of school gardens, and perhaps nature study more generally. From selected works to supportive state and private institutions, Foght was explicit in his recommendations. “The first step,” he wrote, “would most likely be to read some good book or books on school gardens – dealing with their value, how to make them, course of instruction, etc. Then let him send to the Bureau of Education for a free list of bulletins on the subject, gleaning from them such suggestive materials as they may contain...State horticultural societies, state normal schools, and state agricultural colleges willingly send their bulletins, manuals, and courses of study...Better still are excursions to school gardens already in operation;...”⁷² Elsewhere, in a “companion volume” entitled *The Rural Teacher and His Work*, Foght addressed in considerable detail both the new rural curriculum and what referred to as the “professionalization of the entire working staff.”⁷³ As

⁷⁰ Foght, *The American Rural School*, 195.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁷² *Ibid.* 197-198.

⁷³ Harold W. Foght, *The Rural Teacher and His Work* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1924), vii; ix.

strong were the resources for the establishment and maintenance of the garden was Foght's advocacy for its installation in the rural curriculum.

Of course, Foght's rationale for the school garden and the expanded practice of nature study was, at its root, entangled in the notion that the school was an extension of the local community of which it was a part. He stated as much explicitly where he proclaimed that "Nature study and school gardens have proved the open sesame in the relation of school life to community life."⁷⁴ "Educational systems are made for man," he noted further, "and not man for educational systems; and what these systems shall embrace must necessarily be governed by the dominant interest in the community."⁷⁵ From these passages, it seems reasonable to suggest that Foght's advocacy for a program of nature study for rural students was motivated by a desire to tailor the educational program around the local. The city-based curriculum was of little significance in the rural school. "Heretofore the rural schools have drawn their inspiration from the city schools," he explained. "Thence came their teachers and ideals, their curricula and text-books. Thitherward lay all their aspirations and strivings, to the belittlement of farm life and all that to it belonged."⁷⁶ Foght's insinuation was that the needs of the rural and city school were not perfectly aligned, but that the city school curriculum was nevertheless predominate. In response, he argued that "Every activity of the community must be reflected in the curriculum. The farmplace, the fields, the streams, and the forests must all become laboratories or, at least, subject materials for the modern school."⁷⁷ Foght's reform plan demanded a more locally-focused, a more rural-focused, approach.

⁷⁴ Foght, *The Rural Teacher*, 205

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 206.

⁷⁷ Horace M. Culter and Julia M. Stone, *The Rural School: Its Methods and Management* (Boston: Silver Burdett and Company, 1913), 229.

The Rural School a Laggard. In their introductory comments to *The Rural School: Its Methods and Management*, Horace M. Culter, of Kansas State Normal School, and Julia M. Stone, a teacher at Western Kansas State Normal School, suggested that American rural schools, like their urban counterparts, had witnessed significant improvement. “In many respects,” they reported, “the twentieth-century rural school is far in advance of the schools of the nineteenth century. The [school]houses are better, and better equipped; the teachers, though younger, are better educated; the curriculum is richer and more nearly adapted to the needs of child life; the school term is longer and the advantages of school are more nearly within the reach of every child...”⁷⁸ Quick to dispell myths and misconceptions regarding the improved state of rural schooling, Culter and Stone did not dispute the continued need for change and the growing disparity in educational quality as compared to urban counterparts. Claryifying the the rural school problem, they added further:

The true basis of complaint is not that the rural school has not improved, *but that it has not kept and is not keeping, step with the onward progress of our civilization.* It is a laggard in the race with its sister, the city school [emphasis in original]...

[S]ix months of school in the country are not the equivalent of nine months in the city, and this is about the proportion of educational advantages offered in many of our states. In order that the country child may have as good school privileges as the city child, the country must have better schoolhouses and equipment; better supervision and more of it; longer terms of school; courses of study in harmony with rural conditions; and better teachers who have been trained for rural school work...⁷⁹

In line with deficiencies cited above, Culter and Stone went on to add that “While the cities, under great disadvantages, have been teaching nature, the country has done little, though surrounded on every hand by nature’s handiwork.”⁸⁰ Culter and Stone were desirous of new forms of curriculum and instruction, forms better suited to rural locales. “What we need,” they

⁷⁸ Culter and Stone, *The Rural School*, 1.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, vii-2.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

insisted, “are schools situated to the rural conditions, taught by teachers who know and are in sympathy with rural conditions.”⁸¹ The passage was indicative of a context-sensitive approach.

Culter and Stone provided considerable detail on the process of designing and acquiring school libraries as a part of their school reform agenda. There again, local circumstances and lifeways, particularly agriculture, received considerable attention. They remarked:

...[T]here should be some books on agriculture, in order that boys may be led to read along this line. There are many good books being put upon the market each year, and much good information can be obtained from them. “Farm Life Readers,” published by Silver Burdett Company, is a series which will commend itself to the rural teacher. Then, too, the writing of a postal card will bring valuable information from the Agricultural Department at Washington or from the Agricultural College regarding bulletins and reports. Many of these can be had for the asking.⁸²

Embedded within their commitment to include agriculture-based studies, Culter and Stone also emphasized nature study and geography in their suggested plan for a working library in rural schools. The following excerpt from H.L. Kent of Kansas State Agricultural College was instructive:

The work must be applied locally and in this way the general principles may be illustrated and applied most effectively. These principles should whenever possible be illustrated and applied to special crops, as corn, oats, wheat, apples, sorghum, etc. The work must follow the seasons so that the teacher may secure materials and apply the subject matter. It must not be wholly a textbook course, but it must be more a study of things. The barnyard, the orchard, the field, and the feed lot must constantly be sources of information and illustration.⁸³

The local emphasis was clear. Not merely a suggestion of what might be possible in the rural schools, Culter and Stone added to the proposed emphasis on localized agriculture practice a series of specific instructional tools. School gardens, canning regimes, clubs, and contests represented several relevant illustrations. Connections to local circumstance were central to Culter and Stone’s vision of improving the efficacy of rural schooling.

⁸¹ Culter and Stone, *The Rural School*, 52.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 129.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 171.

Although agricultural science did appear to be a mainstay, the localized approach offered by Culter and Stone was not isolated within a particular domain of the curriculum. Geography for example, was to begin at or near the home and "...with those things with which the pupils are somewhat acquainted."⁸⁴ "Of all the studies in the whole program," they insisted, "there is none which can be made more interesting than geography."⁸⁵ In addition to a consideration of local plant and animal species, Culter and Stone recommended local map making and map reading, noting that students might "draw an outline of the school ground, locating schoolhouse, well, coal house, hitching posts, etc.,...[or perhaps] locate farms and homes."⁸⁶ They also highlighted for the rural connections between history and geography. "Geography and history should go hand in hand," they reminded readers, "The one seems to reinforce the other. Knowing a bit of the history of a city, state, or country, helps fix and hold its location in mind...and make it more real."⁸⁷ Strangely enough, the history texts cited by Culter and Stone did not appear to be particularly supportive of a localized conception of teaching and learning. Regardless, their overall plan for rural educational reform did indeed draw heavily upon the unique circumstances surrounding the country school.

Joseph Kinmont Hart. Joseph Kinmont Hart, Assistant Professor of Education at the University of Washington, was another influential figure in the educational reform efforts that grew out of the Country Life Movement. In his edited volume, *Educational Resources of Village and Rural Communities*, published 1913, Hart and contributors worked to refine contemporary arguments surrounding rural educational reform. More specifically, the text represented a

⁸⁴ Culter and Stone, *The Rural School*, 360.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 362.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 365.

collection of essays on the importance establishing better connections between the rural school and the communities of which they were a part.

Hart's point of departure in introducing the *Educational Resources* was to recall the traditional purposes of an education, those purposes that existed before the school itself. In his mind, the curriculum was life itself, the entirety of which was determined by whatever community to which the learner belonged as a novice member. "The school," Hart recalled, "was no school in the formal sense of the word; and because there was none, all education was practical, thorough, and moral: practical because wrought out of the very life of the community; thorough because the tests were those of life itself, and none could call himself educated until the active world passed upon his qualifications; and moral because, both in purpose and content, it was the community's own life and purpose wrought in the life and purpose of the maturing child..."⁸⁸ The school, perhaps not a structure or building at all, was life. For Hart, the problem with contemporary rural schools was the lack of connection to the realities of rural, community living. "If we could get our eyes open," he insisted, "we could make these community elements and forces mean infinitely more than they now mean in the real education of our children."⁸⁹ In Hart's mind, reestablishing the connection between country life and the curriculum was the essence of rural school reform.

Following Hart's introductory remarks regarding the potential of community in educational reform, contributing authors, including Hart himself, addressed a wide variety of community resources relevant to the transformation of the rural school. Reuben Gold Thwaites, for instance, Superintendent of Wisconsin State Historical Society and University of Wisconsin Lecturer in History, elaborated on the potential for an investigation of local history in the rural

⁸⁸ Joseph K. Hart, ed., *Educational Resources of Village and Rural Communities* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1913), 2.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

school. "...[P]upils should acquire a knowledge of the history of their locality," he argued. "To the casual observer, the record of an obscure American town may seem to furnish few circumstances worthy of remembrance. But a careful study of its annals will invariably reveal some facts and incidents well calculated to arouse the interest, if not the enthusiasm, of every intelligent member of society."⁹⁰ Thwaites added further:

"With all of this, there should be a thoughtful summarizing of reasons why the town grew and is likely to grow – the geographical, topographical, and historical considerations underlying this growth..."

Thus it will be seen that the smallest and apparently the least interesting of American communities presents abundant and significant problems for the local historian, economist, sociologist, or other student of life and manners; and woven in and around these problems will surely be discovered many a life story to illumine the tale with grace and romance.⁹¹

Like Thwaites, Hart, too, found value in the local history surrounding the rural school. For Hart, however, engagement with local history extended to political life as well. To clarify, Hart worked to outline questions and problems surrounding such issues as the franchise, units of government, political parties, news media, and the general role of government in a democracy. Yet the local held special significance as well. "Locally," he suggested, "in every community the real democratic problem is that of securing independent thinking along political lines by every individual. Thus constantly the local community is at the mercy of the political boss, who usually has some more or less corrupt alliance with insidious financial elements and manipulates the political life of his community so that these financial interests flow constantly in this direction."⁹² In Hart's mind, investigations of local civic participation and the health of democracy at the community level were legitimate elements of a reformed rural curriculum.

⁹⁰ Reuben G. Thwaites, "The Local History of the Community," in *Educational Resources of Village and Rural Communities*, ed., Joseph K. Hart (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1913), 84.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 86-87.

⁹² Joseph K. Hart, "The Political Life," in *Educational Resources of Village and Rural Communities*, ed., Joseph K. Hart (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1913), 100.

After all, he concluded, “In the life of the local community is to be found the place where democracy grows or where it fails. In the heart of the common individual the ultimate test of democracy will be made.”⁹³ Hart was confident that the inclusion of community political life in the classroom offered many possibilities for rural teaching and learning, if not the improvement of American democracy. The latter point is addressed in greater detail in a subsequent section.

For Hart and others keen to reform the rural school in such way as to “reflect the daily life and interests of the community,”⁹⁴ agriculture almost necessarily touched the curriculum at one point or another. “Since agriculture is our chief primary industry,” he explained, “the redirected education for the open country must be agricultural in its nature.”⁹⁵ Some form of agriculture-based study was, for Hart, indispensable as the city curriculum was ill-fitted to local conditions in rural settings. To be sure, Hart’s conception of a redirected rural curriculum did limit certain areas of learning, as curricular choices were always measured against a benchmark of the local and the rural. “The rural schools will soon be teaching less of stocks and bonds, cube root, and Troy weight;” he revealed, “and more of dairy problems and rotation of farm crops, spraying mixtures, and handy farm measures...”⁹⁶ Hart clearly viewed the city and country as culturally distinctive entities, and this was reflected in his curricular choices. While astronomy or stocks and bonds may have been warranted in the city, they were less welcome in the rural school. Hart insisted on what he believed to be a more practical curriculum for country children.

Farm Arithmetic. Charles William Burkett and Karl Dale Swatzel, agricultural and mathematics professionals respectively, published in 1913 an extended text on the subject of rural school mathematics. Entitled *Farm Arithmetic*, the text represented a supplement to

⁹³ Hart, *Educational Resources*, 101.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 218.

mathematics instruction in the country school, a reflection of the localized, rural-based approach that came to dominate during the Country Life Movement. Less than a guide to mathematical principles and processes, *Farm Arithmetic* intended to "...supply new, concrete, useful...and interesting problems for practice, drill, and review."⁹⁷

As did other Country Life supporters, *Farm Arithmetic* assumed a city bias to exist in contemporary mathematics texts. "There is much in modern higher arithmetic," Burkett and Swatzel explained, "that is of but little value to certain classes of pupils. Particularly is this true of the subject matter of many text-books now in use in rural schools – country, town, and village. These books were made by city people for city children and are, for the most part, admirably adapted to city schools. The problems deal very largely with city affairs and occupations."⁹⁸ For Burkett and Swatzel, their contribution was to serve as a partial corrective. More specifically, their intention worked to reorient mathematics in the rural schools toward the familiar, local experience. "Arithmetic may be taught in terms of agriculture," they suggested. "The household, the soil, the dairy, the crops, and the animals offer wonderful opportunities for the introduction of number and arithmetical problems into the school work as a vital part of the life of the children. Thus the farm arithmetic falls directly into line with the environment of farm boys and girls."⁹⁹ Yet in addition to mathematics study, Burkett and Swatzel also noted that the realistic nature of the text would also ensure its suitability to agricultural instruction. They wrote: "On the other hand, agriculture may be taught in terms of arithmetic. When so taught the real nature of the all important problems with which the country youth of the present and the future must deal, both in school and after taking up farm and home life, will become apparent to him and will

⁹⁷ Charles W. Burkett and Karl D. Swatzel, *Farm Arithmetic* (New York: Orange Judd Company, 1913), v.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, vii.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

receive adequate attention at his hands.”¹⁰⁰ Serving the purposes of a supplement for both mathematics and agricultural study, the three-hundred page, twenty-chapter text provided sample mathematical problems across a wide array of issues pertaining to country life. Plant feeding, soil, field crops, farm animals, roads, farm drainage, forestry, and farm accounts, while not exhaustive, represented several of the topics covered. Although not oriented around a specific locale, *Farm Arithmetic*, far more so at least than other mainstream texts available at the time, represented the local conditions of rural communities. *Farm Arithmetic* was not the only illustration of its type, but an important contribution nonetheless as it demonstrated the extent and relative force of desires to reorient the country school in such a way as to better reflect rural conditions had at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁰¹

L.C. Brogden. In a text entitled *Suggestions for Rural School Supervisors*, published 1920, North Carolina State Superintendent for Rural Elementary Schools, L. C. Brogden, provided a number of practical suggestions for rural school leaders. Of particular relevance for the present discussion, Brogden paid considerable attention to the nature of the relationships forged between the rural teacher and his/her school community. Under the subheading, “Attitude of the teacher toward the community,” Brogden posed the following questions:

Does the teacher have the right attitude toward the community in which she is teaching?...Is she endeavoring to make her school a real community center in the life of the people by organizing and conducting spelling matches and debates between the more advanced pupils in the school and the men and the women in the community;...Does she take a sympathetic interest in all worthy movements in the community for the improvement of the educational, social and moral worth of the community? Or is the teacher lacking in community spirit, feeling that her sole mission out there is to teach the three R’s to those pupils who care to come?¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Burkett and Swatzel, *Farm Arithmetic*, vii-viii.

¹⁰¹ In fact, at least a faint interest in the subject could be seen years in advance of the publication of the *Report of the Commission on Country Life*. As one example, Frank H. Hall published *Arithmetic of the Farm and Workshop* in 1885.

¹⁰² L. C. Brogden, *Suggestions for Rural School Supervisors*, Educational Bulletin XXVIII (Raleigh, NC: Office of State Superintendent of Public Supervision, 1920), 38.

Brogden's consistent reference to community was significant. He found immense value in those things local and familiar and encouraged the inclusion of such subjects of study as "home geography, local history, community civics, community arithmetic, home project work in agriculture, home gardening and home making."¹⁰³ Writing from a supervisory perspective, his school-as-community-center sentiment was consistent with other contemporary support for a more localized approach to rural educational reform in the early twentieth century.

Marion G. Kirkpatrick. Regretful of his own self-identified failures as an ill-prepared rural school teacher, Marion G. Kirkpatrick's *The Rural School from Within*, published 1917, stood as somewhat rare personal account and advisory text for would-be rural educators. Later a specialist of education at Kansas State Agricultural College, Kirkpatrick was initially a country school teacher, a job which he found initially troublesome. "As I look back upon my work in that school," he recalled, "I see many, many vital mistakes that I made, my first one being an attempt to teach school. I had no particular preparation for the work. I had gone into it with the thought of teaching one term, and *Methods of Study* or the *Art of Teaching* had not been any definite part of my school work."¹⁰⁴ While much of the text read as a personal reflection, detailing the trials and tribulations of the new teacher, Kirkpatrick did address several important and generalizing features of rural school reform, one of which was his preference for a more localized conception of rural school reform. In a chapter appropriately entitled "Suggested Improvements," for instance, Kirkpatrick offered a variety of recommendations for rural school reform. In the first place, he made a general appeal for the notion that the "Curriculum must be made to function with the life of the community."¹⁰⁵ Although Kirkpatrick was concerned primarily with the length of school terms, and ultimately, the need for rural school consolidation, his work

¹⁰³ Brogden, *Suggestions for Rural School Supervisors*, 111.

¹⁰⁴ Marion G. Kirkpatrick, *The Rural School from Within* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1917), 22.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 257.

represented yet another prescription for curricular change in the way of localizing content and method.

Summary. Country Life reformers concerned with rural education shared a number of things in common. Among those similarities, advocates for change consistently pointed to the need for a more localized curriculum, one better fitted to the unique circumstances of rural life. Although advocates sometimes drew broad illustrations of rural life, illustrations which arguably minimized the distinctiveness of particular localities, there was nonetheless a thoughtful commitment to the utilization of those objects and phenomena unique to rural settings. At the very least, however, there seemed to be a consensus that rural locales across the nation deserved something other than that common to the city school. In addition to nature study, field excursions, and school garden projects, country lifers called for local history studies and closer examination of community civics. Although agriculture often provided an appropriate context for learning, local farm life was to invigorate the entire course of study. The local nature of Country Life educational reform represented an important historical antecedent for modern place-based pedagogy. Of course, the local focus of the reinvented country school was often inspired by assumptions surrounding the needs and nature of the rural student.

Country Life & the Learner

As indicated above, a prominent feature of the educational reform measures proposed by Country Life advocates was the localized character of those efforts. The city-based curriculum was generally regarded as inappropriate in many ways, and the alternative was a plan for teaching and learning that better reflected the unique opportunities available in rural settings, where agriculture provided a strong, foundational context for life. Much of the agenda to reform the country school was also based in certain assumptions about the learning process as well. In

short, progressive ideals regarding the significance of the learner's lived experience did much to inform the school reform agenda. A number of country school supporters recognized the value of first-hand experience in the learning process and the opportunities for such work in a localized, context-specific format. These attributes of Country Life educational reform are highlighted in the lines below as a further indication of the connections argued here to exist between the movement and the ideals underlying modern place-based education.

O. J. Kern. An early representation, Kern argued that the rural school course of study must be amended to take better account of the nature of the rural learner. "The country child," he implored, "shall be put into sympathetic and intelligent relation to his environment. The country-school studies shall relate more to the life of the child, that this life may be rendered more significant."¹⁰⁶ Kern clearly hoped to reorganize the rural school in such a way that better reflected the lived experiences of rural students. Of course, emphasis on the nature of the learner was a theme that came to dominate certain aspects of progressive educational reform, generally. Kern hinted as much where he suggested that "We are slowly changing our opinions with reference to many things in the training of the child. To-day [sic] we are inclined to believe John Dewey that education is not merely a preparation *for* life, but that it *is*, or should be, life. [emphasis in original]"¹⁰⁷ In Kern's view, reorienting the country school around the realities of country life was a responsibility that rural educators could not afford to ignore. For him, to do otherwise was to violate the rights of the country child.

In addition to the reorientation of the country school curriculum around rural life, Kern also recognized the need to transform traditional instructional practice. As one example, he called on rural educators to take students outside and to take hold of the many educational

¹⁰⁶ Kern, *Among Country Schools*, 32.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

opportunities available in open, rural spaces. “Children *see* things along the country road to school,” Kern noted, “but they are not taught to *think* about these things; we allow them to spend too much time in reading *about* things.” An appeal for a more experiential, observation-based approach to learning, he reiterated the need to incorporate phenomena and processes uniquely available in rural contexts. “The polar bear gets more of the child’s attention than does the study of a noxious weed on the farm...What is needed is that the significance of that noxious weed should be pointed out, and its relation to the life of the boy and to his prosperity as a farmer indicated...”¹⁰⁸ A hint toward the larger purposes of education in transforming rural lifeways, Kern’s statement also revealed a deep commitment to relevancy. The manner of instruction and the nature of the learner were concerns of paramount importance, and Kern was not alone in his advocacy for reform.

The Corn Lady. Like Kern, Field also referenced frequently the significance of the nature of the learner. For her, it was student interest and familiarity that deserved attention in the effort to devise a new program for country students. In short, Field suggested that connections to student’s lived experiences were critical. The letter to her father excerpted below was illustrative: “It has been a wonderful year. It has helped and developed me in many ways and I have been so glad to have had the opportunity to try to re-direct a country school so that it would fit country life...And I have had the part I like best, because it is nearest to the real work. I would rather work it out in this one district school, than to be on the president’s Farm Life Commission. It is easy to say something must be done, and to give advice, but to really meet actual conditions and work them out, that is a task well worth anyone’s time and strength of mind.”¹⁰⁹ Decidedly content to approach rural school reform from the bottom up and as a practitioner, Field

¹⁰⁸ Field, *The Corn Lady*, 160.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

represented a remarkable illustration of the potential of a rural school where country students' lived experiences were made a more significant part of the classroom. The contexts of rural living had to be reflected in the country school curriculum.

Harold Waldstein Foght. Foght was arguably most interested in the improvement of rural farming methods and agricultural productivity, but at the same time he was concerned with the installment of a more appropriate and locally relevant educational program for rural students. Citing roots in both Rousseau and Pestalozzi, Foght reminded readers that “The first fruits of the new century have been to realize much that was advocated by the early educational seers.”¹¹⁰ New method for rural school practitioners was perhaps nothing new at all, though its educative value was not to be underestimated. Recognizing the tradition supporting his reform agenda, Foght called on educators to capture the rural interest in agriculture-related problems. His comments on the influence of farm clubs and agricultural competitions were indicative of the potential connection. “No expedient made use of in recent years by educators, in their efforts to solve the farm problem,” he wrote, “has met with so universal approval as has the industrial club. It appeals to the average farmer’s self-interest...The influence of the industrial clubs on the education of the farm youth can hardly be overestimated.”¹¹¹ In Foght’s vision for rural school improvement, the local agricultural problem was to become a starting point in the creation of the new rural curriculum. Foght went on to note that his comments were not intended as “any disrespect for the three R’s, which are excellent in their place.”¹¹² Nonetheless, the clear preference in his approach was for the range of educational experiences that might hold some relevance for country living. “To implant a taste for good reading is one of the teacher’s most important duties,” he insisted, but “The solution to life’s problems is not found in books. It must

¹¹⁰ Field, *The Corn Lady*, 161.

¹¹¹ Foght, *The American Rural School*, 223.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 250.

come from personal observation, from individual reasoning and reflection.”¹¹³ Without excluding entirely the traditional academic subjects, Foght supported an education suited to the solution of problems oriented around legitimate concerns within the larger experience of country living.

Foght’s test of educational utility was apparently determined by the relevance of subject matter to the lived experiences of students within the community served. He was not, as noted, an advocate of casting away the traditional course of study in its entirety. “The fundamental principles of the average subject are ordinarily retained,”¹¹⁴ Foght insisted. At the same time, the traditional studies had to be made more relevant. In his words, “The local application alone is modified to bring the problem within the experience of the pupil’s daily activities.”¹¹⁵ Traditional English instruction in the rural school was particularly ill-fitted to the needs of country students and Foght went so far as to suggest that “No subject in the rural school curriculum has been so badly taught as the English language.”¹¹⁶ Foght based his critique in his belief that effective communication should take precedence over mechanical understandings of language. While not overlooking the utility of grammar in refining speech and writing, he demanded that grammatical understanding arise in partnership with other aspects of language instruction. “...[I]nstruction in grammar should come later,” he argued, “after the child has learned to express himself in reasonably good English, orally and in writing...Grammatical forms should be introduced incidentally by the teacher in connection with the language lessons.”¹¹⁷ In addition to the timing and manner of grammar instruction, Foght addressed the importance of vocabulary, spelling, and reading in the rural school as well. Again, local circumstance was to be a determining factor in selections made. “The average language lesson,” he wrote, “should grow

¹¹³ Foght, *The American Rural School*, 255.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Foght, *The American Rural Teacher*, 238.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 240.

out of the actual daily needs of the children.”¹¹⁸ In an effort to illustrate the potential of the approach, he offered the following guide to composition work: “The teacher must take the child in its own thought-world, and, while directing him, should be careful not to impose his composition themes on the child, who must be permitted to ‘say’ what is in his heart to say. The fields and hills, and woods and brooks, the school and home garden, the home projects, the children’s play life, their chickens and calves – all are full of vital interests that may serve as themes for oral and written composition.”¹¹⁹ Foght provided a similar illustration in the area of spelling where, again, localized vocabulary was critical and students mastered terms of community life first. As he later remarked, “The child too often fails to get a good grasp of the simplest everyday words because he has to struggle with long lists of words lying almost wholly outside his own vocabulary.”¹²⁰ From here, Foght shifted to address the relative appropriateness of reading and writing instruction in the rural school. Consistent in his approach, he again measured the effectiveness of reading instruction according to the extent to which it allowed for or promoted student interests. “Reading is valuable,” he argued, “only as it appeals to a child’s instincts and interests.”¹²¹ Foght appeared to place little value in the Classics or other traditional texts, at least as far as the rural school was concerned. He recommended that as little time as possible be spent on such things as “flourishes, scrolls, and complicated monograms.”¹²²

Foght also commented on the reform of country school mathematics. Rather than drills, which he regarded as increasingly inappropriate, problem-solving was to guide lessons. Math was to have a purpose beyond the mastery of functions and methods of calculation. More specifically, Foght advocated the outright elimination of “Troy weight, apothecaries’ weight,

¹¹⁸ Foght, *The American Rural School*, 241.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 243.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 244.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 197; 247.

¹²² *Ibid.*

tables of foreign money, annual interest, compound interest, and partial payments...”¹²³ He also called for the deletion of the metric system in the rural mathematics curriculum, at least “until the government enforces its use.”¹²⁴ Despite appearances, however, Foght absolutely did value adeptness in mathematics. His concern was the applicability to the local community and to the lived experiences of rural students. Mathematics was for Foght a critically important subject, but it had to be revised into a more relevant and practical endeavor. Abstract calculations were to be discarded.

Foght also placed a high value on geography instruction and his apparent disenchantment with traditional methods of instruction remained intact in that reform context as well. His appreciation for geography and its almost natural relationship to the lived experiences of rural students may also have been the source of his frustration over what he regarded as generally poor teaching of the subject. He explained:

...[T]hey have contented themselves with teaching common terms and definitions used in describing land and water forms from the printed page of the book rather than from the hills and valleys, brooks and ponds, lying at the heart of the school community!

Even yet are rural children obliged to spend their time in memorizing definitions of capes and headlands, peninsulas and isthmuses, located somewhere on the map; their time is taken up with “bounding” states and countries and hemispheres, with locating state capitals and state metropolises and countless other facts just as dreary and profitless.¹²⁵

Rather than places and names, Foght’s clear preference was for an earnest investigation of the countless geographical aspects of the immediate surrounds, the home, the school, and the community. In addition to the utility that might come from a study of one’s own local environment, he expressed affection for the way in which students might learn. As Foght imagined it, “To begin with the familiar and work outward to the less well-known or strange

¹²³ Foght, *The American Rural School*, 249.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 251.

affords opportunity to utilize the children's apperceptive powers."¹²⁶ Building new learning from existing understanding seemed to undergird much of the approach advocated and this approach was very much consistent with contemporary trends in the field of geography education.¹²⁷ In the context of the reform of the country school, Foght found a great deal of utility in local geography study.

Foght also made brief mention of historical study and civics. Where civic education was concerned, the emphasis on local circumstances remained strong. Of equal import, Foght argued that civic education in the rural school should be purposeful and experiential where appropriate. Regarding rural citizenship, he wrote: "The rural school has not done what it can towards training for citizenship. There is too much *talking* about citizenship in the schools, but too little *living* it from day to day."¹²⁸ The challenge for the country school teacher was to create an environment where students could practice citizenship, rather than simply reading about it. "Citizenship," he remarked, "must be lived in the school from day to day."¹²⁹ Foght was not certain whether civics represented a separate subject and argued instead that a good civic education took place daily and throughout the curriculum. Civics was to be a local affair by which students came to recognize not just their own, but their neighbor's, rights and responsibilities. Grounded in lived experiences of the learner, Foght advocated the establishment of a "...a practical community civics"¹³⁰ in the reform of the country school. Throughout his discussion of rural school reform, Foght emphasized the unique attributes of the learner, first-hand experience, and to some extent, problem-solving.

¹²⁶ Foght, *The American Rural School*, 251

¹²⁷ See Chapter 4 for a more complete discussion of Progressive Era geography education.

¹²⁸ Foght, *The American Rural School*, 257.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 258.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

Joseph Kinmont Hart. As was perhaps true of many Country Life reformers, Hart assumed certain differences to exist between rural and city children, at least with regard to the respective life experiences. “In view of physical conditions the interests of city children and country children are greatly divergent,”¹³¹ he insisted. Going further, Hart made an effort to outline those differences, paying close attention to the interests of students. In his mind, “City children learn to exhaust their energies and have their pleasures among the varying and distracting scenes and conventionalities of the city; while the country children under proper direction find their consuming interests in nature, in field and meadow, in orchard and garden – on the farm;...”¹³² As Hart viewed it, the problem for the rural student was that so many valuable opportunities to link community life and formal education were missed or underdeveloped in the country school as it operated. With that in mind, he suggested that new subjects should be added to the rural school curriculum to better address the unique experiences of rural learners. In part, traditional subjects could be taught with intense reference to the local community. Hart recommended, for instance, that “Geography and arithmetic may be made to deal with much that is near at hand and used in everyday life.”¹³³ While he did not elaborate on the specifics of his reform plan with any great detail, it seemed clear that a guiding principal for change in the country school was based within a consideration of the lived experiences of the learner, an important factor in the process of developing effective educational strategies.

L. C. Brogden. Brogden provided yet another illustration of the close attention that the learner received by Country Life advocates seeking to reform the rural school. Whereas he geared much of his advice toward rural school supervisors and the practical importance of such matters as school meetings and the purposes of recess, the superintendent also committed himself

¹³¹ Hart, *Educational Resources*, 217.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 218.

to a fair amount of discussion of classroom practice and the academic curriculum. Of particular interest with regard to rural instruction was Brogden's dedication to the incorporation of the "...vital relation between the work of the school and the native interests and daily needs of the pupils."¹³⁴ In a critique of traditional, textbook-based practice, he called for a more direct attention to the needs of the learner. "Emphasis," Brogden remarked, "is no longer placed on text-book knowledge alone. The pupil with his impulses to self activity, present needs and interests is the teacher's starting point..."¹³⁵ Speaking to supervisors, in particular, Brogden hoped to draw support for the "underlying idea of making the pupil's present needs and interests the starting point in the teaching process..."¹³⁶ Although it was not clear what impact Brogden himself may have had, the notions he prescribed were pervasive throughout the Country Life Movement as it touched school reform.

Summary. Throughout the literature representative of school reform during the Country Life Movement, one found a commitment to the unique needs of the learner. Proponents of change assumed that the lived experiences of rural students were unique and worked to incorporate the realities of farm life into all aspects of the curriculum. In addition to tapping into the lives and interests of rural students, Country Life reformers also adopted many progressive educational ideas, such as a commitment to inquiry, problem-solving, and an experience-based form of instruction. Coupled with the local focus discussed above, the Country Life emphasis on the nature and needs of the learner further highlights the connection between the movement and modern place-based education.

¹³⁴ Brogden, *Suggestions*, 108.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.

Country Life & the Community

The educational reforms that grew out of the Country Life Movement in the early decades of the twentieth century represented an important historical antecedent for modern place-based education. In particular, reformers associated with the movement looked to the local circumstances and possibilities of rural living in their efforts to reorient the school, an approach that was often grounded in assumptions about the nature of the learner and the potential value of first-hand, observational experiences. These interrelated features of country school reform are highly consistent with the ideals underlying the rationales for modern place-based education. But, more than the emphasis on the learner, experiential engagement, or the incorporation of local context, Country Life educational reform was designed to change the rural community itself and to improve rural life. That feature of the movement, its responsiveness to the community of which the school was a part, represents yet another linkage to modern place-based pedagogy, where possibilities for community change and improvement are frequently highlighted. The discussion below demonstrates the range of community improvement functions observed by Country Life reformers.

O. J. Kern. For Kern, the localized, student-centered reform of the rural school was ultimately intended to thwart outmigration to the city. By making the countryside more palatable, he reasoned, young people might not look to the city as the sole source of future opportunity. “The trouble has been,” Kern explained, “that too often the country child in his education has been led to believe that agriculture does not furnish sufficient intellectual development and financial success to warrant a longer stay on the farm.”¹³⁷ As a remedy, his solution was to generate what he regarded as a “spiritualization of country life.”¹³⁸ Kern reasoned that America’s

¹³⁷ Kern, *Among Country Schools*, 12.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

rural communities could be rearranged to become the “choicest flower of our civilization.”¹³⁹ A romantic appeal, rural living was to be reshaped and beautified and the school was to play a central role. “The great promise, the great hope,” he wrote, “is with country children.”¹⁴⁰ Of course, at the center of the transformation of rural life was agricultural improvement. As Kern imagined it, “A nobler dignity will be conferred upon agriculture...”¹⁴¹ Ultimately, he suggested, the benefits of attentive study of the natural environment and of agriculture in the country school would accrue more broadly to the improvement of rural living standards. In other words, by reorienting the rural school around country living, particularly agriculture, Kern believed that more students would gain an appreciation for the lifestyle itself.

Alongside Kern’s suggestion that aspects of rural life might take on a renewed importance in the country school, he also wanted to improve certain dimensions of the lifestyle itself. More specifically, his appeal generally took the form of improved agriculture techniques through modern scientific advancement. Speaking more directly to the process of agriculture improvement, Kern reported: “Our agricultural colleges and experiment stations are discovering valuable information for the farmer. These discoveries will greatly modify farm work and country life when the great mass of farmers appreciate their value; and the time for this appreciation to begin is when the future farmer is a child at school.”¹⁴² Better methods and higher yield varieties were, for Kern, key concerns in the promotion of the new agriculture, not to mention the Country Life program of rural school reform.

Liberty Hyde Bailey. In some sense, Bailey was something of a philosopher of country living, and a signature feature of his work was represented by the pains he took to distinguish

¹³⁹ Kern, *Among Country Schools*, 14.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 33.

between the rural and city dweller. “If we have very highly developed persons in the city,” He wrote, “we have very rugged persons in the country. If the sense of brotherhood is highly evolved in the city, individualism is strongly expressed in the country. If the world-movement appeals to men in the city, local attachments have great power with men in the country...country people are as personally progressive as city people of equal intellectual groups, but they have not been able to attract as much attention or perhaps to make as much headway.”¹⁴³ The dissimilarities between rural and city life, for Bailey at least, were central to the Country Life problem. But the issue was not simply that the two entities represented distinct lifestyles. Far from it, Bailey added that the “The city sits like a parasite, running out its roots into the open country and draining it of its substance.”¹⁴⁴ Building up rural institutions and creating a more equitable relationship between rural and country interests was Bailey’s goal. “We need to correct the abnormal urban domination in political power,” he explained further, “in control of the agencies of trade, in discriminatory practices, and in artificial stimulation, and at the same time to protect the evolution of a new rural welfare...”¹⁴⁵ Bailey called for more than tinkering in rural lifeways and pointed to a near complete restructuring of social and economic relationships, that between the city and the country. The school, of course, was to play a central role.

Throughout much of Bailey’s writing on the Country Life Movement and rural school reform runs an appeal toward environmental conservation and sustainability. He paired a deep affection for the preservation and sustainable use of the nation’s natural resources with his efforts to improve the livelihoods of rural peoples and to preserve certain elements of rural life. To this end, Bailey was explicit.

¹⁴³ Bailey, *The Country Life Movement*, 15.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

The conservation movement is the expression of the idea that the materials and agencies that are part of the furniture of the planet are to be utilized by each generation carefully, and with real regard to the welfare of those who are to follow us. The country-life movement is the expression of the idea that the policies, efforts, and material well-being of the open country must be highly sustained, as a fundamental essential of a good civilization;...

At the bottom, therefore, the conservation and country-life movements rest on the same premise;...¹⁴⁶

While Bailey went on to distinguish between policy prescriptions geared toward rural life and conservation, he was nonetheless clear in establishing linkages between the two movements. Bailey reasoned that the depletion of natural resources could not go unchecked, and further, that traditional agricultural practices might ultimately prove insufficient in the solution of the “fundamental problem for the human race to feed itself.”¹⁴⁷ In no small part, his solution was to recreate the rural farmer. “As cities increase proportionately in population,” Bailey argued, “the farmer assumes greater relative importance, and he becomes more and more a marked man.”¹⁴⁸ The farmer had to be brought on board as a central figure in the conservation movement, and Bailey looked to the school as guiding institution in that important transformation. As much as school reform was geared toward the improvement of practice and better results with regard to student learning, in Bailey’s plan, the conservation of natural resources and sustainable growth were central themes as well. In the broad sense, Bailey’s plan for school reform served a community, or social, responsiveness function.

Harold Waldstein Foght. As indicated in the discussion above, Foght recognized a natural affinity between school gardening and the rural student, whose life experiences were frequently touched by agriculture. Interestingly enough, however, the educational value of the school garden, for Foght at least, was not necessarily geared toward the promotion of student

¹⁴⁶ Bailey, *The Country Life Movement*, 178.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 198.

engagement. Instead, he drew connections between the school garden and the creation of better farmers. “Concrete illustration,” Fought insisted, “proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that ‘where a boy has learned at school to mix his agriculture with brains’ he is able as a man to raise more farm produce, acre for acre, than his father did before him.”¹⁴⁹ Agricultural knowledge and skill, or perhaps even the potential for greater agricultural surplus, seemed to be Fought’s primary concern.

A reader also found in Fought’s writing a desire to improve rural living as a hopeful preventative of rural outmigration. Following a detailed appraisal of the “dignified modern structure,”¹⁵⁰ the schoolhouse suitable to rural improvement, Fought addressed the significance of improving schoolyard aesthetics. In his chapter dedicated exclusively to school grounds and the study of nature, he noted: “It remains now to point out more in detail how beautiful flowers, shrubs, and trees, how school gardens, lawns, and groves may be made instruments in saving the farm child from the allurements of city life and make him contented with life on the farm.”¹⁵¹ Like many of his contemporaries, Fought believed a newfound appreciation for the countryside would thwart rural outmigration. It was not altogether clear that rural peoples in the early twentieth lacked such aesthetic appreciations, but Fought was nonetheless intent to “... develop in the child breast a sympathy with his environment and in the child mind an understanding of nature and nature’s ways – then, once awakened to the surpassing beauties of rural environments, the American boy and girl will no longer be in danger of deserting the farm for the man-made glitter of the city.”¹⁵² From aesthetic appreciation, Fought moved to discuss the social and ethical potential in rural educational reform.

¹⁴⁹ Fought, *The American Rural School*, 192.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 155.

Foght believed that the best steward of the natural environment was the citizen most familiar with nature. Of course, nature study played an important role. “Properly directed,” he predicted, “nature study may do much to teach children to respect the rights of others...If [students] are early led to love nature, they will learn to protect it. Such children will never vandalize nature by destroying planted trees or other useful flora.”¹⁵³ In a similar vein, Foght drew connections between the installation of nature study and an intensified sense of spirituality in rural students. Linkages to conservation and sustainability remained intact as well. As Foght conceived it, then, the goal was not simply to create better farmers, though agricultural improvement may nonetheless have been an important educational outcome, but to create young stewards as well.

Joseph Kinmont Hart. Local lifeways were a guiding force in Hart’s educational philosophy. Yet Hart called for more than a curricular redirection mindful of agriculture and rural life and embedded within his recommendations for the country school was the motivation to change certain aspects of rural society. In his words, “[e]ven if agriculture be made more profitable than at the present time, this alone will not be sufficient inducement to keep a large productive population on the farms.”¹⁵⁴ “...If country life cannot offer the simplest social satisfactions,” Hart added, “people will go where they can get them. The redirected education with which we are concerned in these pages must aim to make better farmers and better helpmeets for these farmers, must make the occupation more remunerative, and the whole life more satisfactory and free from city domination.”¹⁵⁵ As did others before and after him, Hart saw the rural school as the source of social, economic, and political redirection. The school was the great hope for rural peoples in America. He noted further, “...we have at last come to realize that

¹⁵³ Foght, *The American Rural School*, 159.

¹⁵⁴ Hart, *Educational Resources*, 215.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

scholarship for scholarship's sake alone is untenable. The arts and sciences that do not affect the minds and habits of children in a way to furnish them with an increased disposition for service can no longer be upheld."¹⁵⁶ While Hart called for a more practical, change-driven, curriculum, he distinguished between his vision for the rural school and what might be viewed in modern terms as pre-programmed agricultural training. In some sense, Hart's rejection of a purely practical form of agricultural training stemmed from both his larger motivations for a transformation of rural life in America and a certain philosophy of education. While agricultural training addressed his concern for a more relevant rural curriculum, the approach was perhaps incompatible with his intent to change the thinking of rural students who would later become adult rural leaders. While practical in the sense that it was well-fitted to rural life, Hart's conception of the rural curriculum was well beyond instructional training.

Ultimately, much of Hart's imagining for rural school reform was geared towards the establishment of an educated rural leadership. His affection for his experience with the Danish rural school model was in many ways illustrative. Hart recounted:

The writer had the privilege, a few years ago, to spend some time in a model Danish rural community...

While the so-called essentials were taught in a most thorough manner, the farm subjects, after all, formed the core of the curriculum...The Danes have learned to love nature for its own sake, rather than for the money being got out of it. The farm is home. They have been taught to prefer it to the city...The Danish farmers have solved the problems we are now facing. Their agriculture is scientific; their social and economic organizations of a cooperative nature are unexcelled. Denmark had an educated rural leadership; and what is of greatest interest to us, the redirected schools have furnished this leadership.¹⁵⁷

A generation of a well educated, rural leadership was central to the future of the American countryside in Hart's view. And while he rejected the notion that the precise educational

¹⁵⁶ Hart, *The American Rural School*, 223.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 218-219.

framework of the Danes could be transplanted to America, Hart nonetheless found great value in the overall agenda. The improvement of the rural community was for Hart an overriding concern.

L. C. Brogden. Consistent with the overall change sentiment of the Country Life Movement, Brogden's suggestions for rural school supervisors illustrated a commitment to build a new appreciation for rural living where apparently little was perceived to exist. In his view, it was the supervisor's responsibility to ensure that the schools recognize "What opportunities...country life provide[s] for the country child for appealing to and deepening his sense of aesthetic appreciation."¹⁵⁸ Brogden called for an experiential, student-focused educational outlook, but his motivation was not solely an educational one in the sense that there was at the same time a strong impetus to thwart then accelerating trends in outmigration. Drawing on a personal experience, he concluded:

And that country boy has doubtless turned his back upon the old home neighborhood and is now living in a city solely because the only things he saw in country life was "greenness" and the only emotion he had felt was one of "lonesomeness and greenness" – due to his teacher's failure to unstop his ears, and unseal his eyes that he might both hear and see the wondrous beauty in the world of Nature about him. The imperative need of awakening in the soul of the country child this finer and deeper sense of aesthetic appreciation of country life and county things!¹⁵⁹

Again, for Brogden, rural supervisors were to ensure that both the practical and educational value of country living were utilized appropriately. While aesthetic appreciation was to extend ultimately to the "'refined pleasures' of life,"¹⁶⁰ Brogden was clearly mindful of the need for the improvement of rural living in his efforts to foster the development of such sentiments in the country school. Consistent with his plan for rural instruction, he insisted that supervisors work to position the rural school as "a vital community center."¹⁶¹ As Brogden suggested, "...the vision

¹⁵⁸ Brogden, *Suggestions for Rural Supervisors*, 50.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 127.

of the really efficient and progressive rural teacher is no longer circumscribed by the four walls of the school room, she no longer considers the country school a mere segment of the life of the community, cut off and isolated from it, but rather a continuous part of its whole life;...the aim and work of her school include service to the whole life of the community as well as to the children in the classroom.”¹⁶² What the school provided, he added, was “...some central place whether for wholesome recreation and social enjoyment, or whether for the exchange of their experiences and ideas in the successful solution of the problems that are common and vital to the highest well-being of the entire community,...”¹⁶³ Steered by a skilled and committed supervisor, Brogden saw the country school not an institution divorced from, but rather part and parcel of, the improvement of the local community. Living and working in and for the community interest, Brogden’s ideal supervisor was arguably the single most important figure in the program of rural school reform, and by extension country life uplift. Together with other Country Life school reformers, Brogden’s work demonstrated clearly that a significant aspect of educational redirection was geared toward the improvement of the community, and of American rural lifeways more generally.

Chapter Summary

Not unlike the larger Progressive Movement of which it was a part, Country Life supporters were a relatively diverse group of reformers. David Danbom implied as much where he noted that “...confusion about the nature of the Country Life Movement reflects disagreement among historians regarding the nature of progressivism.”¹⁶⁴ Indeed, Country Life reformers varied significantly in the problems they approached, addressing concerns that ranged from the deterioration of the rural church to agricultural efficiency, not to mention the remedies they

¹⁶² Brogden, *Suggestions for Rural Supervisors*, 127.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁶⁴ Danbom, “*Rural Education Reform*,” 462.

prescribed for those problems once identified. At the same time, however, it was also true that a certain degree of homogeneity came to characterize the movement. Reformers within the Country Life Movement seemed to enjoy an “essential unity”¹⁶⁵ and this was certainly true for those eager to rearrange curriculum and practice in the rural school.

This chapter has presented the body of school reform measures associated with the Country Life Movement as an important historical antecedent of modern place-based education. As the discussion above has worked to reveal, country school reform was localized in scope. Kern’s practical assessment that rural students might gain more from a study of noxious weeds than from tropical fruits or polar bears offered but one illustration of the general mood supportive of a curriculum that could account for locally occurring objects and phenomena. Field’s effort to design a corn-oriented curriculum for her Midwestern students, too, provided a glimpse of the Country Life emphasis on the school, neighborhood, and district. In the reforms offered by Hart, Brodgen, and Cutler and Stone, readers found yet again a whole course of study designed around locally inspired, rural phenomena. Throughout the relevant literature, beyond even those items reviewed above, Country Life proponents positioned the unique attributes of rural life at the center of school reform and curriculum development.

In addition to the local focus, Country Life educators also maintained a certain appreciation for the lived experiences of rural students. Virtually everywhere, in fact, was the call to redesign the rural school in such a way as to better address the unique experience of rural living, experiences to which the traditional, city-based curriculum were apparently ill-fitted. Rural educational reform in that fashion required a new curriculum and a more localized, context-specific approach to teaching and learning. In virtually all educational initiatives, readers met with plans informed by the perceived interests and needs of students. Country Life

¹⁶⁵ Danbom, “*Rural Education Reform*,” 468.

educational reform transformed geography, history, literature study, and mathematics around rural life experience, or as Brogden viewed it, the “native interests and daily needs of the child.” But reform was not simply curricular and moved well beyond the adoption of a new course of study. In fact, much of the traditional course, specifically the “Three R’s,” seemed to remain dominant. Methodology, however, achieved great attention from Country Life supporters. The significance of first-hand observation, problem-solving, and inquiry remained important features. As Foght noted, the redirection of the rural school was to be arranged around “personal observation, reasoning, and reflection.” The field excursion, the school garden, and experiment clubs all played central roles. Plans for the transformation of the country school emphasized the nature and needs of learners, and that dimension of the reform project cannot be overstated.

Among other attributes of the Country Life educational reform agenda, another significant dimension was the degree to which advocates worked to address the problems they perceived to exist in rural America at the turn of the century. Many proponents, for instance, viewed with concern perceived trends in rural outmigration. As a partial solution, they planned to invigorate the rural curriculum in such a way as to promote enjoyment and appreciation in rural life in the hope that more young adults would seek adult lives on the farm. To “dignify” country living was a central objective for the redirected school. In addition to the adjustment of aesthetic sensibilities, school reformers addressed issues of agricultural efficiency and productivity as well. Through the school garden, as Foght and others imagined, young students might introduce to their parents the most up-to-date, technologically advanced agricultural techniques. The progressive desire to identify and solve community problems was the mission of the Country Life Movement as a whole and, with that in mind, it was not particularly surprising to find that many looked to the rural school “as a vital community center” in the process. With the clear

emphasis on the local, the learner, and the community, Country Life educational reforms represent a robust historical model of place-based pedagogy.

The overall impact and success of the educational project within the Country Life Movement is difficult to estimate. Perhaps the best measure was individual cases. For instance, while Bowers, Danbom, and other historians tend to mark the end of the Country Life Movement at 1920, noting that little widespread concern existed for rural reform after World War I, this conclusion overlooked the similar achievements in rural educational settings since that time.¹⁶⁶ The desire for rural educational reform remains intact even in the present, often invoking many of the same themes characteristic of earlier Country Life initiatives. While the phrase arguably became less prominent, if not obsolete, the central themes of reform have persisted. The most recent reiteration, of course, is evidenced in the growing body of literature surrounding place-based educational theory and practice.

Despite the fact that the educational reforms of the Country Life Movement gained national support for over two decades, not only from practitioners, colleges, and universities, but from President Theodore Roosevelt and the United States Congress, relatively little mention has been made of this progressive rural program in the educational literature. While educational historians such as Lawrence Cremin stand as notable counterexamples, most others have broached the subject in only a marginal way if at all.¹⁶⁷ It is not particularly surprising, then, that same can be said of modern place-based educational researchers. To date, there exists only a single scholarly contribution linking Country Life educational reform and its modern corollary in

¹⁶⁶ It may be true that widespread concern waned, but the fundamental concerns raised by Country Life supporters did not end abruptly. As a singular example, each of the core themes for educational reform highlighted in this discussion can be seen in Julia Weber's *Country School Diary* published well after the movement in 1946.

¹⁶⁷ Cremin provided an excellent discussion of the Country Life Commission and the influence of key figures such as Kern and Bailey. As two prominent illustrations of omission see Urban and Wagner, *American Education* and Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum*.

place-based education.¹⁶⁸ Of course, even beyond the Progressive Era reforms discussed above, those surrounding the “new geography,” nature study, and the Country Life Movement, there were several other more recent twentieth century developments which today share a close resemblance to modern place-based education as well. Developments in *outdoor education* in the 1940s and *community education* represent two examples, the subjects of consideration in Chapters 6 and 7, respectively.

¹⁶⁸ Canniff, “On Living Well in Our Place.”

CHAPTER 6

OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Introduction

As discussed in previous chapters, nature study education, the “new geography,” and the reform efforts of Country Life advocates in the early twentieth century shared in common a range of sentiments and frustrations. In no small part, an increasingly industrialized America represented the root cause of change and the social, political, and economic problems perceived to exist as a result. While not exhaustive, reformers associated with those movements lamented, in various forms, the breakdown of traditional lifeways, the quality of human-environment interactions, and the sustainability of the nation’s natural resources. For the school, they also tended to favor scientific problem-solving, inquiry and first-hand observation, and a curriculum based around perceived needs of the student. But as each of those movements began to wane and decentralize to some extent by the 1920s, many of the concerns voiced would persist.

Beginning as early as the 1940s, a new educational movement began to take shape in the form of *outdoor education*. Like their progressive predecessors, advocates of outdoor learning operated with the recent memory of industrial transformation. Proponents also shared with Progressive Era reformers who came before them an understanding that dramatic change in America almost necessarily implicated the school. In part, reform measures were pedagogical and turned again toward the value of experiential learning in the social and ecological settings within the immediate surrounds of the school. Elsewhere, outdoor educators presented their amendments in an effort to influence the operation of community and social life directly.

This chapter presents the development of outdoor education between the 1940s and 1970s as an historical antecedent of modern place-based education. With a few notable exceptions, the movement has received relatively little attention from modern scholars in the field, the same historical deficit detailed throughout this larger study.¹ In the main, modern researchers and writers have all but overlooked the trends and practices that surrounded the development of outdoor learning and school camping by mid century. The discussion below outlines the ideals and practical experiences of American outdoor education in an effort to further explore connections to contemporary place-based educational thinking.

This chapter begins with a brief consideration of the contexts that gave rise to trends in outdoor education in the middle decades of the twentieth century in American educational circles. Following a consideration of contexts, the discussion reviews the early development of outdoor and camping education as a formalized reform strategy for the school. The remainder of the chapter is framed around the defining criteria established at the outset of the study, specifically, the local, the learner, and the community, in an effort to demonstrate the relevance of outdoor education in an historical review of place-based pedagogies. The discussion provided below is based upon on the major works of American outdoor educators such as Lloyd B. Sharp, Julian Smith, Lou and George Donaldson, and Donald Hammerman, all of which were foundational figures in the field. Articles from associated professional journals, edited volumes, and relevant portions of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*, are among the resources considered below.

¹ Clifford Knapp, a figure who has drawn partial comparison between outdoor and place-based educational theory and practice, stands as perhaps the sole counterexample to this trend.

Social & Political Contexts

Without overlooking other influencing forces, outdoor educational reforms should be viewed in the context of at least three interrelated sociopolitical trends. In the first place, outdoor education was part of an ongoing response to modern American life, and the “rapid tempo” and “restlessness” sometimes believed to accompany it.² The changes brought on by American industrialization were lasting and still being felt at mid-century, though perhaps in new ways. Proponents of outdoor education were explicit in that regard and frequently cited mechanization, urbanization, and later computerization, as potentially transformative forces in American life. The following passage from Smith et al. was indicative of the general sentiment:

Beginning with the Industrial Revolution, man’s work has been more and more accomplished by machines,...Although he has reduced his work day and week, as well as the physical toil involved, man has, by and large, failed to make good and creative use of the time and energy saved...Thus modern living denies peoples many desirable experiences that were the heritage of their forebears. With most of the adult population two generations removed from the land, there is a noticeable lack of skills, appreciations, and attitudes about the land and the outdoors. These changes have significant implications for education, with special implications for health and recreation. Since people are not born with the skills and knowledge for using natural resources of the land wisely, children and adults of this day must have educational experiences in the outdoors...³

The passage, but one of many of its type, positioned outdoor learning as a response to certain aspects of American living believed to be deleterious to both the individual and to society. But the passage also highlighted two additional concerns.

Not entirely unrelated, outdoor education was also backgrounded by concerns surrounding American sedentism and environmental/ecological change, perhaps to varying degrees over the course of time. To the former, and in a post-War context, there was growing frustration in some circles regarding the perceived loss of physical fitness among Americans,

² Julian Smith, et al., *Outdoor Education*, 2nd ed. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 7.

³ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

particularly youths. In the midst of World War II, a department had been established to address issues of physical fitness as a partial solution to a growing number of military service rejections. Although it was not entirely clear that outdoor education sprang up in direct response, it was nonetheless the case that a crusade against sedentary living became an important rationale for outdoor learning, leisure, and recreation. In addition, outdoor education, not unlike nature study and some aspect of the Country Life Movement, was a partial response to ecological/environmental change. Simply stated, proponents of outdoor learning frequently connected the approach to the desire for a renewed ecological consciousness, one that would develop in young learners (and future citizens) a sense of environmental stewardship. A concern of advocates from the outset, the acceleration of environmentalism in America in the 1960s and 1970s added additional support for outdoor learning initiatives.

Outdoor education should also be viewed as a reiteration of educational progressivism. Outdoor learning initiatives called for a student-centered approach, personal development, collaborative engagement in democratic communities, experientialism, observation, and civic competency. Each of those themes could be attached to earlier educational developments in the later nineteenth century and throughout the first quarter of the twentieth. Yet outdoor education, grew up at the end of the era of educational progressivism, after World War II, and during a period when progressive notions began to draw considerable critique.⁴ Coupled with the somewhat unorthodox methodology of “school camping” it is perhaps unsurprising that outdoor education as a movement has remained more or less on the fringe of American public school education. While outdoor learning could hardly be considered a mainstream educational strategy,

⁴ See Lawrence Cremin, *Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 328-353; Susan F. Semel and Alan R. Sadovnik, “*Schools of Tomorrow,*” *Schools of Today: What Happened to Progressive Education*, History of Schools and Schooling, vol. 8 (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); Wayne J. Urban and Jennings L. Wagoner, *American Education: A History*, 3rd ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2004).

developments in the field nonetheless hold important insights for modern reformers (and educational and curriculum historians).

Roots of a Formal Educational Strategy

Searching for the earliest examples of outdoor education, Bruce L. Bennett looked to the Round Hill School of Northampton, Massachusetts. Round Hill's curricular commitments to "physical education and outdoor activities,"⁵ may have been among the first formalized efforts in American education. The Round Hill School operated between 1823 and 1834, which Bennett explained preceded the efforts of the Gunnery School in Connecticut by nearly four decades. But the approach that he described at Round Hill was less academic and more physical educational in scope, thus minimizing the connection to twentieth century outdoor learning to some degree.

While physical education was an important component of the Round Hill curriculum, an element that surely brought students into contact with the outdoors, Bennett reported little in the way of outdoor academic work; that is, walking and hiking, though certainly valuable, seemed to overwhelm the academic possibilities that other proponents of the outdoor laboratory have emphasized since that time. In other words, Bennett did not indicate that a great deal of academic work took place in the outdoors at Round Hill. The passage below, written in 1823 by one of the school's two founders, George Bancroft, was revealing:

Within two months after the school opened, [Joseph] Cogswell wrote that they had been walking twelve to sixteen miles every Saturday afternoon. On Thanksgiving weekend in November, 1823, Cogswell took six boys to Hartford, Connecticut, on the "ride and tie" plan by which half the group walked, the other half rode on horse, and then the two groups changed off. On this trip they did fifty miles on foot and covered a hundred miles altogether. Cogswell was pleased with the boys' courage in walking several miles after dark. He also told of a boy who hiked the last seven miles with a bleeding foot caused by a nail in his shoe. (8:146-47)⁶

⁵ Bruce L. Bennett, "Camping and Outdoor Education." *Quest* 4 no. 1 (April 1965): 53-64.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

Cogswell's description surely indicated the hardiness of his students and, undoubtedly, much could have been learned over the 100 mile trek. Noteworthy perhaps as a physical educational experience, it was not initially clear from his illustration that the experience was educational in other disciplinary senses. Amidst the accounts of hiking, skating, and swimming, all of which, to be sure, serve educational purposes, Cogswell's writing elsewhere depicted outdoor experiences more readily recognizable as educational. Along the treks, for instance, students were exposed to informal lessons in geology at the direction of Cogswell.

In addition to the hiking expeditions at Round Hill, Bennett's depiction reported that students also ventured outdoors to design and carry out community-building exercises. Deemed Crony Village, students selected a property nearby the school on which they erected a living structure and school camp, all of which apparently occurred somewhat spontaneously. While it was not clear from available reports by what measure plans were organized at the school, students also engaged in hunting and fishing excursions in which traps and homemade implements became the primary tools used. Cogswell ultimately ordered the demolition of Crony Village after an unfortunate incident involving a Round Hill student and a local farmer's daughter, but the outdoor adventures at the school continued nonetheless. School farming, for example, was at least a temporary component of learning at Round Hill.⁷ Available evidence of the work carried out at Round Hill is somewhat scarce, but even from Bennett's appraisal it seemed to represent an early precursor for outdoor learning, particularly with regard to the learning that took place at Crony Village and the experiences arranged for students after its demolition. More than a century later, a more expansive experiment in outdoor education would take shape, the essential themes of which are outlined below.

⁷ Bennett, "The Making of Round Hill School," 35-36.

Twentieth Century Outdoor Education. According to George Donaldson and Oswald Goering in their introductory remarks to in *Perspectives on Outdoor Education*,⁸ the outdoor educational movement in America began much like any other, because "...it was an idea whose time had come."⁹ Searching deeper, they noted that the notion of outdoor learning "...did not spring, full-blown into the consciousness of a single inventor, [but] rather it drew ideas from many places, several movements, as well as many people."¹⁰ As indicated above, outdoor education was a carryover of the progressive educational ideals established in the early decades of the twentieth century. In a similar fashion, Donaldson and Goering pointed broadly to the nature study movement and the vitalization of an American conservation and nature movement. While they did not reference either the Country Life Movement or the developments within the domain of geography instruction, Progressive Era reforms discussed at length in Chapters 4 and 5, respectively, their efforts to trace the history of outdoor education were soundly attached to range of reforms linked to American educational progressivism. That much seemed certain.

The School Garden Association of America. The phrase "outdoor education" has likely been invoked numerous times over the decades and centuries in educational circles. While outdoor education as a movement gained a considerable degree of momentum between the 1940s and 1960s, and is in fact still in use today, the term was not unique to mid-century reforms in American education. As early as 1916, and perhaps much earlier, the phrase was in use by educator's seeking to move learning outside the traditional classroom setting and into the local and neighborhood environments surrounding the school. Beginning in October of 1916, the School Garden Association of America initiated its monthly bulletin to address developments

⁸ George W. Donaldson and Oswald Goering, *Perspectives on Outdoor Education: Readings* (New York: William C. Brown Company, 1972).

⁹ Ibid. 25.

¹⁰ Ibid.

and possibilities for school and home gardens, elementary agriculture, rural science, and nature study. The title adopted by the organization was *Outdoor Education*. The efforts of The School Garden Association seemed to mark the first use of outdoor education as a formal educational term, yet their work anticipated the start of a formal outdoor educational movement.

What was perhaps most interesting about *Outdoor Education* as a publication was its timing, which in many ways serves to highlight the connections, if not continuity, between pedagogical trends in pre-war educational progressivism and the formal outdoor educational movement that gained momentum by mid-century. In other words, while there were distinct pedagogical differences between the reforms that emanated throughout nature study, geography education, and the Country Life initiatives beginning the 1890s and extending to the 1920s as compared to the outdoor programs emphasized by educators in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, all shared much in common, even if the relationship was an incidental one. It seemed fitting that the School Garden Association of America chose “outdoor education,” as the label highlighted, however coincidentally, the fundamental principles shared by all of the aforementioned reform efforts. In short, whether nature study, Country Life, outdoor ,or geography education, reformers looked to the possibilities of the local, neighborhood environment as potentially rich resources around which to build first-hand learning experiences. While the contexts and purposes shifted slightly throughout this period, the fundamental commitment to the local environment, the nature of the learner, and the stakeholders within the community were common features throughout the entire period. While the emphasis of this investigation is focused most directly on American models, a brief consideration of contemporary German models deserves attention.

Outdoor Education at Wegscheide. In some ways anticipating and in some ways paralleling American developments in outdoor education were similar curriculum reform

measures in Germany in the first decades of the twentieth century, particularly in the public schools of Frankfurt. As the previous chapters have detailed, European educational experiments with local non-school environments date back some time, not just to the late nineteenth century with *Hiematskunde* curricula, but to the region's earliest prominent educational thinkers, namely Comenius, Pestalozzi, and Froebel. Oswald H. Goering offered yet another account of German educational pioneering, this time in the area of outdoor education, which he argued began in the lead up to World War I.¹¹ As early as 1914 near Frankfurt, Goering reported, German facilities and properties once utilized for artillery testing and troop training were left abandoned. Those properties, once evacuated, fell to local authorities following the destruction brought on by the war. By 1920, he added, "The superintendent of schools of Frankfurt, Rector August Jasper, began looking for an area that he could repurpose as a children's health center."¹² Not long after, the superintendent transformed the newly acquired properties yet again, this time into the site of what was essentially, according to Goering, an outdoor education program. "Here [students] lived, worked and studied with their teachers for a full week," he noted, and by 1921 "...a total of 6,063 students attended."¹³ Despite initial successes, the region, including the village of Wegscheide where the camps were located, confronted the threat of yet more conflict. Despite best efforts to transfer the rights of the property from public to private ownership, thereby avoiding confiscation, the Third Reich assumed control in 1939. What was once an experimental outdoor education program, became a prison camp to detain foreign soldiers.

For a period of time, the properties surrounding Wegscheide became home to East German refugees, but in 1970 the Schullandheimdorfes Wegscheide celebrated its 50th

¹¹ Oswald Goering, "Fifty Years of Outdoor Education in the Frankfurt, Germany Schools," in *Perspectives on Outdoor Education: Readings* (New York: William C. Brown Company, 1972).

¹² *Ibid.*, 51.

¹³ *Ibid.*

anniversary as an outdoor educational initiative. Though the program was not affiliated with any particular school, by the time of its reconstitution it had developed the capacity to serve more than 1000 teachers and students at a time.¹⁴ The educational goals at Wegscheide were consistent with many of the outdoor educational programs offered during the same period in the United States, though Wegscheide apparently predated the American movement. Goering reported that designers were thoroughly committed to an experiential curriculum. As he phrased it, “Here nothing is ‘learned’ but ‘experienced.’”¹⁵ Moreover, while the activities and experiences of the program may well have reinforced in vital ways the traditional curricular domains in the German system, the social focus on the community was significant as Wegscheide concluded that “Social virtues are developed through practice.”¹⁶ Of course, a single German illustration does little to represent the German or European experience with outdoor educational practice. What Wegscheide does represent, however, is an understanding that while American outdoor education gained considerable momentum beginning in the 1940s, the developments may not have been unique. The remainder of the investigation emphasized the American movement exclusively.

Outdoor Education, the Learner, & the Local

Outdoor educational writing near mid-century in the United States represented an alternative curriculum and an instructional approach that emphasized both the locally available outdoor settings and the significance that the unique qualities of the learner potentially held in the educative process. At the insistence of outdoor learning proponents, a valuable supplement to traditional practice was the vast array of educational stimulus available for immediate consumption once the school doors were opened. Quite simply, in that this feature of the outdoor

¹⁴ Goering, “Fifty Years of Outdoor Education,” 52.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

educational approach almost necessarily implicated the local, the movement today represents an early example of a place-based pedagogy. But there were more similarities still. In short, outdoor educators looked to locally accessible out-of-door experiences for specific pedagogical purposes. Like modern place-based education, outdoor learning was grounded in an appreciation for the learner and the potential value of first-hand experience. Advocates consistently reiterated each of these themes beginning in the 1940s and throughout the expansion of the American outdoor educational movement.

Lloyd B. Sharp. If there were a single individual to which supporters of outdoor education might look if tasked with identifying a founder for the American movement, Lloyd B. Sharp would have been a solid candidate as he was responsible for contributing some of the earliest literature defining the field. In 1952, in the journal, *The School Executive*, he sought to address the all important question, “What is Outdoor Education?” From the outset, Sharp built an educational rationale for outdoor learning based in experience; that is, he reasoned that the best education was one in which students had first-hand experiences with the various topics under consideration. In his words, “We know we are on the right track, for we know the best way to learn is to come in contact with the things we seek to know.”¹⁷ Sharp offered a clear description of the approach, its methods and purposes:

Outdoor education, in its simplest aspect, merely says: Don’t try to bring the whole world into the school. Rather, take the children out to where the world is. Outdoor education begins just a step outside the door of the school. On the way to and from school, our youth pass by or through the very things that they go into the classroom to study about.

Authors of textbooks pass on second-hand information they have found by observation and discovery. It is always the person who sees, discovers, or explores a situation who gets most out of it. This, in short, is the whole thesis of outdoor education. Such learning is faster, is more deeply appreciated and retained longer.¹⁸

¹⁷ Lloyd B. Sharp, “What is Outdoor Education?,” in *Outdoor Education: A Book of Readings*, eds. Donald Hammerman and William Hammerman, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Burgess Publishing Company, 1968), 2.

¹⁸ Ibid.

In those short paragraphs, Sharp revealed much about the core principles of his vision for outdoor education, a multi-disciplinary, inquiry-based, experience curriculum that used the environments, social and ecological, surrounding the school and neighborhood as significant sources of learning. His plan was akin to what modern observers would consider a place-based approach.

For Sharp, outdoor education was “a method of teaching, as well as a principle of using the out-of-doors wherever possible.”¹⁹ While he did not use the precise phrasing, his plan for outdoor learning applied to all potential fields of study, from the sciences to the social sciences and all areas in between. Outside of the school doors, Sharp remarked, “there is the earth, . . . even in the poorest neighborhoods, some plants grow, a great deal of weather; and always some animal or insect life.”²⁰ Similarly, he continued, just beyond the school was the community, “. . . a fit subject for study surely. Government, public health, safety, law and order, business, society, industry – all these should be seen firsthand if any useful knowledge of them is to be gathered.”²¹ To procure a sense experience with the objects and concepts under investigation was the central goal of outdoor education for Sharp, and he apparently excluded little from that agenda. The first step, of course, was to move beyond the traditional classroom and textbook-based instruction.

The function of Sharp’s “What is Outdoor Education?,” as the titled suggested, was to outline the essential themes and purposes of the newly named approach, an effort to solidify understanding and perhaps to garner support for continued pursuits in theory and practice. With that in mind, Sharp neglected to provide any sort of specific outline for an outdoor curriculum. Through his advocacy, however, he did provide several brief illustrations that did much to clarify the sort of reform he advocated. The excerpted passage below was indicative:

¹⁹ Sharp, “What is Outdoor Education?,” 3.

²⁰ Ibid., 2.

²¹ Ibid., 2-3.

In a unit on geography, a teacher spent three lessons trying to teach her class about contours, and succeeded only in making them think that contour lines may somewhere be found on earth, where they would appear to be wavy, as they appeared in the geography books and on the blackboard. But at the rear of the school, there was an eight-foot hill. With encouragement from the teacher, the members of that class could have made a level, and with this and a ruler, could have figured the height of that small hill and the percent of grade. This could all have been done in one forty-minute class period, and a fuller grasp of the significance of contours would have been acquired. The unit of learning would have cost the school district less money.²²

A further demonstration of the variability of applications for outdoor learning, Sharp offered a similar illustration framed within the context of civics and government. He wrote:

In a unit in civics, the high school group learned about the water supply when the city fathers shut down the water in order to clear the corrosion out of the pipes. The school was closed for lack of water. Education, it would appear, had to stop. And when the added pressure on the pipes caused some of them to burst, the school holiday was prolonged. No one thought to take the civics class out to study the municipal water supply, to make tests of water, to figure the per capita consumption, to study the water table maps to see if it were possible to drill wells, to learn what is meant by watershed, and to learn why restrictions are necessary in the watershed area to insure water supply. Also, it would have been a good public service if some of these youngsters had volunteered to help during the emergency. Education need not have stopped... The school is not education...²³

In both passages, Sharp looked to the immediate surrounds of the school as a source for educational inspiration and learning. As noted above of his rationale for outdoor learning generally, Sharp sought to infuse all subject areas with a first-hand, experiential approach. The approach was not exclusive to one disciplinary domain or another. Perhaps more so than other outdoor educational advocates, who frequently emphasized the potential role of the approach for learning situated traditionally within the sciences, Sharp's early rationale emphasized the function that the outdoor classroom might play in both social and ecological learning contexts. And the broad reach of outdoor learning was in no way mysterious for Sharp. Its multidisciplinary nature was instead characteristic, as investigations of nature and of society,

²² Sharp, "What is Outdoor Education?," 3.

²³ Ibid.

even on the small-scale, local level, necessarily drew up all of the traditional disciplines. He suggested further that “It is out-of-doors that the greatest integration occurs in the process of learning. Sooner or later everything relates itself to everything else.”²⁴ On the issue of curricular integration, he continued:

In a classroom, subjects tend to become artificially separated from the rest of the world. One cannot explore housing conditions in the community without touching history, sociology, health, science and other fields. A group of students cannot undertake field work in science without concern for personal health. And everything in nature leads out, sooner or later, to related subjects of interest. Outdoor education forces the issue of integration in the curriculum, to study and experience things in their total relationships—one thing to the other. It puts greater emphasis upon the facts and ideas that are most important – a natural selection of important things to know and appreciate.²⁵

Sharp did not move from his initial appreciation for learning in the outdoors and into a creative exercise to find ways to broaden advocacy through a multidisciplinary framework. By contrast, the multidisciplinary and integrated nature of outdoor education was an outgrowth of the environmental/ecological and social objects and phenomena under investigation in a non-traditional, inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning.

Sharp was not an advocate of an educational reform plan that would seek to eliminate the traditional indoor classroom in its entirety. “It is neither practical nor wise,” Sharp reminded readers, “to move all education outdoors.”²⁶ Though he might have considered it at one point or another, his appeal was one that suggested balance between tradition and innovation. Above all, Sharp hoped to ensure that students received the most educationally beneficial experiences possible. What was best for the indoor classroom should remain there. Learning outdoors was “not a substitute for school.”²⁷ By contrast, he urged educators to consider the possibilities for

²⁴ Sharp, “What is Outdoor Education?,” 4.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Lloyd B. Sharp, “Why Outdoor and Camping Education,” *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 211 (January 1948): 314.

²⁷ Sharp, “What is Outdoor Education,” 5.

learning out-of-doors, wherever that sort of learning might be best arranged. Sharp understood that the outdoor classroom was a challenge to tradition and one that might give rise to a certain level of conflict and disruption.

Of no small significance, Sharp anticipated to some degree the challenges that outdoor learning posed to teachers and teacher educators. Well aware that some practitioners might reject reform out of hand, he also recognized that even willing educators would often require at least some type of additional training. “In the main,” Sharp stated, “teachers are trained to do their work in classrooms and other controlled places. They cannot be expected to discover immediately how to handle groups of children out-of-doors.”²⁸ Among the greatest obstacles for teachers who endeavored to experiment was a willingness to learn alongside of their students. In that much of the work itself was exploratory and intended to foster a spirit of inquisitiveness and inquiry in young learners, the utility of pre-formed, ready-made educational outcomes almost necessarily diminished to some extent. As Sharp explained, “A teacher using the out-of-doors has to overcome the fear of not knowing something when she is asked.”²⁹ Rather than play the “oracle that knows all,”³⁰ he concluded, mutuality was the order of the day for the teacher in an outdoor educational program.

At times, Sharp’s descriptions of outdoor learning pointed toward fairly sophisticated, long-term projects. But for Sharp, outdoor education did not have to become overly complicated or require a great deal of resources. While it was nonetheless the case that Sharp found value in the day-to-day use of small scale outdoor work, his affection for school camping, an arguably more radical and certainly more challenging departure from the norm, was clear. “There is great benefit in a single day [of outdoor education],” he insisted, “if that day has been well planned as

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 4.

³⁰ Ibid.

an adventure in learning.”³¹ “Camping,” Sharp went on to add, “stands at the very peak of outdoor education...”³² Despite its relative scarcity, then and now, Sharp, and eventually the vast majority of scholars who followed him, placed school camping at the center of outdoor educational reform. For better or worse, school camping became synonymous with outdoor learning.

Sharp pointed to an expanded curriculum that moved outside of the traditional classroom. To the outdoors he attached a wide variety of potentially valuable educational experiences. He looked to “health and recreation values,”³³ from the common sense standpoint that learning outdoors would quite often become more physically stimulating than traditional indoor instruction. In addition, Sharp argued that an outdoor education was far more realistic as students had opportunities to work “directly with the environment and real life.”³⁴ Of particular relevance, Sharp framed the rationale for outdoor learning around experientialism and inquiry. In his mind, “...we learn most through direct experience, we learn faster, the learnings are retained longer, and the appreciation is greater” [emphasis in original].³⁵ Outdoor education advocates such as Sharp built a strong case for their localized reform efforts.

William Heard Kilpatrick. Widely regarded for his early work with the project-method, William Heard Kilpatrick also shared some relationship with the earliest foundations of the outdoor education movement, specifically with regard to his writing on the merits of camping as an educational tool. In a 1942 contribution to the *Journal of School Camping*, Kilpatrick situated camping as a powerful innovation for contemporary educators. As a point of departure, he challenged a number of conceptions he believed to be commonly held among educators of the

³¹ Sharp, “What is Outdoor Education,” 5.

³² Ibid.

³³ Sharp, “Why Outdoor and Camping Education,” 314.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

day. In the first instance, Kilpatrick rejected the notion that children were “naturally bad”³⁶ or that they were without any real or meaningful knowledge of the world. Conversely, he also rejected the claim that “all suppression is wrong”.³⁷ “[W]e do not,” he insisted, “simply turn children loose to do as they please.”³⁸ Critical of extreme visions for child-centered reform, what Kilpatrick preferred instead was an educational program informed by empirical results. More specifically, Kilpatrick believed that where educational programs most closely related to the lived experiences of learners, the resultant educational outcomes would become far more effective. Camping provided just such a union between living and learning. Kilpatrick explained:

...Before a thing can be *learned*, it has first to be *lived*. If it is a feeling, I can't learn it until I have first felt it. If it is a thought, I can't learn it until I first think it. If it is a skilled movement, I cannot learn it until I first make that movement. I learn only and exactly what I live.

That the camp is a place where children can and do live is at once obvious. We begin now to see why a camp is so good a place for children. It provides real living, and so brings learning far and away better than does the older type school. Hour for hour, a camp is often more educative than school because in it children can better live what they are to learn.³⁹

Kilpatrick concluded by pointing out that although sense-experience was a critical dimension of learning, the significance of the experience and the degree to which the experience was an outgrowth of existing knowledge and understandings were also inextricable features of the process. In a short summation, he explained that “We learn each thing we live as we accept it to act on and we learn it in the degree that we count it important and also in the degree that it fits with what we already know.”⁴⁰ Of course, the traditional, formal instruction that Kilpatrick believed characterized most school practices hardly met the requirements for learning outlined

³⁶ William H. Kilpatrick, “The Role of Camping in Education Today,” in *Outdoor Education: A Book of Readings*, eds. Donald Hammerman and William Hammerman, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Burgess Publishing Company, 1968), 16.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁰ Kilpatrick, “The Role of Camping,” 18-19.

above. Camping, by contrast, was often far more vital and offered learners numerous opportunities to experience first-hand, otherwise bland or abstract presentations of subject matter. “In other words,” Kilpatrick wrote, “camping is on the whole much more successful at teaching its lessons than is the ordinary school of the older type, because the children live the camp life more fully than they live the most that goes on in the more formal school.”⁴¹ Vitalizing traditional practice was key.

William Gould Vinal. Outdoor education as an educational movement was in some ways a carryover and extension of the nature study, geography education, and Country Life initiatives established in the final decades of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century. To say it another way, outdoor learning was a vestige of educational progressivism. As noted, the term “outdoor education” itself was first used in 1914, well before the educational movement of the same name had been established. But while the phrase was perhaps an independent invention, there were other developments, however limited, which suggested a somewhat earlier beginning than the mid 1940s. William Gould Vinal, writing in 1936, advocated nature education through camping and thus provided one such illustration.⁴²

For Gould, the trouble with contemporary schooling, particularly with regard to the study of nature and science, was the disconnected character of the work. In other words, the formal approach to science education favored the indoor laboratory, the textbook, and the test, over the outdoors and natural phenomena in its original form. Like many of his contemporaries, Gould despised this dimension of formalism within American educational practice. As much was evident where he stated that “Armchair nature study plus lip service where one grinds out facts

⁴¹ Ibid., 19.

⁴² William G. Vinal, “The School Camp Line-up,” in *Outdoor Education: A Book of Readings*, eds. Donald Hammerman and William Hammerman, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Burgess Publishing Company, 1968).

and credits, such as is typical in many high schools, is the lowest form of nature leadership.”⁴³ Rather than expensive, if not wasteful endeavors, to produce what he regarded as “static” symbols, Vinal called on educators to teach nature through nature. Well in line with the nature study movement initiated a few decades earlier, Vinal’s advocacy was primarily a renewed call for the adoption of an old idea. Yet while Vinal’s attention to the educational value of studying nature through nature was a recycled one by the mid 1930s, his insertion of camping into the equation was somewhat new.

In many ways, Vinal viewed camping as the embodiment of educational progress. The passage below was indicative of the appeal that school camping held for him as a reform measure:

There is no education without action. A schoolroom can be full of a number of things and still be in a vacuum. Unfortunately, many schoolrooms are vacuums when it comes to nature. There should be a stream of child activities where the child works and does not just listen. There should be children caring for growing flowers, building observation beehives, breeding guppies, raising a pair of ring-necked doves, and making geranium cuttings. The schoolroom is a clubhouse. Such a program means a path of daily activities. It is subject matter out of experience rather than experience out of subject matter. Such experiences could take place either in school or in camp. Similar discoveries could be made in one’s back yard. Self-achievement, in whatever place it is attained, must come through everyday experimenting, observing, and reasoning. Citizenship must come through participation in citizenship in school, home, street, park, or camp. Nature recreation must come through reading, travel, and camping. There are bound to be richer nature activities in seven twenty-four-hour days at camp than in five five-hour days in school.⁴⁴

An echo of similar calls for first-hand educational experiences outside of the traditional classroom, Vinal’s emphasis on the camping experience as a reform measure did much to highlight the persistence and longevity of the approach soon to take hold in the form of an outdoor educational movement. His effort to recognize the value of locally available outdoor experiences only strengthened the connection.

⁴³ Vinal, “The School Camp Line-up,” 29.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

In Vinal's comparison, the relative advantages of indoor and outdoor learning were rather stark. The traditional indoor setting might offer students the opportunity to study fish through the use of the textbook or, as Vinal suggested, in a laboratory-like setting through the use of an aquarium. But "One anemic goldfish in a glass jar..."⁴⁵ was hardly a suitable stimulus for learning, particularly as compared to studying fish in their natural habitats. Vinal continued the illustration thus:

...We have passed the gazing stage in our parks, games, and biological education. Several goldfish chasing each other through castles and grotesque grottoes may be *amusing*. We are not running amusement parlors. The care of a pair of guppies, the breeding of which is a real experience, brings up problems to be solved. It is a *basic experience*. A field trip to catch stickleback in order to raise more sticklebacks is a *challenging experience*.

In camp there may be a series of fishing experiences over a long period of time. To be successful one must study the habits of trout and bass so as to outwit them. To be within the law one must know the law and have an appreciation of conservation...And then there are a thousand and one unexpected experiences.⁴⁶

Scientific study through the first-hand investigation of nature as it occurred naturally was for Vinal far superior to the manufactured laboratory. Camp life, and for that matter outdoor learning generally, offered realism and purpose to learning in the context of nature education. Of course, these themes would be reiterated and revised time again throughout the next several decades.

Julian Smith. At times regarded as the "Dean of outdoor education," Julian Smith was a foundational figure in the field of outdoor education. Smith suggested that the roots of learning outdoors were quite deep indeed, stretching perhaps as far as the schools established by Plato and Socrates. In short, his claim was that outdoor education was an age-old conception of teaching and learning. His story originated in the state of Michigan, and while he suggested no clear

⁴⁵ Vinal, "The School Camp Line-up." 30.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

historical beginning for using “the outdoors as laboratory for recreational ventures,”⁴⁷ Smith linked the origins of outdoor education in the state to the “experimental” and “child-centered”⁴⁸ curricular movements of the early twentieth century. Searching for more direct linkages, Smith pointed specifically to developments in the 1930s at the Tappan Junior High School of Ann Arbor, Michigan. At Tappan, teachers and administrators developed a camping program for junior high school students. By the middle of the decade, the Kellogg Foundation established the Clear Lake Camp which served at least three local high schools. Smith reported that the Kellogg experiment became “...an integral part of the curriculum of the participating school,”⁴⁹ and was among the first to operate all year long. Temporarily disrupted during World War II, a variation of the camp was still in operation by 1950 at the time of Smith’s writing.

While the work of individual philanthropists was in part responsible for the development of outdoor educational programs in Michigan, Smith reported that state initiatives also played a significant role. “The most unique aspect of the school camping and outdoor education program in Michigan,” he reported, “has been the teamwork of departments and agencies, particularly the State Departments of Public Instruction and Conservation.”⁵⁰ Smith went on to explain how the state joined forces with the pre-existent efforts of the Kellogg foundation.

In 1946 the Michigan Department of Public Instruction and the Department of Conservation, in cooperation with the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, joined in a camping and outdoor education project to discover how education in the out of doors could be brought about and how it would involve natural resources and facilities already available. The project gathered great momentum stimulating the rapid development of local programs as well as redirecting the activities and resources of the two departments involved...Many new day camping programs were established on state lands. School

⁴⁷ Julian W. Smith, “The Michigan Story of Camping and Outdoor Education,” *Journal of Educational Sociology* 23, no. 9 (May 1950): 508.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 509.

camping programs were initiated in state parks and group camps, and a wide variety of outdoor activities were carried out in many communities.⁵¹

By 1948, Michigan's camping and outdoor education programs gained national attention from, among others, the National Education Association, the United States Office of Education, and the American Council on Education. Proponents of outdoor education received more good news in 1949, as the state of Michigan redoubled its support for camping initiatives by signing a state aid package "to reimburse schools that provided work experience in camps."⁵² The broad institutional support enjoyed in Michigan was significant and came to represent somewhat of a model for educational reformers of other states.

Although outdoor education in Michigan frequently took the form of camping, Smith revealed that outdoor curricula were almost inherently variable from one locale to the next. The outdoor curriculum was not a fixed one. For Smith, the fluidity of outdoor education was a natural and important feature. "This is as it should be," he insisted, "so as to meet the needs and conditions as they exist in local communities and this makes it possible for every school to use the out of doors in the learning process."⁵³ For whatever curricular variations may have existed, Smith did provide some indication of possibilities. Among those possibilities, he cited projects in "...reforestation, timber management, soil erosion prevention, trail building, game and fish management, exploration of wooded areas, park improvement, fire fighting, and a variety of other land improvement activities..."⁵⁴ From long-term summer camps to short field excursions, the exact form and purpose of outdoor education were to be determined locally based upon available needs and resources. By modern standards, the Michigan experiments in outdoor learning were place-based.

⁵¹ Smith, "The Michigan Story," 509-510.

⁵² Ibid., 511.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 513.

Smith also spoke of the importance of teacher training in organizing effective outdoor educational activities and programs. “The primary requisite of a good camp program is, as in other phases of school curriculum, a good teacher,”⁵⁵ he wrote. Without identifying specific colleges or university programs, Smith did suggest that the Michigan practitioners had access to opportunities for outdoor educational training. New York University and Indiana University apparently also offered outdoor educational instruction by the 1950s. Smith did not address the nature of those programs with a great deal of specificity, yet he nonetheless pointed to several key understandings that all teachers might take away in their training. “The major points of emphasis in teacher education...,” Smith remarked, were an “an understanding of child growth and development,...the process of democratic living,...and the best use of the natural environment in the educational process.”⁵⁶ Whether through first-hand camp experiences or periodic field visits supplemented with coursework in educational psychology, science, and child development, Smith nonetheless looked to teacher education as a critical component in the expansion of outdoor education. Moreover, his appraisal seemed to highlight the experiential, localized character of outdoor education.

Unlike nature study and the experiential methods surrounding geography education in the decades prior, outdoor education was not initially associated with a particular dimension of the traditional school curriculum. By the 1950s, however, Smith suggested that the movement developed a deeper partnership with recreation and health education. Oddly enough, Smith regarded the shift as a broadening one. In his short description of Outdoor Education Project, an initiative sponsored by the American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, Smith reported that outdoor education consequently “...encompassed more aspects

⁵⁵ Smith, “The Michigan Story,” 512.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

of the school curriculum, particularly in physical education and recreation.”⁵⁷ Rather than a broadening trend, however, one that offered the possibility of an all encompassing outdoor learning curriculum, the reality may have been a narrower focus on outdoor recreation and physical education. But the 1950s were indeed important years for the movement. Among the other developments that Smith addressed, he pointed to the growing attention that the field received in the area of teacher education. The establishment of the National Conference on Teacher Education for Outdoor Education which met first in Michigan in 1953 was an indication of the growing influence of the movement on the training of teachers, novice and veteran alike. Lastly, Smith alluded to the notion that it was during the 1950s that a number of influential outdoor educational programs were initiated. Not unrelated, through their involvement with the establishment of programs at American colleges and universities and private organizations, a number of important outdoor educational scholars assumed new leadership roles in the movement.⁵⁸

Throughout the 1960s, the appeal of outdoor educational initiatives grew considerably according to Smith. In part, that shift in popularity was evidenced through the growing number of programs across the nation at all levels. While he highlighted the significance of outdoor learning in the elementary grades during this period, he also reported continued changes at the post-secondary level, particularly with regard to the availability of teacher education programs. Without diminishing the impact of new programs at Indiana University, Pennsylvania State University, and North Colorado State University, three of several new additions during the era, perhaps the greatest change toward the promotion of outdoor education came in 1965 with the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*. In particular, “Title III of this act was responsible for

⁵⁷ Smith, “The Michigan Story,” 28.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 27-29.

the development of more than 50 outdoor education programs of varying types, many of which continued after the end of federal funding.”⁵⁹ Among other provisions, Title III of the legislation offered matching funds for educational initiatives designed to improve learning outcomes under the heading “Supplementary Educational Centers and Services.”⁶⁰ The initial allocations set aside \$100,000,000 in federal support for each of five years beginning in 1966 and provided assistance for programs ranging from those specific to the needs of underserved rural students to a final provision which offered assistance simply to “other specially designed educational programs.”⁶¹ Not surprisingly, the otherwise unorthodox practice of outdoor education clearly enjoyed a surge in such an atmosphere supportive of innovative, and perhaps experimental, educational programs.

Lee M. Thurston. A State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Lee M. Thurston offered further illustration of Michigan’s pioneering work in outdoor education in 1940s and 50s, specifically the state’s efforts to promote school-related camping. As did others, Thurston characterized Michigan’s efforts to develop outdoor learning opportunities as a venture geared toward a multidisciplinary education. From his generalized description of the activities coordinated in school camps, it seemed that participating students took part in activities ranging from reforestation and timber management to the “functional use of mathematics” to “dramatics, music, and art.”⁶² In as much as the activities addressed specific disciplinary learning, however, Thurston implied that student learning was ongoing throughout the experience and often informal. Without formal, prescribed lessons, Thurston explained that students enjoyed “...many opportunities for activities in social living where boys and girls learn to plan, work, and play

⁵⁹ Smith, “The Michigan Story,” 29.

⁶⁰ *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Printing Office, 1965).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁶² Lee. M. Thurston, “Michigan High Schools and Their Camping Activities,” *The High School Journal* 34, no. 2 (February 1951): 58-59.

together.”⁶³ Formal or informal, the opportunities for learning through first-hand experience were commonplace in Thurston’s description of Michigan’s outdoor educational programs.

Another valuable insight in Thurston’s brief illustration of camping initiatives in Michigan surrounded the need for quality teacher education programs. Not surprisingly, he believed firmly that an expanded outdoor program in the state, or in any state for that matter, would require a more concerted effort on the part of teacher training institutions. “The primary requisite of a good camp program,” he noted, “is a good teacher.”⁶⁴ In particular, Thurston recommended that teacher education programs emphasize the following: “(1) the understanding of child growth and development, (2) the process of democratic living, and (3) the best use of the natural environment in the educational process.”⁶⁵ Without providing a great deal of information regarding the status of Michigan’s teacher training programs by those measures, Thurston did add that “Schools and colleges in Michigan are already providing experiences for teachers in camp situations as part of their preparation.”⁶⁶ What the Michigan case represented, then, was a move toward outdoor education that included a wide variety of stakeholders. Teachers, teacher education programs, state and local governing bodies, and private philanthropic groups all contributed to the growth, and success, of Michigan’s project to expand access to outdoor education. Similarly, Thurston’s illustration also reiterated the experiential, student-centered character of outdoor education.

John W. Klotz. A partial indication of the institutional appeal and longevity of the outdoor educational movement, proponents generated a good deal of literature on the training of teachers. In addition to the several illustrations above was John W. Klotz’s reflections of his

⁶³ Thurston, “Michigan High Schools,” 58.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

experiences with the Concordia Teachers College in River Forest, Illinois, a concrete illustration of the type of training to which teachers had access by the 1950s.⁶⁷ Based upon experiences at River Forest, Klotz detailed a pilot program that took place during the summer of 1955 as an effort to utilize the natural resources available locally in Cook County. Organizers based the entire institute around camping, a feature common in outdoor educational programs.

Klotz explained that “A special effort was made to make it clear...that this was to be an educational experience” for teachers and students alike. Among the various educational opportunities available during the initiative, the tentative schedule of events and topics including the following: Aquatics (field trip); Insects, reptiles, and mammals; Language; Painting and sketching; Birds and bird life; Trees; Soils (field trip); Mathematics; and Astronomy. In addition, and given the Lutheran affiliation of the college and practice school, daily “devotions” were also a part of the institute’s curriculum.⁶⁸ Based on the schedule provided, which Klotz noted was not fixed, the courses offered at camp represented what one would likely have found in the traditional classroom with regard to subject areas offered. In some sense, the schedule implied a multidisciplinary approach to outdoor learning.

Several of the student teachers at Concordia also enrolled in what Klotz term a “‘Nature Study’ class,” where they worked with each other to “...assume major responsibility for the outdoor phases of the program.”⁶⁹ Perhaps the greatest difference between the indoor and outdoor programs, a feature about which outdoor educators often boasted, was the opportunity available for first-hand experience. For instance, while both indoor and outdoor school arrangements might have addressed astronomy as a scientific discipline, the outdoor program

⁶⁷ John W. Klotz, “Outdoor Education at Concordia Teachers College,” *The American Biology Teacher* 17, no. 8 (December 1955): 266-269.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 267.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

provided opportunities for study of the night sky directly. The same experiential, first-hand approach was apparent across the curriculum at Concordia. In sum, in the Concordia model, students and teachers studied objects and phenomena in their natural settings, not from texts or illustrations alone. First-hand experience was the rule.

In addition to the experiential function of the program at Concordia, the experiment offered several other important insights to observers. At the conclusion of the institute, for instance, organizers and participating teachers came together to discuss the successes and the needs of the initiative. “The student teachers,” Klotz suggested, “were much impressed with the possibilities of school camping and what it can do for a group of children.”⁷⁰ By the same token, there was apparently no small illusion with regard to the time, effort, and resources that such endeavors required. As Klotz explained, “[Student teachers] were also amazed at the amount of planning and the work involved in carrying out a program of school camping.”⁷¹ The educational benefits were potentially great as students became “...acquainted with the out-of-doors,” “...became generally more observant...and saw things around them that they had never seen before,” and gained “...the experience of living together.”⁷² Yet each of the rewards was the result of a considerable expenditure of time and effort on the part of all teachers involved.

Unfortunately, aside from the general understanding that would-be outdoor educators gained some understanding of the potential challenges and benefits in organizing camping programs and field excursions for students, Klotz offered little else with regard to the successes and failures of the teacher education component of the Concordia experiment. His primary conclusion appeared to be that teachers left the institute with some deeper sense of familiarity with outdoor education as an approach to teaching and learning, perhaps even an appreciation for

⁷⁰ Klotz, “Outdoor Education at Concordia,” 267.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

the possibilities and challenges associated. What was not clear was the extent to which those teachers were prepared to install outdoor educational programs in their own home areas. Nonetheless, Klotz's report of Concordia did suggest, as stated at the outset, that a certain momentum for outdoor learning was building in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Of equal import, the work at Concordia reiterated yet again the experiential function of the approach.

Orlo L. Derby. Despite the growing momentum for reform in outdoor education, Orlo L. Derby proclaimed in a 1954 issue of *The Clearing House* that outdoor education remained in its infancy. This was particularly the case where the training of teachers was concerned. In his mind, "Outdoor education, insofar as teacher education is concerned, is on the threshold of a great development – its resources are yet untapped."⁷³ Whereas state normal schools in New York required certain teacher education paths to take part in outdoor or camping experiences as a part of the training, Derby reported that requirements generally applied to physical education and recreation-oriented educational pathways alone. Elementary-level teachers in training, by contrast, did not enjoy regular offerings in outdoor education. "[T]here seemed to be no practical way," he added, "to include camping in the curriculum."⁷⁴ In addition to finding curricular space, other obstacles, such as the standing obligation of students to work during the summer months, further prevented the growth of normal school training in outdoor education for most pre-service teachers.

Despite the challenges, Brockport Teachers College took measures to offer an experimental summer course in the early 1950s designed around "trips and excursions" and

⁷³ Orlo Derby, "Some Things are Better Learned in Camp: Outdoor Education at Teachers College," *The Clearing House* 28, no. 7 (March 1954): 423.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

outdoor education in general.⁷⁵ Derby cited two primary purposes for the experimental initiative, which began with a modest five participants. In addition to practical guidance in the development of educational trips and excursions, Derby suggested that the program intended to familiarize pre-service teachers with the local natural environment itself. As he phrased it, students were to acquire “skill and knowledge needed to feel at home out of doors.”⁷⁶ Derby went on to explain that the summer experiment was highly organic and that teachers worked closely with experienced camp coordinators to design and implement outdoor educational activities for student residents. In a description of the format of the initiative, he noted that “Emphasis throughout the three weeks was placed on a maximum of experience and a minimum of theory.”⁷⁷ Going further, Derby indicated that the teacher-created objectives and activities were multidisciplinary and addressed subjects ranging from biology and the sciences, to mathematics and art. “All the members of the group,” he reported, “went on trips to a sawmill, a paper mill, an iron mine, and a Girl Scout camp...Moreover, since we operated in conjunction with a children’s camp, all had a chance to see the reactions of children in such a situation.”⁷⁸ In all, then, although work at Brockport represented a small scale experiment in outdoor teacher education, participants nonetheless gained experience not only in planning outdoor learning activities, but gained those in the clinical context of an outdoor program. Despite the relative scarcity of outdoor educational courses in general teacher education programs, Derby’s description of the experimental efforts of the Brockport Normal School was an important illustration of the movement. The attention to teacher education, not to mention the emphasis on learning about the local contexts for learning, was significant.

⁷⁵ Derby did not offer a specific date or range of dates for the summer programs at Brockport. The early 1950s was assumed by this author based upon the date of publication.

⁷⁶ Derby, “Some Things are Better Learned in Camp,” 423.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 424.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Outdoor Education in the 1960s. A persistent theme throughout the history of pedagogies organized around the outdoor environment, local or otherwise, has been the emphasis on first-hand experience. Outdoor education was certainly no exception and that undemanding remained close at hand as the movement developed beyond the 1950s. In a 1963 volume appropriately titled *Outdoor Education*, Smith et al. indicated that "...experiences are offered on the assumption that the outdoors is a setting for learning, and that direct experiences give reality to the educative process and contribute to the enrichment of classroom learning."⁷⁹ Of course, the manner in which students and teachers engaged with the out-of-class environment could vary significantly. Whereas some outdoor educators promoted school camping as the ideal form of outdoor learning, a feature which arguably came to define the movement, other schools and teachers opted for more practical, often more localized field trips and excursions. Smith et al. explained:

Of all outdoor learning experiences, the most common is the field trip or exploration. It may consist of a few minutes spent in a school yard or be an extended visit to a forest or farm. The value of any field trip depends upon the extent to which it is a real learning experience. To the participant it should be interesting and adventurous...

There are various types of field trips. One type might be called ecological and might involve an intense study of a particular area such as a desert, marsh, or woodland...A second trip might be designed to illustrate certain important concepts, such as the dependence of man on plants and animal, the formation of soil, or the preparation of living things for winter...A third type of trip might be centered around some particular science, such as geology or botany...A fourth type of field trip might be a free discovery exploration to learn how the seasons and other factors effect change in the environment; such a trip has ecological significance. A fifth trip might be designed to develop aesthetic appreciation and be related to writing, reading, music, and art.⁸⁰

Smith et al. went on to identify several important characteristics of successful field trips. In short, they suggested that observation and inquiry on the part of the student remain the emphasis throughout the excursion experience. Going further, they made an effort to identify the utility of

⁷⁹ Julian Smith et al, *Outdoor Education*, 2nd ed. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 53.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

school trips within the context of specific academic disciplines. Forestry, Geology, Zoology, Biology, and general science were among the areas through which they offered direct suggestions. Smith et al. also addressed the possibilities of conservation projects, specimen collections, and school and community gardens.⁸¹ With strong arguments in support of each of these projects as outdoor learning approaches, it was somewhat striking that Smith et al. offered virtually no discussion of the long educational traditions supporting each, particularly with respect to the school garden. Regardless, their book-length commentary on the development of outdoor learning suggested that both localized learning contexts and experientialism remained important themes for the movement into the 1960s. Similarly, Smith et al. demonstrated further the multi-disciplinary character of the field.

Jeanne Smith. Though the field had perhaps a natural affinity for science education, learning in the outdoors was an approach which potentially touched all components of the traditional school curriculum. In a 1968 contribution to the *Journal of Reading*, Jeanne Smith linked outdoor education methodologies to teaching and learning in the area of reading instruction.⁸² Inspired by efforts in Flemington, New Jersey and the Irvington Outdoor Education Center, Smith outlined a rationale for the prospect of integrating literacy into outdoor educational programs. Beginning with the premise that “some children *cannot* and *do not* learn in a school setting [emphasis in original],”⁸³ Smith moved quickly to reiterate the general premise for young readers. As an alternative, outdoor education, through the mechanism of “personal experience,”⁸⁴ provided an invigorated reading curriculum that Smith believed offered motivation and purpose for young learners as they worked toward literacy. In her words, outdoor education ultimately

⁸¹ See Chapter 3 and 5 for more on the role of school gardening.

⁸² Jeanne Smith, “Outdoor Education as a Method of Teaching Reading,” *Journal of Reading* 12, no 3. (December 1968): 229-233.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

invigorated traditional literacy goals as it coupled reading instruction with “exploration, observation and discovery.”⁸⁵

In an effort to test her hypothesis, Smith reported on experiences at Irvington. In short, she selected 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students of varying socio-economic backgrounds to participate in the program. Students rated as low-ability readers received priority, and Smith explained that she measured student improvement through benchmark tests administered at the outset and the conclusion of the outdoor experience. All students were aware of the objective to improve reading comprehension, but Smith revealed that the tests, and the expectation to improve reading, did not necessarily become an overriding concern. As she described the program:

Children were encouraged to know and keep in mind the objectives of the reading program, the primary objective being to know and improve oneself. They were happy to learn that there were no passing or failing grades that if their test scores improved at all, they could be proud of their accomplishment.

The children were pleased when warned not to compare themselves with their peers, for it would seem that the child who has a greater knowledge of camp life through scouting or similar previous experience would most likely score higher on the pretest. However, this did not mean that the child with limited camp experience could not do as well on the post test.⁸⁶

The passage above pointed not just to the measures taken by Smith and others to minimize the competitive nature of the program, but also to the method of instruction adopted. To clarify, what outdoor, camp experiences offered learners was a vital, first-hand experience in which they might ground efforts to improve their literacy skills. Experiences in archery, rowing, and other typical camp activities, Smith explained, offered important, if incidental, opportunities for expression. Although unclear whether or not the enthusiasm generated for reading was transferable to the traditional school setting, Smith suggested that, at the very least, “summer

⁸⁵ Smith, “Outdoor Education as a Method,” 230.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 231.

regression of reading achievement”⁸⁷ might be thwarted. For whatever valuable insights her preliminary work might have provided contemporary practitioners, Smith also represented an important aspect of the field itself. In short, her work represented the longevity and consistency of rationales surrounding the experiential nature of outdoor learning, not to mention the field’s efficacy as a multidisciplinary approach to improving student learning outcomes.

Donald Hammerman. Donald Hammerman established himself as a powerful advocate of outdoor education in the middle decades of the twentieth century. In *A Case for Outdoor Education*, Hammerman offered a renewed agenda for non-traditional, outdoor learning programs established in the 1940s. In an assessment of outdoor educational advancement since that time, he wrote:

Since 1947, outdoor education has developed from an experiment in camping education to the place where over 800 school districts in practically all of the United States participate annually in a resident outdoor education experience. Outdoor education has obviously permeated American public school education to a far greater degree than is commonly recognized. In such school systems as Battle Creek (Michigan), Cleveland Heights (Ohio), and Los Angeles and San Diego (California), outdoor education is, and for a number of years has been, firmly entrenched as an integral part of the total educational program. The number of school systems utilizing the concept of the extended classroom as another avenue through which curricular goals may be realized continues to grow each year. Outdoor education as curriculum experience has been influenced by the same changing cultural conditions, social forces, and educational concepts that were instrumental in determining the role to be played by the contemporary public school.⁸⁸

From that historical sketch, Hammerman made an effort to redefine the key elements of continued progress in reform geared toward the promotion of outdoor education. For him, non-traditional educational initiatives provided learners with experiences simply not available in most school settings. “The only rationale upon which justification for outdoor education can be maintained,” Hammerman argued, “is the fact that it helps to fulfill, in a way that ‘indoor

⁸⁷ Smith, “Outdoor Education as a Method,” 233.

⁸⁸ Donald Hammerman, “A Case for Outdoor Education,” *The Clearing House* 38, no. 1 (September 1963): 54-56.

instruction' cannot, the aims of education.”⁸⁹ Perhaps the greatest deficiency perceived by Hammerman in the traditional classroom, or in mainstream schooling generally, was the detachment between traditional curriculum and instruction and the lived experiences of students. Simply stated, “School studies are very often removed from reality.”⁹⁰ “The outdoor school setting,” Hammerman went on to point out, “provides the natural environment where pupils have the opportunity to come to grips with reality – where, close, first-hand observation, independent investigation, analysis of data, and problem solving are the order of the day.”⁹¹ With his emphasis on realism, Hammerman’s plan for outdoor learning almost necessarily implicated the local and first-hand learning experiences were essential.

Alongside the proliferation of outdoor educational initiatives in the 1950s and 1960s, Hammerman reported a simultaneous increase in the degree to which program goals and practices were predetermined; that is, programs apparently began to “...acquire a high degree of organization and standardization.”⁹² He conceded that in order for alternative programs like outdoor education and camping to become more widespread, some emphasis on correlation with the traditional in-school curriculum was warranted. At the same time, however, his general appraisal suggested that a high degree of standardization was a mistake, “...a move in the wrong direction.”⁹³ Hammerman offered the following clarification:

Outdoor education should complement the ongoing instructional program of the school. It should not become school-like, however. When the structure and content of the outdoor school curriculum become too much like those of the indoor school curriculum, so there is virtually no difference, outdoor education will have expired...Educators should resist the tendency to standardize and regiment outdoor school curricular experiences. There should, in fact, be a concerted effort to preserve the sphere of experimentation within which early school camping ventures operated. Solving the

⁸⁹ Hammerman, “A Case for Outdoor Education,” 54.

⁹⁰ Ibid.,

⁹¹ Ibid., 55.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

problems of daily outdoor living, for example, is one of many possibilities that may constitute the core of the outdoor curriculum. Various learning activities grow out of the problems faced in living and working together in a miniature community. Furthermore, these experiences of living and learning in the outdoor school relate to the overall goals of education.⁹⁴

For Hammerman, indoor and outdoor curricula were not separate, but one in the same. Nonetheless, outdoor education contained within it a unique set of instructional approaches, as well as educational goals. Through the passage above, Hammerman also demonstrated that outdoor education was in some sense a curriculum of opportunity where occasions for learning were often unpredictable. In doing so, he offered a sense of context for his recommendation that outdoor programs avoid the temptation to become overly standardized and regimented, though it was not entirely clear from his advocacy how well that recommendation transferred. Despite Hammerman's best efforts to battle against ignorance or the outright dismissal of outdoor educational programs and ideals, which he regarded as the "frontier of curriculum development,"⁹⁵ initiatives remained more or less rare in the mainstream.

William M. Hammerman. In his contribution to a 1964 volume of *Improving College and University Training*, William M. Hammerman offered further justification for renewed consideration of the possibilities of learning in non-traditional settings. Without providing a detailed historical appraisal, Hammerman was keenly aware of the fact that the general notion of learning in an "outdoor laboratory" was not an educational invention unique to the 1960s. He reported:

Ever since the mid-19th century, people concerned with improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the teaching-learning process have gradually become aware of the vast potentialities of direct learning experiences outside the traditional classroom or campus building. Between the years of 1847 and 1934, approximately 49 colleges and universities sponsored course offerings at field campuses. These courses ranged from archaeology, botany, forestry, and geology to surveying, recreation, and zoology. Since

⁹⁴ Hammerman, "A Case for Outdoor Education," 55.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

these earlier years, programs in field science, psychology, mining, and art have been established at off-campus centers in the out-of-doors where the emphasis is placed upon learning through first-hand experiences in the local environment.⁹⁶

With the general reference to the fact that the foundational principles of outdoor education had deep roots, Hammerman suggested several other key themes supportive of the rationale for the expanded use of outdoor laboratories.

In a reiteration of what became, by some measure at least, a sort mantra for the outdoor educational movement, Hammerman reasoned that certain items worth knowing were best learned in non-traditional classrooms; that is, some things were best learned outdoors. He insisted that first-hand, outdoor learning was an approach suitable to all disciplines and all grade levels. “This principle,” he wrote, “is applicable at all grade levels, kindergarten through graduate school; and to all subject matter areas, astronomy to zoology.”⁹⁷ Hammerman suspected that practitioners at all levels might come to recognize the potential educational value of engagement with local and neighborhood environments, but continued by pointing out that the difficulty arose in the process of determining which pieces of the curriculum were most appropriate for the outdoors and which might fare better in traditional settings.

Although the challenge to link the curriculum to the appropriate method was a real one, Hammerman did not waiver from his pronouncement that outdoor learning was a tool appropriate throughout the course of study. To that end, he provided a short outline to highlight points of intersection between outdoor education and the core areas of study. For instance, with regard to the social sciences, Hammerman suggested the potential for “A study of the history of the local area; its land, its people, and its customs.”⁹⁸ Similarly, he called for field trips oriented

⁹⁶ William M. Hammerman, “The Outdoor Laboratory,” *Improving College and University Teaching* 12, no. 1 (Winter 1964): 44.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

around “an investigation of Indian sites, lumber camps, and gold mines.”⁹⁹ Within the disciplinary domain of mathematics, he recommended experiential lessons in the measurement of distances and sizes through, among other possibilities, studies of “land areas, elevations, tree heights, lumber footage, and tree ages.”¹⁰⁰ For the Fine Arts, Hammerman called for “creative drawing and sketching, pottery making, and working with native materials.”¹⁰¹ In addition to each of those illustrations, he maintained the standard commitments to the sciences, to conservation, and to recreation so often referenced in outdoor educational literature. In sum, what readers found in Hammerman’s short appraisal of the outdoor laboratory was a general framework for a multidisciplinary outdoor educational program, one consistent with the trends established in the field in decades prior. “Although sorely in need of research studies to help substantiate some of its claim,”¹⁰² Hammerman concluded that outdoor educational work had much to offer, not only with regard to essential disciplinary knowledge, but observational and investigative prowess and aesthetic appreciations as well. His work demonstrated still more continuity for the advocacy of an experiential, localized approach to outdoor learning.

Summary. Plans for outdoor learning in the American school in the middle decades of the twentieth century were highly localized in scope. Advocates associated with the movement called for the practical usage of the ready-made laboratory available just beyond the school doors. Far from an entirely new conception for teaching and learning, outdoor educators did add to local study the possibility of school camping. Of course, like other localized forms of instruction, proponents couched their rationales for outdoor learning in discussions of the nature and needs of the learner. Outdoor learning offered an experiential, inquiry-based program that

⁹⁹ Hammerman, “The Outdoor Laboratory,” 44.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 45.

many believed would engage students while also developing skills and capacities for thoughtful reasoning. Many also believed that tapping into the lived experiences of learners would vitalize traditional school work. In addition to the learner and the local, characteristics which position outdoor education as an historical precedent of modern developments in place-based education, another defining feature of outdoor learning was the community improvement function to which many outdoor initiatives were linked.

Outdoor Education & the Community

In addition to the outdoor educational connection to the social and ecological contexts within the immediate surrounds of the neighborhood and school, proponents of outdoor learning in middle decades of the twentieth century were firmly committed to providing for students experiential forms of instruction. Often times based in inquiry and problem-solving, most contributors to the movement recognized the educational benefits of first-hand contact with the objects and principles under study across a wide variety of disciplines and grade levels. But in addition to the local and the learner, proponents of outdoor learning also spoke consistently about the value of the approach in the context of community and social improvement. In some instances, those sentiments were expressed as a part of a larger conservation and sustainability agenda. Elsewhere, advocates cited the desire to install a renewed sense of democratic citizenship in young people as an overarching educational outcome. In sum, outdoor education characteristically maintained a level of community responsiveness, a further indication of the movement's position as an historical antecedent of place-based education.

Lloyd B. Sharp. From the earliest writers forward, the connection between outdoor education and the community was evident. Sharp, for example, framed outdoor learning as a response to social change. He insisted that in the face of sweeping social and economic changes

brought on by industrialization and urbanization, the traditional curriculum no longer completely met the shifting needs of citizens in an American democracy. He explained the transition thus:

With the period of industrialization and expansion, more and more people congregated in the cities, adding to the complexity of city life and creating new social and economic problems. Our country is now over 75 per cent urbanized, making it difficult and in many cases practically impossible for people to have much direct contact with basic realities of life. In the congested centers and indeed in all part of our country, made up of various races and creeds, the demands upon education for contributing to a more workable democracy are great. It requires *more* than literacy to meet the demands of present-day society. If we are to preserve and extend our freedom, the two basic qualities of *understanding* and *self-reliance* must be developed within each individual and far more effectively and quickly than at present. [emphasis in original]¹⁰³

Among the most pronounced educational benefits associated with outdoor learning was the citizenship education function that advocates believed such programs served. Reminiscent perhaps of John Dewey and his conception of the school as an “embryonic community,”¹⁰⁴ Sharp framed his brand of the approach around democratic living, a live exercise in learning and living with others, students and teachers alike. The passage below was illustrative:

The experience in living in the out-of-doors together as a regular part of the school program is not a fad, frill or an extra. Indeed, it is a must for the modern school. Here students meet the more subtle problems involved in group living, the problems connected with the unselfish and unbiased consideration of others, the problems involved in fears and prejudices. Thrown together in a single group with others who have different backgrounds – social, racial, economic, religious – the student learns good and valuable lessons very quickly and by very natural means. Lessons in democracy do not have to be instigated and assigned by the teacher.¹⁰⁵

Rather than merely talking about democracy, Sharp suggested that outdoor educational programs might provide more meaningful first-hand experience, practice in fact. In addition to impromptu explorations of the natural areas in a camp setting, the efforts required by students and teachers to plan activities, cook meals, organize and divide labor, and, not insignificantly, resolve tensions

¹⁰³ Sharp, “Why Outdoor and Camping Education,” 314.

¹⁰⁴ John Dewey, *The School and Society*, in *The School and Society and The Child and the Curriculum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

¹⁰⁵ Sharp, “What is Outdoor Education,” 5.

and disputes, became the training ground for democratic behavior in Sharp's mind. And while he emphasized the development of citizenship skills, Sharp also pointed to the potential vitality that camp experiences added to the traditional classroom and to a student's general enjoyment and appreciation for thinking and learning. As reported of his experience with a New York school's camping program:

At the camp farm, they gathered eggs, milked cows, fed pigs. They saw how potatoes were grown. They lived in small groups, planned most of their own menus, and cooked their meals over the open fire. They operated their own banks and used check books; they ran their post office. They modeled out of native clay, cut wood for the fire, built and repaired shelters, went on overnight trips and slept under the open sky. The wide range of new experiences and the problems of living and working together added up to an impact upon their lives that the usual school experience was not able to make; but did these children lose out in their regular lessons?¹⁰⁶

Of course, Sharp's question was a rhetorical one, and students involved in the program, he reported, learned quite well through the combination of formal and informal learning offered through the camp.

Sharp urged school designers and administrators to consider the development of what he termed "school community camps."¹⁰⁷ In brief, the school community camp represented a scaled down experiment in democracy, one which he expected to be repeated over and over again in small groups of students and teachers. In those miniature communities, members would engage in the same sorts of occupational and social activities as adult citizens in the wider community. As much as the experiences may have supplemented disciplinary learning and the development of practical skills and understandings in various trades (e.g., carpentry, cooking, etc.), Sharp ultimately intended the school camps to serve as laboratories for democratic learning. In brief, he wanted students to experience further the challenges and opportunities of living together with others. The following passage illustrated the general plan for Sharp's experimental community:

¹⁰⁶ Sharp, "What is Outdoor Education," 5-6.

¹⁰⁷ Sharp, "Why Outdoor and Camping Education," 315.

The school camp provides an ideal setting for a new kind of outdoor community. Here the school youth and their teachers have the opportunity to plan their own program and to set up their own democratic procedures for living. The camp is free of city control and regulations. It is the youth's community, a place to live together in the open country, and learn firsthand things not possible in school.

The camp should be divided into as small of groups as possible – seven to ten have been found to be the best size for a group. Each such group should operate as a small camp and be as self-sustaining as possible, should plan its own program, plan and prepare most of its meals, do construction work, and be responsible for its own activities.

These groups should be some distance from each other, yet close enough for combined activities on occasion. The central part of the camp should become the community center or village. In it would be located the main library, infirmary, administrative office, a place for some meals to be served, bank and post office, cobbler shop, and other facilities needed in community life.¹⁰⁸

Quite literally, Sharp viewed the school camp as a scaled down experiment in democratic and community living.

Sharp also offered several guiding principles for the school camp. In the first place, he insisted that all students contribute to the construction of the community, a feature central to the democratic ideal that citizen shared both opportunities and responsibilities. Moreover, to the greatest extent possible, he urged that teachers leave the students to work out their own problems independently as a powerful exercise in problem-solving. With the strong emphasis on problem-solving, he also found value in the types of problems confronting students. "The camp should motivate its program," he noted, "by causing students to do for themselves and to solve their own problems." Going further, Sharp recommended that problems arising at the camp "...should emphasize experience by putting the native materials into the hands of the students at spots where such materials are naturally found."¹⁰⁹ Here, Sharp re-emphasized the local and experiential nature of the school camp; that is, the function of the camps required a vital engagement with the natural and social circumstances characteristic of the environs in close proximity to the school and neighborhood.

¹⁰⁸ Sharp, "Why Outdoor and Camping Education," 315-316.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 317.

The multiple purposes of the camp community, an experience and problem-based curriculum with an emphasis on “living and learning together,”¹¹⁰ were, for Sharp, intended for the masses of American students. “Provide this type of camping experience for the nearly thirty millions of our school youth throughout the country,” he argued, “and our problems of racial tolerance and understanding would largely be solved, as well as a better meaning of democracy attained.”¹¹¹ However much his outdoor educational ideals may have challenged the traditional arrangement of American schooling, Sharp wanted to see the more vital engagement with “real life” adopted everywhere, teacher-preparation programs included.¹¹² In this way, equity seemed to be a core interest.

Another feature embedded within his vision for outdoor education was the aim of promoting a conservation-mindedness and, to that end, an emphasis on building an educational apparatus capable of fostering an ethic of ecological sustainability in young people. “Good textbook material and references,” he wrote, “are valuable in helping students teachers understand about conservation of our natural resources...”¹¹³ Not surprisingly, of course, Sharp went on to highlight the notion that there might also be better ways. The texts and classroom work were vital, but supplementary. The real learning, the “genuine understanding,” was to be derived not through reading alone, but rather through first-hand experience. As Sharp reported: “In many schools throughout the country, groups are learning through actual experience about protection, filling in ditches to keep the soil from washing away, planting trees, making shrubbery and harvesting of crops and what is meant by contour farming. At the same time they are having a chance to see the wild flowers and animals in their natural habitat, to experience the

¹¹⁰ Sharp, “Why Outdoor and Camping Education,” 317.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., 314; 318.

¹¹³ Sharp, “What is Outdoor Education,” 4.

hills, valleys and streams, and to gain respect for the land,...”¹¹⁴ While brief, the several sentences above provided not only an additional illustration which captured the essence of his brand of outdoor education, but highlighted the conservation ethos in Sharp’s early work, one that ran throughout much of the literature available in the field of outdoor education as a whole. While not exclusively so, quite a few outdoor educators who wrote, taught, and carried out research between the 1940s and 1970s,¹¹⁵ did so with an explicit concern for the preservation and care of local, regional, and global ecological systems. Outdoor education, then and now, fit well within a larger framework of environmental education, even if that emphasis often varied from one author to the next.

William Heard Kilpatrick. In Kilpatrick, too, outdoor education and the community connection received attention. Rather than restricting learning in the outdoors to those subject areas commonly linked to the traditional disciplines alone, he linked outdoor learning to the enhancement of the social community. Without calling directly for the adoption of explicit educational ends to be achieved through school camping initiatives, Kilpatrick nonetheless expressed clear opinions regarding the potential for the promotion of certain democratic sensibilities. “[T]he camp offers better opportunities at group living and in many ways,” he wrote, and “...there is much opportunity for discussion and shared decisions.”¹¹⁶ In a reiteration of the role of living in learning, Kilpatrick concluded, “It is this sort of living democracy that best teaches democracy.”¹¹⁷ An early advocate of outdoor education, Kilpatrick did much to outline both the democratic and experiential functions of school camping.

¹¹⁴ Sharp, “What is Outdoor Education,” 4.

¹¹⁵ This twenty-year period for outdoor education is generalized and is a time frame adopted by the author. While it is perhaps true that outdoor learning as a formal approach continues even today, the reform movement gained definite momentum beginning in the 1950s and 1960s.

¹¹⁶ Kilpatrick, “The Role of Camping,” 21.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

Julian Smith. As suggested of Sharp’s plan, equity in outdoor education seemed to be an issue of real concern for many proponents of the approach. As one illustration, a common theme represented in Smith’s account of outdoor education in Michigan was equity and total access. At the instructional level, he expected all students to contribute their ideas and energies and programs were to work to ensure that all students were able to do so. In fact, one of the central purposes of camping and other forms of outdoor learning, according to Smith, was the creation of a democratic community of learners.

Regardless of the scale that a particular outdoor program might have achieved, issues of funding were perhaps a perennial issue, a feature of the reform that might explain in part the difficulty in establishing and maintain outdoor initiatives generally. In Michigan, Smith reported that the school, the student, and, in some instances, the surrounding community typically shared costs. Again, equity and access remained important concerns. Smith reported that the common expectation was for families and students to arrange to cover the costs of food and that the school would continue to maintain its traditional support of instructional costs. There will be “...those families that are unable to contribute financially to the cost...,” he added, but “no girl or boy will be denied a camping experience because of financial reasons.”¹¹⁸ Ensuring wide and equal participation was an inextricable element of the democratic mission of outdoor teaching and learning.

Robert A. McCabe. Like other proponents, Robert A. McCabe, too, recognized the potential of outdoor education to achieve certain community and social ends. Writing for the *Wilson Bulletin*, a publication of the Wilson Ornithological Society established in 1888, McCabe described the pioneering outdoor educational work in Cook County near Chicago. Situated in a 45,000 acre wilderness area, the Cook County Forest Preserve served as steward over the lands

¹¹⁸ Kilpatrick, “The Role of Camping,” 514.

“...dedicated to the education, recreation, and enjoyment of the people.”¹¹⁹ With regard to its educational programs, the Cook County group offered experiences in the form of both short field excursions and overnight camping, the latter of which was a particular rarity for students in metropolitan Chicago. In both cases, McCabe suggested that the programs held value in the context of developing in learners commitments to conservation and sustainability. “Daytime camping in the Cook County Forest Preserve by thousands of Chicago youngsters,” he noted, “provides the conditions under which principles of conservation can be best taught.”¹²⁰ “The program for day campers is diversified,” McCabe continued, “but one of the major activities is the study of natural history-the way plants and animals live together.”¹²¹ First-hand experiences in botany, forestry, and zoology were also among the educational features represented at the preserve. An early exemplar in the movement, the conservation dimension was noteworthy.

McCabe also suggested that the outdoor educational opportunities in Cook County were available to all students and that efforts to serve learners from “low income brackets”¹²² became an important feature of the work. While much of the educational experiences at Cook were of the first-hand, experiential sort, organizers also published weekly pamphlets on relevant local issues for students (and adults) and broadcast periodic radio bulletins. Waterfowl banding and research also became a cornerstone of the programs offered through the preserve. The product of many contributions and resources both public and private, the Cook County Forest Preserve represented yet another successful early outdoor educational endeavor, one with a particular bent toward conservation and sustainability, equity and access, and first-hand experience in locally available natural settings.

¹¹⁹ McCabe, “Outdoor Education Cook County Style,” 174.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

P. J. Hoffmaster. Writing for the *Journal of Educational Sociology* in 1950, Hoffmaster, too, addressed the potential for conservation objectives to be achieved through outdoor education programs. Like nature study advocates before him, Hoffmaster's believed that familiarity with the natural environment likely bred some sense of appreciation in students. He explained further that "Without some contact there can be little or no appreciation of the outdoors or of the innumerable things and conditions that make up the outdoors."¹²³ For Hoffmaster, the actions of adults and young learners alike were hardly affected by laws and regulations designed to compel sustainable living. Instead, what was required was, in a sense, a change of heart and mind in the individual.

"We have been a prodigiously wasteful people," he wrote, "with all of the resources of our land. We have taken and used them with no thought of the future and not much regard for the waste entailed. Even today we are cutting the forests faster than they are being replaced. Wildlife, with all of our efforts, is losing grounds. The tide of soil depletion has not yet been turned. Underground water tables are being lowered at an alarming rate in certain sections. The whole picture is dark – and unnecessarily so. To be sure, there are many reasons, but to me there is just one – not knowing."¹²⁴

Not knowing was, for Hoffmaster, the central obstacle to effective change. Of course, with that determination in mind, formal education, particularly outdoor education, rose to significance as an influence toward change in the direction of sustainability.

Ever hopeful, Hoffmaster nonetheless revealed his uncertainty about the implementation of an outdoor curriculum and the outcomes that might be reasonably expected. "Outdoor education through the school," he noted, "is as yet too new to bring material benefit to our resources."¹²⁵ In the end, he returned to his initial conception regarding the lessons learned when teachers and schools committed themselves to organize first-hand experiences in nature for learners. Cautiously, Hoffmaster asked "...if children were just taken where the things of Nature

¹²³ Hoffmaster, "Conservation through Outdoor Education," 516-517.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 520.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 521.

are, out beyond the influence of great centers of population, and were given a limited amount of guidance and interpretation – it might be the best and most effective way of getting into their minds a truer concept and fuller appreciation of the things we live by.”¹²⁶ Unsure of the precise mechanism by which a conservation ethic might be established, let alone the process through which such curricular change might come, Hoffmaster remained confident that the experiences offered through interaction with the natural world might provide untold benefits for both the learner and the community of which he or she was a part.

Hoffmaster’s prescriptions for educational practice were perhaps underdeveloped. His primary motivation was to insist that learners ‘go outside.’ Nonetheless, through the connection to conservation and sustainability, outcomes that Hoffmaster clearly attached to interaction with the natural environment, his brand of outdoor learning today stands in close proximity with the some of the broad objectives of place-based education. In short, while place-based education is today a multi-curricular approach in theory, scholars have often framed much of the practical and theoretical research in the field within the larger domain of environmental education. Add to that the emphasis on first-hand experiences and the frequent attention to local outdoor settings and the similarities become even more apparent. These elements of similarity were in place since the beginning of the outdoor education movement, and Hoffmaster provided but one additional illustration.

Lou & George Donaldson. In Lou and George Donaldson, too, outdoor education played a particularly vital role in the social training of young people.¹²⁷ Alarmed by what they perceived be a trend of degradation in American communities large and small, Donaldson and Donaldson were among those outdoor educators who looked to the school as a means of

¹²⁶ Hoffmaster, “Conservation through Outdoor Education,” 521.

¹²⁷ Lou Donaldson and George Donaldson, “A Camp is a Children’s Community,” in *Outdoor Education*, eds. Donald R. Hammerman and William M. Hammerman, 2nd ed. (New Jersey: Burgess Publishing Company, 1968).

adjusting the relationship between the individual, the school, and society. Yet schools themselves were only part-time institutions according Donaldson and Donaldson. Consequently, they looked directly to the school camp as an educational alternative to effective citizenship education.

Whereas other advocates sometimes looked to outdoor education as a means of invigorating the science curriculum, or perhaps to promote recreation, Donaldson and Donaldson viewed such measures, specifically the school camp, as “citizenship laboratories.”¹²⁸ Following that pronouncement, they endeavored to offer characteristics of effective camp experiences. Among those characteristics, Donaldson and Donaldson suggested that the camp community directed toward community building worked best where teachers and organizers allowed a degree of “permissiveness.”¹²⁹ Far from a completely free arrangement whereby the experience was completely unregulated, they simply pointed to the value that a level of flexibility and spontaneity provided. Similarly, permissiveness allowed students to assume responsibilities that might otherwise be out of reach. “The camp which truly believes in allowing children to face community problems,” they noted, “will consciously refrain from doing anything *for* children which they can reasonably do for themselves.”¹³⁰ In addition to a student-centered spirit, the school camp was, for Donaldson and Donaldson, simultaneously “idealistic” and “real.”¹³¹ “Children are realists,” they wrote, “They want and need no ‘busy work’ or fake motives.” Quite simply, they urged that learners were served best when allowed to engage in purposeful activities in collaboration with other students and to be given opportunities to confront, by themselves to the extent possible, the problems that almost inevitably arose from those conditions.

¹²⁸ Donaldson & Donaldson, “A Camp is a Children’s Community,” 34.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 35.

¹³¹ Ibid.

With regard to the ideal setting, Donaldson and Donaldson implied that all care should be taken to arrange a safe and productive environment for learning. From the selection of camp teachers to the arrangement of camp facilities, the experience was to reflect the best available choices that could be made for the growth and development of those who elected to participate. While not exhaustive of the range of characteristics identified, Donaldson and Donaldson also urged that camp remain “fun.”¹³² “Children have always gone to camp for fun,” they wrote, and “We suspect they probably always will.”¹³³ Rather than a force to combat, Donaldson and Donaldson returned again to the learner and explained that practitioners should come to regard fun in learning as a method. In their view, the plan was to “exploit the fun impulses of children for all they’re worth.”¹³⁴ Perhaps even more telling, they reasoned that educators, too, should begin to have fun in their work as well. For Donaldson and Donaldson, the measure of success of the camp as an outdoor educational device was perhaps less directly tied to the precise curriculum and activities offered than it was to the manner in which the camp itself was organized and the nature of the roles and responsibilities attached to the learner. Outdoor learning was to be an exercise in social living, a preparation for adult roles as members of the community.

Outdoor Education in the 1960s. While the connection was perhaps always present in some form or another, the 1960s and 1970s brought increased public support and concern for environmental health. The public response in the early 1960s to Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* surely stimulated the conservation orientation of outdoor educational writing. The answer to the environmental crisis was a more harmonious living arrangement between human societies and the natural world. “It is not surprising,” Smith et al. remarked in their introductory comments to

¹³² Donaldson & Donaldson, “A Camp is a Children’s Community,” 36.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

Outdoor Education, "...that society seeks to rediscover the link between man and the earth from which he sprang."¹³⁵ As had others before them, outdoor educators reasoned that the school might foster just such an adjustment by repositioning the role of the outdoors in the process of learning.

Whereas a rising tide of environmentalism may have colored the writing of outdoor educators during the 1960s and 1970s, most advocates nonetheless maintained a multidisciplinary, broad purpose mission. Smith et al.'s effort to define the scope and purposes of outdoor education was illustrative:

Outdoor education means learning *in* and *for* the outdoors. It is a means of curriculum extension and enrichment through outdoor experiences. It is not a separate discipline with prescribed objectives, like science and mathematics; it is simply a learning climate offering opportunities for direct laboratory experiences in identifying and resolving real-life problems, for acquiring skills with which to enjoy a lifetime of creative living, for building concepts and developing concern about man and his natural environment, and for getting us back in touch with those aspects of living where our roots were once firm and deep.

This concept of outdoor education brings it within reach of every school, college, and educational agency in the land. Most teachers and youth leaders will find outdoor resources which they can use to enhance learning and to provide opportunities for acquiring knowledge and skills necessary for wholesome outdoor pursuits.¹³⁶

The purposes of outdoor education, according to Smith et al., were multiple, ranging from an attempt to create problem-based instruction, to efforts to foster a desire to pursue lifelong learning. Not insignificantly, Smith et al. placed additional emphasis on the potential to connect learners and the natural environment.

Another key feature of the definition, and one that gains particular relevance in the present attempt to explore the historical antecedents of modern place-based educational theory and practice was the distinction drawn between teaching "in" and "for"¹³⁷ the outdoors. In some

¹³⁵ Smith et al, *Outdoor Education*, 15.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

sense, the distinction explains much about the rationale and purposes of outdoor education over the several decades of its ascendance. In their discussion learning “in” the outdoors, Smith et al. that the approach was in some sense “...a laboratory that offers an opportunity for direct experiences leading to a great appreciation, a clearer interpretation, and a wiser use of the natural environment in achieving the purposes of education.”¹³⁸ Going further, they suggested that “This phase of outdoor education might well be called the appreciation arts.”¹³⁹ Without a great deal of elaboration, Smith et al. nonetheless reiterated the notion that the “boundlessness” of outdoor education was appropriate across a wide range of studies and therefore appropriate for schools and classrooms everywhere. In short, the environments outside of the school might serve to invigorate traditional approaches to teaching and learning.

Framed “in” or “for” the outdoors, Smith et al. revealed that a significant feature of outdoor educational work had historically been the promotion of a conservation mindedness. In a short discussion of environmental education and the relationship that the field shared with outdoor educational initiatives, Smith et al. looked directly to Aldo Leopold as a foundational figure. Whether conservation education or the closely related term, environmental education, they noted that “Both refer to the man-land ethic or the ‘ecological conscience’ of which Aldo Leopold spoke so impressively.”¹⁴⁰ Across the board, the development of an “ecological consciousness” was a ubiquitous feature of outdoor educational practice, a feature rarely omitted. The passage below from Smith et al. was illustrative of the total relationship between environmentalism and outdoor education.

The development of attitudes towards a quality environment is accomplished best when the learner has satisfying experiences with the resources involved, as in outdoor programs described in this book. Schools report that when children have experiences in

¹³⁸ Smith et al., *Outdoor Education*, 20.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 25.

the improvement of their environment, whether it be planting trees or helping to prevent erosion and pollution, they feel a greater responsibility for the care and wise use of natural resources. They have a stake in the land. The young adult who learns the skills and finds satisfaction in angling, hunting, boating, hiking, camping, and nature activities will have more concern about the care and management of the natural assets that contribute to his recreation. Direct experiences, followed by study in the classroom, constitute a complete learning circle in a given phase of outdoor education.¹⁴¹

A supplement to the traditionally recognized academic disciplines as well as those activities commonly regarded as leisure or sport, the stewardship function of outdoor education pervaded all larger purposes for Smith et al. Familiarity and first-hand contact, regardless of the method or reason, arguably produced a certain appreciation and connection with the natural environment. Yet the concern for sustainability and wise living with the natural environment was not merely an ecological problem, one that might potentially be remedied through engagement with the natural environment alone. Another important component of outdoor education, at least as framed by Smith et al., was the community of which the school was a part.

For Smith et al., outdoor education ideally situated the school "...as a service agency in an educative community."¹⁴² Among other important outcomes, the role of outdoor education in the community school pointed to a highly localized arrangement, whereby the precise needs and resources of individual communities determined the range of curricular choices ultimately adopted. With that in mind, while a range of schools might have adopted the general mission of incorporating local problems into the curriculum, an element common in Smith et al.'s depiction of the community school generally, those problems and the resultant curriculum would naturally vary from place to place. The passage below provided further clarification:

One of the newer ideas in building a local school curriculum is to begin with local community problems. This procedure fits well into the generally accepted principles of developing learning experiences in accordance with the interests and processes of the classroom group. Consequently, when problems arise in any of the school subjects, such

¹⁴¹ Smith et al., *Outdoor Education*, 26.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 32.

as the physical and social sciences and communication arts, it is logical to focus attention on solving local problems first, then consider state, national, and world affairs. With this approach, which is fundamental in the development of a community school curriculum, outdoor education occupies a logical and natural place. Physical science courses might focus on problems of reforestation, water and air pollution, and game management in some sections of the country. In other places, land considered marginal in terms of agricultural use might more profitably be developed into park and recreation areas. The utilization of outdoor areas for physical education and recreation in some communities would make for a curriculum richer than the traditional programs in gymnasiums and playfields.¹⁴³

Smith et al. highlighted a similar localized trend in their comparison of urban and rural school settings. They wrote:

A school located in a suburban area, where people sought fresh air and open spaces, would miss its calling not to be involved in land use planning, beautification, experiences in gardening, solving problems of water supply, sewage disposal, and pollution. Likewise, schools of inner cities and ghettos can use limited space and green areas as laboratories to help problems relating to the improvement of the environment.¹⁴⁴

In both illustrations, the clear tendency was curriculum designed around local problems and concerns and in such a way as to confer a benefit on the community served. Not insignificantly, it is at this intersection, that between the community school and the utility of outdoor learning, that place-based education and outdoor education intersect theoretically. For both modern place-based educators and outdoor learning proponents in the mid-twentieth century, the local problem was a potentially rich source of student learning. Local settings not only enriched the learning process by providing occasions for direct observation and participation, but also contributed directly to the maintenance and improvement of the local community itself.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented outdoor education as an historical precedent for modern place-based education. Spurred on by post-war concerns surrounding physical fitness, ecological sustainability, and, more generally, the “tempo” of American life, outdoor education gained

¹⁴³ Smith et al., *Outdoor Education*, 35.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

momentum beginning in the 1940s as an educational reform strategy. Essentially progressive in scope, advocacy for outdoor learning arrived late in the era of educational progressivism and at a time when non-traditional strategies were beginning to draw fierce criticism. Though it is certainly true that outdoor educational initiatives achieved great educational successes since the 1940s, any hope that such opportunities would be expanded to all school-aged students has not been realized. Nonetheless, appeals for learning outdoors, whether on a small, local scale or in the form of extended-term school camps, have persisted and continue to enjoy some degree of favorability even in contemporary educational research and practice. In other words, while the force of the American outdoor educational movement received its greatest support prior to the 1970s, the value of learning outdoors is still recognized today.

Outdoor education represented an historical antecedent to modern place-based theory and practice. The similarities between the two educational models cannot be overstated. In first place, the push for learning “in” the outdoors inspired students and teachers to make use of those objects and phenomena available in and around the neighborhood and community. As Sharp explained early on, “even [in] the poorest of neighborhoods,” opportunities for learning outside were abundant, a plea for the adoption of a simple, if non-traditional, practice. Far better than Vinal’s “anemic classroom goldfish,” outdoor educators asked that teachers provide observational experiences in natural contexts. Whether through Derby’s field-trips and excursions or Kilpatrick’s early rationale for school camping, the notion that local settings outside of the classroom might provide educational experiences was an obvious and characteristic feature of outdoor learning.

Like other place-based pedagogies, the use of the local in outdoor education was frequently linked to certain assumptions regarding the needs and nature of young learners. In the

first place, outdoor learning strategies utilized “outdoor laboratories” to engage students in first-hand experiences. To interact “directly with the environment and with real life,” as Sharp suggested, was widely regarded by outdoor educators as an effective means through which student interest and motivation might be gained (and maintained). As Hammerman viewed it, the traditional practice of schooling was ill-fitted to the needs of the learner and often “detached from the lived experiences of the child.” Learning outdoors outlined an experiential approach with investigation, analysis, and problem-solving at the center.

The inquiry-based, experiential, and localized character of outdoor learning strategies that grew up between the 1940s and 1970s represented a curricular and instructional approach that very closely resembled modern place-based pedagogy. Add to that educational equation the social and ecological dimensions of outdoor education and the similarities between the two reform movements become even more apparent. In the first place, outdoor educators continued an American interest in promoting conservation and sustainability through the public school program. From Sharp and Smith to McCabe and Hoffmaster, contributions which spanned nearly three decades of advocacy, outdoor educators frequently tied to outdoor learning issues surrounding the health of the natural environment and the preservation of natural resources. For Hoffmaster, as one illustration, learning out-of-doors was linked specifically to students’ appreciation for conservation legislation; that is, Hoffmaster believed that students in closer contact with the natural environment, through outdoor educational initiatives, might feel a deeper sense of duty and allegiance to laws and regulations designed to protect natural resources. Elsewhere, in Smith et al., for instance, conservation goals were more generalized, but nonetheless attached to the ideas that young people might better understand their “stake in the land.” But outdoor education was not exclusively environmental education and the

community/social responsiveness function was in fact much wider. In many instances, writers attached to outdoor learning opportunities for the development of citizenship skills. As Kilpatrick phrased it, “Living democracy best teaches democracy.” For Donaldson, outdoor education created “citizenship laboratories,” which gave students the experience of doing democracy, not simply of talking about it. The idea that practice in democratic living might improve communities was a notion echoed time and again by proponents of outdoor learning. And finally, for some, outdoor education threatened to tackle community issues directly. Perhaps the clearest illustration of such a sentiment came from Smith et al. who suggested that the school should become a “service agency.” Whether through conservation, the promotion of democratic citizenship skills, or direct involvement, outdoor educators frequently attached to their reform plans objectives for learning which could ultimately work to improve the community of which the school was a part. Combined with the emphasis on the local and the learner, the community responsiveness function in outdoor education positions the field as a clear historical antecedent of place-based education.

Despite the relative marginality of outdoor education, and particularly school camping, as mainstream educational reform strategies, the outdoor education movement represented an important chapter in the history of education, and one that has received relatively little attention. Few educational historians have broached the subject.¹⁴⁵ The same inattention can be found in modern place-based educational literature. With Clifford Knapp representing a notable exception, the parallels between outdoor education and contemporary place-based education have been all but overlooked. As Chapter 7 reveals, there is yet another broad-based educational reform movement that has nearly escaped the attention of modern scholars in the field of place-

¹⁴⁵ A quick review of Cremin, *The Transformation of the School*, Urban and Wagoner, *American Education*, and Kliebard, *Struggle for the American Curriculum* revealed no reference to outdoor education, school camping, or the major figures associated with those developments.

based education. More specifically, the range of educational reforms within the domain of *community education* deserve close attention.

CHAPTER 7

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Introduction

As noted at the outset and reiterated throughout, the goal of this extended discussion has been to identify historical antecedents in theory and in practice for place-based education. With the exception of Chapter 2 which highlighted the earliest roots of place-based teaching and learning, the discussion to this point has focused almost exclusively on well established educational reform movements, most of which gained momentum during an era of educational progressivism beginning in the last decade of the nineteenth century. In large part, the reform agendas evaluated have represented more or less cohesive and somewhat bounded curricular and pedagogical movements; that is, even though nature study may have informed work in the domain of Country Life, both movements enjoyed a certain sense of identity and independence and represented responses to somewhat unique sociopolitical developments. Chapter 7 adds further to the essential purpose of identifying place-based educational precedents, but considers developments that did not always represent the same degree of homogeneity that characterized the reform movements assessed in previous chapters. The focus of Chapter 7 is the broad-based domain of *community education*. Community education did rise to prominence as a formal field in the 1950s and 1960s in the aftermath of World War II and the breakdown of traditional, colonial strongholds across the globe and those developments are highlighted in the discussion below. At the same time, however, a complicating feature of community education is that it also reflects an age-old educational agenda that has recurred time and again through independent

experiments for centuries. With that in mind, Chapter 7 also provides a selective review of independent community education initiatives which closely resembled modern place-based education, but have not been historically associated with any larger educational reform movement(s).

This chapter presents various iterations of community education as historical precedents of place-based pedagogy. The dimensions of community education reviewed below are not exhaustive, but the discussion underscores (a) the characteristic features of the programs presented and (b) the sociopolitical contexts which gave rise to each. With regard to the former and in keeping with the style and format of the study to this point, the discussion is also informed by the defining criteria of place-based education established at the outset in Chapter 1. Attention is paid to the local and the learner and, in particular, the potential role of the school in responding to the needs of the surrounding community. The primary works of prominent community educators, archival holdings in the form of course bulletins and catalogues, and, in the case of Foxfire, an extended scholarly criticism, provide the basis for the discussion. The first portion of the chapter reviews several unaffiliated illustrations of community education, including The Berry School, The Penn School, The Tuskegee Institute, and Foxfire. Following that discussion, the chapter turns to consider developments that took place in 1950s and 60s under the formal heading “community education.”

Unaffiliated Illustrations of Community Education

Illustrations of independent educational experiments reflective of place-based strategies are undoubtedly numerous. To provide an exhaustive review of such initiatives, many of which are likely quite obscure, is not the intention here, though it is hoped that this larger discussion will bring more historical illustrations to light subsequently. In the discussion below, four

independent illustrations of community education are evaluated, specifically the Berry School of northwest Georgia, the Penn School of coastal South Carolina, the well-known Foxfire Fund, and the educational initiatives established at The Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes in Virginia and Alabama, respectively. These several select historical antecedents were not openly affiliated with any identifiable educational movement, yet represented the essential themes and character of modern place-based education. The cases presented were almost exclusively representative of education in the American South though this feature is largely coincidental. Further exploration will undoubtedly reveal a much broader geographic influence.

The Berry School. Martha Berry's pioneering effort to establish a school for rural Appalachian boys at the turn of the twentieth century represented one illustration of a community education initiative consistent with the foundational themes of modern place-based education. Even a casual review of the institutional bulletins published by the Berry School revealed such connections. Although the institution changed dramatically as the Boys Industrial School (founded 1902) grew into the coeducational Berry College by the early 1930s, a certain attention to the local in the curriculum was evident throughout the school's early history and across virtually all disciplines. Excerpts from the science curriculum as described in the 1906-1907 edition of *The Berry School Bulletin* offered support. The bulletin read:

Freshman Year: Fall Term - Physiography. This is a four months' course, with daily recitations. Besides the study of the text-book, the class does some field work, examining under the direction of the teacher, certain aspects of the physical conformation of the section in the immediate vicinity of the School.¹

Complemented with traditional classroom instruction, the suggestion that "the immediate vicinity of the school" might serve an educational purpose represented what might be termed a place-based perspective. In addition to course and laboratory work following the freshman year,

¹ *The Berry School Bulletin, 1906-1907* (26), The Berry College Archives.

the same bulletin noted how the growing agricultural functions of the Berry School were to be achieved. Under the heading "Agricultural Department," the bulletin outlined the following localized approach:

Although this is not strictly an agricultural school it aims to give that practical knowledge of Agriculture which will enable any boy to become an intelligent and successful farmer. This training is given by class recitations in Agriculture and by practical work on the school farm.

The farm consists of about five hundred acres and is one of the most important resources of the School...This year about seventy-five acres of corn has been planted, which will provide for the stock on the farm for the coming year...It is our aim to make the agricultural training the best of any school in the South.²

Despite appearances, the vocational aspects of Berry did not overwhelm the place-focused approach; that is, Berry was not concerned exclusively with technical training, but was in fact committed to an educational philosophy grounded in local contexts. This is a reasonable conclusion, but incomplete for several reasons. A focus of the Berry School was always agricultural and industrial education, features that remain evident in Berry College even today, but that focus did not preclude a localized approach to curriculum and instruction.

The particular area of northwest Georgia in which the Berry was located, indeed much of Georgia and the South at the turn of the century, was, in fact, heavily invested economically, culturally, and politically in agriculture. Agriculture, and more broadly the goal of educational improvement for the then impoverished agricultural families of Appalachia, was always a part of Berry's mission and a reflection of local conditions. This focus was apparent in the course catalogues dating from 1905 to 1922 and explicitly stated in the annually reoccurring section titled "Special Information for Students." The introduction read:

Candidates for admission must live in the country, must be unable to attend a more expensive school...No city boys are accepted as students...The following boys also are not wanted: Those who are "headed for town," whose ambition in life is to be a clerk,

² *The Berry School Bulletin, 1906-1907* (28-9), The Berry College Archives.

bookkeeper, chauffer, insurance agent, "drummer," street-car conductor, book-agent, "dude," etc. or who are looking for easy jobs.³

The dedication to those boys, and later girls, intent on a rural life, not a life in the nearby city of Rome, Georgia, was evident. With that in mind, the organization of Berry represented a community-based approach, one intently focused on the needs of local peoples.

A more direct refutation to any claim that the Berry School was purely an agricultural one could be found in the fact that throughout the early bulletins there were descriptions of a complete course of study grounded in the local; that is, the evidence for a localized approach at Berry extended well beyond the agricultural components of the curriculum. The English and social studies curricula, for instance, maintained an attentiveness to issues local, Georgian, and Southern. In addition to Nature Study, a curriculum component found throughout Berry's Grammar School course descriptions, observers found that a similar approach informed geography education. The following "Geography II" course description provided an illustration:

Throughout the course in this subject the view-point is always that of the homes of the students and constant reference is made to local conditions. The work is made interesting and practical through the use of maps, pictures, models, apparatus and field observations.⁴

The passage appeared to reveal a locally-focused approach to teaching and learning in geography, one that built on student interest of those things familiar, perhaps believed to be inherent in the learner's experience. The description of Berry's "Country Life Course" offered further evidence.

The aim of this course is to take the everyday activities of the boys on the farm and make these the basis for arithmetic, science and agriculture...Most of the boys in this class have studied very little arithmetic in the rural communities from which they come. The practical way in which arithmetic, agriculture, economics, and current events are blended enable the quick assimilation of what otherwise would be dry and indigestible material.

³ *The Berry School Bulletin, 1912-1913* (49), The Berry College Archives.

⁴ *The Berry School Bulletin, 1912-1913* (25), The Berry College Archives.

No definite text-book is used during this year, but the students are encouraged to accumulate and read bulletins on the subjects discussed in class.⁵

In many ways, this passage read like a modern description of place-based education. As an important aside, the passage also provided an interesting set of linkages between The Berry School, and the reforms discussed in previous chapters, namely, the nature study movement, the “new geography,” and the Country Life Movement. In this way, a deeper consideration of the Berry curricula and philosophy adds significantly to the historical portrait of theoretical and practical connections between those various movements and the continuity of certain themes in the present in place-based education. To be sure, despite the appearance of contemporary reform measures in the Berry bulletins, it was not readily apparent that Berry was directly affiliated; that is, Berry did not arise as an experiment in Country Life reform, for instance, even though Country Life reforms may have eventually informed the school’s operation. Berry was an independent endeavor in community education.

But what of the other social studies courses, mathematics, English, and literature? While not present in each and every course description, an attention to the local contexts of Rome, Georgia existed in each component of the curriculum, with the possible exceptions of Bible Studies and Music. With regard to social studies courses, the bulk of the coursework was historical in nature and not explicitly localized. Despite the persistence of what appeared to be a more traditional history curriculum, however, a place-conscious theme did permeate a number of other social studies courses. Coupled with the “Geography II” excerpt cited above, selections from the course descriptions for “Civics I” and “Economics I” below provided further support for the argument that the early Berry School exemplified a place-based approach in practice which pre-dates modern initiatives.

⁵ *The Berry School Bulletin, 1921-1922* (47), The Berry College Archives.

Civics I [*sic*]. An elementary study of the structure and function of local, state and national government, with study and practice in the ordinary duties of rural citizenship, including things a boy should know about the law.

Economics I. An elementary course in political economy, ethics, and the duties of American citizenship, special reference being paid to rural conditions and needs.⁶

In both “Civics I” and “Economics I,” the rural focus arguably represented an attempt to make the social studies locally relevant and representative of the lives lived by Berry students.

Much like the persistence of traditional history, English courses had perhaps the least locally-focused flavor at Berry. This trend was particularly salient at the high school level as illustrated through the curricular emphasis on classic, non-local texts. At the grammar school level, however, the use of Stewart's *Country Life Readers* indicated that localized, rural topics were at least present. While the course descriptions for high school English and literature courses did not illustrate a localized approach entirely, student work on *The Advance*, the school paper designed “...to give items of news in regard to local happenings, and also furnish an opportunity for literary effort on the part of students,”⁷ may have served a similar purpose. In fact, to approach disciplinary learning through local journalism was not at all unlike other historical place-based educational precedents, namely the *cultural journalism* method illustrated through the Foxfire program.

Elements of an essentially place-based approach were even apparent in mathematics course descriptions, though perhaps less pronounced given the nature of the subject area. “Mathematics VII,” for instance, boasted “practical applications to country life,”⁸ while “Mathematics X” offered work in “simple bookkeeping, particularly as applied to the farm, shop

⁶ *The Berry School Bulletin 1921-1922* (51-52), The Berry College Archives.

⁷ *The Berry School Bulletin 1905-1906* (24), The Berry College Archives.

⁸ *The Berry School Bulletin 1921-1922* (48), The Berry College Archives.

and home.”⁹ The same localized focus was evident in the education courses described in the Berry bulletins. Both courses recorded reportedly maintained “special reference to rural school work,” and, particularly in “Course II,” the rural high school's “place in the community life, the training of leaders, and ... agricultural and industrial training for country life.”¹⁰

Even where the focus was agricultural, the Berry School course bulletins were suggestive of an experiential, localized approach. Whether horticulture and gardening, botany and forestry, or animal husbandry, course descriptions maintained a focus on the subject as relevant to, and in the context of, local circumstances. The course description for “Botany and Forestry” provides as an example.

Each student is required to work out a practical plan for the management of the average forested area on a 160-acre farm; considerable attention is also given to the relation of the state and national governments to forestry and to its influences upon the industrial and social welfare of rural communities.¹¹

Throughout the curriculum, then, at least as represented through the institution's bulletins and course descriptions, the Berry School appears to have advocated and implemented a place-based approach to its work with rural Appalachian students in northwest Georgia. The localized nature of learning at Berry spanned the entire course of study and touched nearly all disciplines. Similarly, the bulletins reviewed above also pointed to an experiential approach to teaching and learning. First-hand student participation was the order of the day, even after the transformations that took place when Berry College was established in the 1930s.¹² While the community responsiveness function was perhaps less pronounced in the bulletins and course descriptions, Martha Berry's mission was clearly designed around the motivation to provide educational opportunities for social, economic, political, and, perhaps, moral uplift in the highlands of

⁹ *The Berry School Bulletin 1921-1922* (49), The Berry College Archives.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹² Ouida Dickey and Doyle Mathis, *Berry College: A History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005).

southern Appalachia. The commitment to the community was an inexorable part of Berry.¹³ Despite what appears to be a solid historical antecedent of place-based education in practice, the Berry School has been entirely overlooked by modern researchers. The history of education in Georgia may offer still more.

Rabun Gap-Nacoochee & Foxfire. Another Georgia-based, community education initiative that bears an important relationship to modern place-based education was Foxfire. Named after a phosphorescent fungi native to southern Appalachia, Foxfire was a localized educational program that grew out of the Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School near Cleveland, Georgia. The institution that eventually evolved into the Rabun Gap School was founded by Andrew Richie in 1905 and functioned as a hybrid organization, with both public and private support. During the daytime hours, the school was publically funded, including its teaching staff, while the non-school hours were overseen by a privately owned and operated school board and administration.¹⁴ Foxfire was not established until much later, not until the late 1960s under the initial direction Eliot Wigginton.¹⁵

As innovative as the Foxfire program would become, the Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School itself deserves independent attention, particularly given the contexts of community education and place-based pedagogy. The Rabun Gap School, not unlike that of Martha Berry's work in nearby Rome, Georgia, combined principles of community education, rural reform, and educational progressivism. With the assistance of Harvard colleague and University President, Charles Eliot, the school secured the funds necessary to purchase nearly 2,000 acres of land in northeast

¹³ Harnett T. Kane and Inez Henry, *Miracle in the Mountains: Inspiring Story of Martha Berry's Crusade for the Mountain People in the South* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1956).

¹⁴ John L. Puckett, *Foxfire Reconsidered: A Twenty-Year Experiment in Progressive Education* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

¹⁵ Wigginton was convicted on one count of sexual molestation in the early 1990s. He was charged with a felony and sentenced to prison in Florida. Most reasonable observers could agree that despite his pioneering early work as an educator, his choices did great damage to the Foxfire program, much of which lasts today. Oddly enough, few writers mention this aspect of Wigginton's involvement with Foxfire.

Georgia, Ritchie's childhood home place. Once in possession, the school invited local farm families to live on the campus grounds, which Ritchie had arranged to be subdivided into workable plots of farmland. In exchange for the use of the land and all the fruits of their labor, participating farmers and their families agreed to take part in agricultural training exercises, and, not insignificantly, to send their children to the Rabun Gap School. Like the contemporaneous Berry schools, the Rabun Gap School itself was self-sufficient. Of the Farm Family Program, as Ritchie's experiment came to be known, Puckett offered the following illustration:

In 1917 Ritchie instituted at Rabun Gap School the Farm Family Program, arguably the first example of a school-based economic development enterprise in the United States. Ritchie invited area tenant farmers to settle on the thirty or more farms that he had marked out on the school property. With the help of school employees, the farmers built their own houses, barns, and outbuildings; Ritchie provided the building materials, livestock, implements, and seed. The farmers were allowed to keep all proceeds from their work, and their children were educated, with no tuition charges, at Rabun Gap School...

Each family was allowed to remain at the school for a period of five to six years. Unfortunately, there is no extant data to indicate how many of these farm families were able to maintain independent farms after their tenure at Rabun Gap School had ended. Suffice it to say that Ritchie's institution, far ahead of its time, became a model and demonstration site for international rural development.¹⁶

Despite the lack of data to indicate the long-term successes of the Rabun Gap model, the school clearly served important educational functions for rural northeast Georgians in the early and middle decades of the twentieth century. Serving the dual functions of educating rural farm youth and providing the means and support to families to better manage their agricultural lifestyles, the Rabun Gap School bridged a wide variety of educational purposes, some of which are today echoed by modern advocates of place-based education. The longevity of the school seemed to suggest something more of an independent community development initiative. As other rural reform efforts waned in the 1920s, Rabun Gap gained momentum and thrived until the 1950s when larger economic forces transplanted industry for what was once an agricultural

¹⁶ Puckett, *Foxfire Reconsidered*, 12.

dependence. Regardless, whether a vestige of Country Life concerns or an independent solution to a local community problem, the Rabun Gap School (the Rabun Gap Nacoochee School after 1928) was, in and of itself, a powerful illustration for innovative educational reform. All of this, of course, set the stage for Wigginton's later work in the 1960s with the development of Foxfire.

Frustrated with a lack of intellectual engagement on the part of his English students, Wigginton looked to democratize and vitalize his instructional decision-making. Students, for example, voted on the nature and content of classroom bulletin boards. In a similar fashion, Wigginton asked students to collaborate and to develop a range of somewhat non-traditional classroom activities that might invigorate English teaching. As an aside, he was also a freshman geography teacher at Rabun Gap-Nacoochee, despite the fact that his work in English education has typically gained the most attention and, by all accounts, was the source of the early Foxfire initiative. While there has emerged since some indication that the notion of a literary magazine, and perhaps cultural journalism method generally, was to some degree a pet project of Wigginton's, most accounts suggest that the decision to undertake such a program was made with the wide support of students. The notion of a literary magazine apparently out-competed more than twenty other potential projects, and, once the broad direction was determined, the nature of the final product, including its substance and style, was, in fact, a collective effort. From Puckett's account of the "thematic focus of the magazine,...It would be a literary journal and would include, first, creative writing and art submitted by Rabun Gap students, students at other Georgia high schools, and practicing writers and poets; second, articles based on materials drawn from the local community, e.g., superstitions, home remedies, folk expressions, and weather signs."¹⁷ In 1967, students selected from a list of possible monikers the name *Foxfire* to

¹⁷ Puckett, *Foxfire Reconsidered*, 18.

represent the journal and distributed calls for proposals throughout the community and to area schools.

While the Rabun Gap-Nacoochee administration did not directly fund the program, as was the case for other school initiatives, including the yearbook, they offered their general support. This flexibility was another important characteristic of the circumstances under which Wigginton's experiments thrived. Although school leaders did require that Foxfire remain a supplement to the curriculum as opposed to an alternative, the atmosphere was generally supportive of the fledgling program. As much as they supported Foxfire, however indirect that support might have been, the community was arguably the greatest source of success and power.

Although the popularity of Foxfire left the Nacoochee School with Wigginton in 1978, eleven years after his start, the program did provide a much needed educational and recreational outlet for students for a short period. In part, Foxfire's early successes at Rabun Gap-Nacoochee might be a reflection of the relative utility of the learner-centric methods incorporated. Wigginton had not arrived at the historical connection between his reform efforts and those theorized and implemented decades earlier in the twentieth century. Nonetheless, although his efforts may have represented somewhat of an independent invention, one of necessity, in fact, Wigginton's move to turn some level of authority and ownership over to his students, to assume the co-equal role of learner, and the project- and inquiry-based nature of Foxfire, provide a reasonable cause to link the approach broadly to the work of progressive reformers before him, if not the effectiveness of each of those educational components. In addition, and of particular import given the present discussion of place-based educational antecedents, Wigginton's efforts highlight the potential significance of the local in educational contexts. Wigginton, and apparently somewhat incidentally, arrived at the conclusion, as many educators before him, that

the local experience was of inestimable pedagogical value. “Cleverly or unwittingly,” as Puckett wrote, “Eliot Wigginton had turned to advantage a liability of small rural schools and communities-their paucity of meaningful and engaging things to do. He had done this, in large part, by making rurality itself-its traditional practitioners, folk patterns, and survival arts-a source of adolescent activity and interest.”¹⁸ His response to the perceived formalism and community-focused nature of the Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School itself, Wigginton’s approach somehow worked to develop and tap into the interests and motivations of students through those things seemingly most familiar to them. Foxfire was a successful illustration of place-based pedagogy delivered some thirty years in advance of the formal phrase or movement.

For whatever was pedagogically successful in Foxfire, the context out of which the initiative grew deserves attention. Ironically, Puckett described a Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School that was simultaneously progressive and conservative, if such a combination could be imagined. With regard to discipline, at least for full-time, boarded students, the school was near prison-like. The Presbyterian mission of the school was of a particularly conservative sort, sometimes described as “Baptist-Presbyterianism”¹⁹ to highlight the evangelical, if not fundamentalist, Christian perspective which predominated there. At the very same time, Rabun Gap-Nacoochee was an innovation. To finance the school, supporters cleverly assumed both a private and public institutional status. The school was essentially public during the day and private after the school bells rang, thereby acquiring State funding for teachers, but maintaining a Christian, boarding school character. In the context of an experimental initiative such as Foxfire, it might be easy to imagine the lack of support that an organization interested primarily in a traditional educational program might have provided. Of course, in the case of Rabun Gap-Nacoochee, Wigginton

¹⁸ Puckett, *Foxfire Reconsidered*, 21.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

experienced little open resistance. Although he received virtually no financial support from the school, the academic freedom to even consider the non-traditional instructional strategies with which he experimented suggested that Rabun Gap offered Wigginton a relatively open and supportive professional environment. In every way, the climate of Rabun Gap-Nacoochee, not to mention the effect of that climate on students and teachers, revealed much about the introduction of Foxfire, both its cause and early success as an educational reform measure.

Not only did students develop an interest in the study of the peoples and places around them, the various cultural and ecological settings of which they themselves were a part, but Foxfire served the added function of developing a sense of community stewardship. The educational rewards seemed clear, though incidentally, the educational value of the program does receive a degree of critical attention below, but the citizenship function of Foxfire has not always been highlighted.

In addition to Wigginton's own charismatic zeal for the project and the character of the Rabun Gap-Nacoochee culture, both administrative and student, Foxfire was in very real sense an exercise in localized citizenship education; it was a community education program. Students involved in the project, and the same might have been said of adult participants as well, were serving the community and developing their own skills as citizens-in-training alongside any traditional academic pursuits associated with the initiative. In other words, the content and disciplinary understandings arguably delivered through engagement with the magazine's creation (e.g., editing, grammar, punctuation, style, etc.) were complimented nicely by the fact that the magazine was in some sense a preservation tool. There was little evidence, then or now, to suggest that Wigginton embarked on the Foxfire journey in the hopes of preserving what remained of Georgia's Appalachian lifeways. After all, it was relatively clear that his plan for

cultural journalism initially served as a solution to an important pedagogical problem. Yet other motivations, cultural preservation, in particular, certainly helped to ensure the longevity of a sometimes struggling educational reform program. The following passage from Puckett provided further context:

En route to Rabun County, Wigginton spent a few days in Washington, D.C., where he made several fortuitous acquaintances. At the Library of Congress he discussed *Foxfire* with James Dickey, the Library's poet-in-residence, who recommended Wigginton to the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines; a visit there resulted in a \$500 grant. Another propitious visit was with officials at the Smithsonian Institution, where Wigginton learned that "an enormous amount of collecting of music, folklore and crafts had been done in the Southern Appalachians, but very little in the north Georgia section where we were working. As such, we were a part of a long tradition with a definite role to play and a huge contribution to make – a contribution made even more significant by the fact that virtually none of the previous collecting had been done by people actually from the region – and absolutely none had been done by its teenagers. Most had been done by academic professionals from the outside."²⁰

The preservation function of *Foxfire* offered staying power in the sense that it provided both a larger mission and, not insignificantly, a potential source of much needed financial support. As Puckett noted, "...influential people in Washington, D.C., took a strong interest in the project, believing that it would prove to a replicable model in other culturally distinct areas of the nation."²¹ Not surprisingly, the increasingly high profile of the initiative ultimately amounted to funding and by 1969, by which time Wigginton returned to Rabun Gap-Nacoochee, *Foxfire* finally achieved financial stability. But to return to the initial claim regarding citizenship education, the transformed mission to capture the local knowledge of southern Appalachian culture also placed students in a unique role as important and contributing members of a community. All of these experiences were generated in a local, community context.

An important element of consideration within *Foxfire* surrounds the extent to which the rhetoric and goals of citizenship education translated into lifelong practice of *Foxfire* students. In

²⁰ Puckett, *Foxfire Reconsidered*, 24.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

an effort to assess the “life skills” function of the initiative, Puckett tracked down nearly seventy Foxfire students who had participated in the program over roughly a twenty-year period from 1967 to 1984. In his estimation, and the same remains true today, “The resulting information, woefully absent from previous studies, is indispensable for assessing *Foxfire’s* specific strengths and weaknesses as a curriculum reform at the classroom level.”²² The following questions served as initial guideposts in Puckett’s investigation:

- (1) What stands out as a memorable experience from your *Foxfire* days?
- (2) What skills related to *Foxfire* have proved useful in your adult life?
- (3) Do you think of yourself as a mountain person? How did *Foxfire* influence that identity?
- (4) How did *Foxfire* influence your views of the elderly? How do you think the elderly benefited from the *Foxfire* experience?
- (5) What changes would you have recommended in *Foxfire*?
- (6) Would you recommend that your children take *Foxfire*? Why or why not?²³

While Puckett was candid in his admission that the number of Foxfire participants that he managed to interview were hardly a statistical representation of the whole, he added nonetheless that the sixty-six persons in his study represented approximately 19% of all the students who had contributed to the Foxfire books. Representational issues notwithstanding, the findings of the study were profound with regard to the educational effectiveness of the Foxfire framework. In the first place, Puckett’s analysis revealed that based upon self-assessments of student learning, Foxfire participants strongly attached the development of “personal identity,” an “appreciation for the elderly,” “self-confidence,” and “interpersonal relations” to their involvement with the program. In the case of identity formation, in particular, nearly 75% of respondents viewed an association.²⁴ For Puckett, this feature of the program was especially important given the overall negative public perception of mountain peoples. The following passage was clarifying:

²² Puckett, *Foxfire Reconsidered*, 84.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

Certainly no subculture in America has continued to be more caricatured than Appalachia. The image of the moonshine-toting, illiterate, shiftless hillbilly is purveyed daily into the nation's consciousness by the likes of the "Beverly Hillbillies," "Snuffy Smith," and "L'il" Abner." James Dickey added a more sinister element to the stereotype in his novel *Deliverance*, in which he convincingly portrayed mountain people as bereft of civilization and morally depraved. The Warner Brothers film version of the book, released in 1972, projected even starker images of rural Appalachia as a hostile and backward region peopled by homosexual rapists and habitual practitioners of incest...²⁵

But perhaps worse than any misconception, was the potential for negative images to be interwoven into the identities of Appalachian youth. Further cause for alarm, Puckett reported, "There is evidence that the 'evil image' of Appalachia has been internalized by some young people in Rabun County."²⁶ And therein lay one what was perhaps among the most significant contributions of the Foxfire initiative in its heyday, the building-up of a positive mountain identity. The response below from Linda Page, a 1969 graduate of Foxfire, was telling:

Wig made us aware of our heritage and made us look at ourselves, our families, and our community. He made us aware of the importance of the life we have here in this area. We started understanding that we *did* speak differently from people in Atlanta and other cities. But we also became aware of the fact that the way we speak is a language. Just as northerners have an accent, we also have an accent. We became less inhibited when we were around people from other backgrounds – city slickers. [Our] understanding that there was nothing wrong with our language probably started with Foxfire.²⁷

Puckett's work with other Foxfire graduates revealed similar affection for the program's power to promote a positive image of Appalachian lifeways and few self-assessments diverged from that general conclusion.

Educational historians might be well positioned to make the claim that Foxfire was a success, an overwhelming success, in fact, where the learning outcomes were framed as education for effective living. In that regard, modern observers would be hard pressed not to recognize certain citizenship educational qualities within the Foxfire framework as practiced

²⁵ Puckett, *Foxfire Reconsidered*, 86.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

historically in northeast Georgia. On the other hand, where the learning goals were framed around more traditional educational ideals, content and disciplinary knowledge, for instance, a different appraisal of the program may have emerged. In addition to citizenship qualities, Puckett also evaluated the perceived educational value of Foxfire within in the domain of “Cognitive/Intellectual Skills.”²⁸ The results were considerably less positive. Especially damning it seemed was the fact that only 42% of respondents attached to their involvement with Foxfire the ability to write effectively. This finding was consistent with Puckett’s critique regarding the relative inefficiency of the practice of Foxfire as a writing curriculum. Nonetheless, while only a minority of participants linked their involvement in the program to their writing skills, and even fewer to their speaking skills, there were certainly exceptions to that general trend. Jan Brown’s appraisal, a graduate of the program from 1969, provided one illustration. She wrote:

Somehow I learned to write more creatively as a result of Foxfire. I think it was a result of the whole experience. I just really have a strong feeling that I write so much better and express myself so much better because of Foxfire. And I don’t think I can put my finger on it. It was the culmination of all I did in Foxfire, having to pick out a word or phrase that would catch the reader’s eye, listening to a tape you have to edit to make it readable, observing the environment, learning how to connect paragraphs and how get from one paragraph to another and make the article flow...I think all of these things combined to help me be a better communicator.²⁹

In sum, the extent to which Foxfire promoted disciplinary learning in students was mixed based on the self-assessments of students who had participated in Puckett’s study. Just as some program graduates failed to develop certain citizenship qualities in light of positive experiences of the large majority of their peers, other students found great worth in Foxfire’s ability to reinforce writing proficiency skills despite trends to the contrary. Perhaps most importantly in the context of a review of historical precedents in place-based education is the ambiguity itself; that is, while the cultural journalistic approach represented in Foxfire may have provided

²⁸ Puckett, *Foxfire Reconsidered*, 93.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

educational benefits to students in some contexts, the efficacy of the program was inconsistent at best.

In addition to the types of learning that Foxfire promoted, Puckett's critical review of the program also revealed much about the institutional dynamic in which the initiative operated, part of which has been highlighted above. After the Rabun Gap phase of Foxfire was completed, Wigginton moved the program to nearby Rabun County High School in 1977. There, and much to the chagrin of a number of faculty, strong feelings of resentment toward the program began to take shape. Not unlike the Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School, Puckett described the school culture of Rabun County as somewhat strict, all the more so in the early 1980s when the school board brought on a "law and order"³⁰ style principal to restore discipline to what some observers perceived as an increasingly chaotic campus environment. Foxfire had traditionally operated somewhat independently from the rest of the school, both its students and faculty. Little changed with the addition of the new principal, including the county's tendency to overlook the teacher qualifications of Foxfire faculty. Coupled with suspicions regarding the academic utility of the initiative, a good deal of resentment regarding the relative equity of treatment surfaced by the mid 1980s. Puckett offered the following account:

By December 1984, Foxfire's dearth of properly accredited staff teachers had become a minor *cause célèbre* for the high school. Ostensibly, the administration has a legitimate complaint against the non-certified Foxfire staff. Reports had to be filed with accrediting agencies, and Foxfire's ambiguous status might threaten the school's certification. The administrator responsible for completing these forms stated he had not listed Foxfire staff members, but he had misgivings about the omissions: "It seems to me to be a violation of state standards. It's really not right. [My] recommendation would be for these people to get off their butts and get a certificate."³¹

The jealousies, the freedoms provided to Foxfire students to take part in program activities during school hours, the issues surrounding accreditation, and the perceived (mis)match between

³⁰ Puckett, *Foxfire Reconsidered*, 94.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 102.

Foxfire and the traditional curriculum all pointed to potentially valuable lessons for modern day place-based practitioners. In the most general sense, Foxfire's implementation at Rabun County High School, not to mention comparisons that might be made between Rabun County and Rabun Gap-Nacoochee, offered a compelling case illustrative of the viability of Foxfire-like approaches in formalized, public school settings. Yet again, as indicated above, the rare mention of Foxfire in the place-based educational literature to date has been characteristically uncritical, not to mention brief. This is particularly unfortunate given the wealth of information available, a rarity to be sure.

Another significant dimension of the Foxfire story stems from the all-important relationship between the program and the surrounding Rabun County, GA community. As is the case generally with community education programs, the goals of Foxfire were not limited to the educational growth of students alone. Community improvement, economic or otherwise, was also a cardinal objective of the initiative. Yet the relationship between Foxfire and the people of Rabun County was not uncomplicated. While Puckett ultimately concluded that "The evidence...suggests that Foxfire has proved to be a boon, rather than a boondoggle, to the communities with which it has long been associated,"³² he offered a portrait of community interaction that deserves attention.

As indicated above, a portion of the educational mission of Foxfire was citizenship education. In part, that function was served through the preservation of mountain heritage and the skills that Wigginton hoped students might obtain through the magazine work. In addition to those two important missions, Foxfire also endeavored to engage students directly in the consideration of local issues, social, economic, and political. One of the central concerns of Rabun County during the Foxfire era was economic growth. More specifically, Foxfire students

³² Puckett, *Foxfire Reconsidered*, 109.

at one stage embarked on first-hand community assessments in order to determine best paths forward in the general context of economic development. The passage below was illustrative of the character of student involvement:

As a first step in learning about change, each student in the new class selected a neighboring town that had experienced a recent growth spurt or period of social dislocation, e.g, Helen, Georgia, which had transformed itself from virtually a ghost town into a replica Alpine Village, with over a hundred tourist shops and restaurants, a tawdry display of pseudo-Bavarian and Swiss architectural styles. The purpose of these investigations, typically interviews with mayors and other community officials, was to collect data and slides to present at a meeting for the people of Mountain City in an effort to get them involved in making decisions about the kinds of changes they wanted and did not want in their town. The students conducted a door-to-door campaign to get Mountain City's 450 residents out to the event.³³

In Wigginton's assessment of the exercise, the project culminated in success and did much to foster direct improvements in the Mountain City community, not to mention provide valuable educational experiences for student participants. Wigginton recalled of the meetings that followed the student investigations:

...Local people pulled themselves together then, and the first major activity they sponsored in association with the kids was a major town-wide cleanup where 125 people turned out, scoured the town, [and] hauled numerous truck loads of garbage to the dump. Everybody turned out and mowed their lawns and trimmed their trees, and if they had old stuff they had been meaning to throw away for years but had never done it, they could haul it out to the side of [the] road, and when the crews came through, they'd grab it and throw it in the trucks...At then at the end we had a big festival, a community celebration. We had a square dance and a greased pole climb; we had kids spitting watermelon seeds, and a tobacco-spitting contest...A great experience.³⁴

Although it may not have been immediately clear how a tobacco-spitting contest improved a community, the types of outcomes that Wigginton highlighted above were certainly a net positive for Mountain City, Georgia, including not only a sharper sense of shared purpose, but also collective understandings regarding then important issues of city zoning, economic development, and escalating land prices. Much of the discussion also surrounded the

³³ Puckett, *Foxfire Reconsidered*, 113.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

development of tourist sites and shops associated with the Foxfire program itself and the potential effects, positive and negative, that such plans might pose for the municipality and its citizens. Yet despite what appeared to be initial successes, Wigginton's stated goals of "empowering"³⁵ students and providing an outline for the expansion of Foxfire as a local industry, much of the student-led involvement dwindled after the initial experiment with a community issues class at Rabun County High School. It was, as Puckett noted, a "'one-shot' effort."³⁶

Somewhat more successful was the work of Foxfire to promote the economic development of Mountain City. Wigginton's plans to reinvent Foxfire as a "community development corporation," an entity whose mission would have been to "provide a financial umbrella [under which] community-owned businesses would originate,"³⁷ went largely unrealized. Nonetheless, the organization's presence undoubtedly brought some measure of economic life to the area. By that measure, both educationally and economically, Foxfire was a success.

Of course, for at least a few critics, Foxfire did not do enough to promote the improvement of the communities that made the program possible. Herbert Kohl, an educational critic of note, expressed his own discontent with the organization in a 1979 letter to Foxfire. In short, Kohl was of the belief that the royalties derived from the sale of Foxfire merchandise, including its magazine subscriptions and book revenues, should be delivered directly to those participants whose stories provided the foundations for the initiative's many successes. It seemed that Wigginton and colleagues could not win. The letter read:

³⁵ Puckett, *Foxfire Reconsidered*, 113.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 115.

Who get the financial benefits from the books? It is usual to pay people to use their material, to publish their words and their writing. Given that the Foxfire Books are not scholarly works that appeal to academic audiences but well-packaged trade products, it seems that the people represented in the books should get the benefit. It is sensible for Foxfire to keep enough of the money to keep the project going, but when all the money goes into the land, staff salaries, and other development projects, it seems to be a case of exploitation. Kenny Runion does not seem any richer for being known by several million people. I believe that the Foxfire Board has a moral responsibility to recommend that Foxfire give a fair and retroactive share of the royalties to people who appeared in the books and to make sure that they get a share in of future work.³⁸

As Puckett's investigation of Kohl's exploitation claims revealed, however, the benefits to the people of Mountain City and beyond went well beyond direct financial contributions. The books and magazines offered free advertising, an outlet for publications not connected to Foxfire, and the manner in which students and faculty assisted elderly participants was considerable. To the latter point, Puckett added, "There is persuasive evidence that the elders who made such a strong and favorable impression on the Foxfire youngsters have also benefitted from these relationships."³⁹ In the form of labor, gifts, and perhaps most importantly, companionship, accounts of Foxfire experiences tended to suggest strongly that community members found clear advantage in their important work with the initiative and its student organizers. Yet Kohl's critique remained. With issues of equity in mind, all of this may have suggested something significant regarding the outcomes of community educational pursuits like Foxfire. In short, and without diminishing the importance of the economic development goals shared by Wigginton and others, Foxfire also demonstrated that the community improvement function of the initiative and others like it need not be regarded in monetary terms alone. Puckett intimated as much in his critique of Kohl where he suggested that Kohl's "...tautology leaves no room for the non-pecuniary benefits that may have accrued..."⁴⁰ Among the other services provided to the

³⁸ Puckett, *Foxfire Reconsidered*, 123.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

community, a number of local contributors to the program found great value in the opportunity to work toward the preservation of mountain lifeways. As longtime contributor and Rabun County local, Buck Carver, viewed it: “They don’t deserve no pay. They’re helping to preserve a way of life that’s vanishing fast. I feel I’m getting double pay by preserving our old-time methods. I think that’s the way the others feel. He [Wigginton] has published nothing that hurt us – especially the moonshining. It don’t throw no black mark on us at all. I think it made more people understand why we done it. It was necessary.”⁴¹ Puckett’s rare evaluation of local perceptions of Foxfire provided numerous other similar illustrations. Contrary to Kohl’s criticisms, then, monetary compensation was generally not something that locals perceived necessary, though many benefitted indirectly in economic ways nonetheless. Of course, all of this positions Foxfire as an historical exemplar in place-based education, one committed to the local, the learner, and community responsiveness.

African American Experiences

Whereas the Berry experiment, the Nacoochee School, and Foxfire served almost exclusively white rural populations, a reflection of the demographic make-up of Georgia’s Appalachian foothills, this feature was surely incidental. A broader examination of other available examples better represents the wide applicability of community education across a diversity of populations. Of particular note, are several historical illustrations from the American South, many of which have demonstrated further the potential utility of a localized, context-specific approach to teaching and learning. Given the deep histories of the Penn School in South Carolina, and the Tuskegee Institute of Alabama,⁴² these programs and their community development goals receive detailed attention below, specifically as they represented precursors to

⁴¹ Puckett, *Foxfire Reconsidered*, 128.

⁴² Tuskegee was closely related to another significant educational initiative in Virginia, the Hampton Institute, and casual reference to the connections between the two are indicated elsewhere in the discussion.

a place-based educational approach. While far from exhaustive of the range of programs available across the country, the initiatives marked an important chapter in the history of place-based theory and practice.

The Penn School. Established in 1862 on St. Helena Island, South Carolina and in operation until the late 1940s, the Penn school represented another early illustration of what was essentially a place-based model of practice, one that has remained unstudied. In his introductory remarks to *School Acres*,⁴³ an internally produced history of the Penn School published in 1930, Paul Kellogg offered a description of the school's mission. He noted:

The experience of Penn in education "of the people, by the people, for the people" not only plays luminously on the needs of rural districts the country over, but upon a dilemma confronting our cities. Miss Cooley reveals how the New England school of the "three R's" with its academic ramifications fell short when it came to training-for-life under the changing conditions of the rural South. She sets forth a strategy and spirit of the two revolutions at Penn School- how the life of the farms was brought into the classrooms, and the how through the school acres and other extramural activities the process was reversed and the educational impulse was spread to the ends of the island.⁴⁴

From its democratic approach to building the community through the school to the explicit effort to bring the life experiences of students into the classroom, the description that Kellogg provided points to the Penn School's place-based educational outlook, both its purposes and its methods.

Laura M. Towne, founder of the Penn School, embarked on her experiment with an understanding that a traditional, perhaps detached, educational system was not meeting the needs of local students and local communities. As Rossa Cooley, once principal of the Penn School, noted: "...[T]he limitations of a purely academic education became etched deeply in the life of the island. They are the same limitations that are to be found, repeated over and over again, in the average Negro school in the rural South. They are the same limitations which mark the general run of rural schools the country over; the same limitations which mark much of the work

⁴³ Rossa Cooley, *School Acres: An Adventure in Rural Education* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, xiv.

of the mission schools in foreign lands which have taken over too faithfully the models of our traditional schooling; the same limitations which in various guises have confronted elementary and high schools and colleges everywhere.”⁴⁵ Clearly critical of educational waste, The Penn School intended to offer an alternative suited specifically to the needs of the community and students it served. Recognition of the lived experiences of students was an integral part of the school’s foundational mission. As Cooley phrased it, the Penn School brought “the school to the farms, and making this oldest of Negro schools in a sense the newest – an all-island school, an all-the-year-round school, merging school and community into a common adventure.”⁴⁶ The localized, student-centered approach, one that also served to respond directly to community needs and problems was evidence of a place-based approach to teaching and learning, one in operation long before the modern coining of the phrase.

Founders created the Penn School to serve the local community, a homogenously African-American one, but Cooley's appraisal of the approach at Sea Islands, suggested a belief in the transferability of the locally-focused model. She regarded work at Penn as an innovation with potentially wide appeal. Reflecting on the school's past, Cooley remarked: “Nor was this peculiar to the race. How many white children in America went through our public schools during these same decades with little consideration of how their education might fit them for the life they must fit into? And all over the world in the mission fields (with noteworthy exceptions), we can see the same tendency – an education that is plastered on, regardless of the life and the needs of the people.”⁴⁷ The lament expressed over an education that was “plastered on” lent further credence to a wider appreciation and application of an educational approach that was home-grown. Cooley's claim that the old method of education was one that favored “isolated

⁴⁵ Cooley, *School Acres*, 4.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 5

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

facts learned not because they fitted into life but because they fitted into the examinations”⁴⁸ was perhaps even more telling, not to mention oddly familiar to modern readers.

As were her remarks on the school's mission and educational approach, Cooley's descriptions of Penn students and their work were clarifying. In no small part, the Penn School curriculum was framed through agriculture, specifically through the school's miniature farms. As Cooley explained, “arithmetic and agriculture played into each other's hands.”⁴⁹ She continued: “Each pupil was given a small plot of land [and later] we put a whole group on another acre of old cotton land to raise corn...the land rented from the school; and the cost of the seeds, fertilizer, time of "man and mule," and the net returns of the crop made a computation worthwhile...New enthusiasm was thus kindled for the next year's work.”⁵⁰ In sum, the familiar, first-hand experiences offered at Penn served to vitalize and make purposeful traditional academic work.

Preserving the local history of the Sea Islands was another task taken up by Penn students. The Folklore Society, for instance, held “responsibility for seeing to it that these songs of people are preserved in the midst of a faster life.”⁵¹ Although Cooley’s representations were in some ways incomplete, the attention to local history seemed clear enough and suggested a social studies education that was at least partially locally-based and experiential.

The Penn model and its curriculum represented an important historical antecedent of place-based education. The programs offered there were highly localized and based upon the lived experiences of learners. By the same token, Penn worked to serve direct community improvement functions in that it served marginalized Sea Islanders and promoted wise use of

⁴⁸ Cooley, *School Acres*, 36.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

agricultural resources. Despite rather solid connections, the Penn School has not appeared in the existing literature on place-based education. But the gap runs deeper still. In addition to the community education model at Penn, similar independent experiments at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama deserve attention as well.

Tuskegee Normal & Industrial Institute. Tuskegee was an outgrowth of the Hampton Institute in Virginia. As Robert R. Moton described it, the relationship was much like that “...existing between a son and the father who watched the growth and development of his child through the formative transition periods of his youth.”⁵² The first president of the Tuskegee Institute, Booker T. Washington, had received his education from Hampton and it was through those experiences, not to mention the assistance of Hampton supporters, that he later developed the plans for the industrial school in Alabama. Despite similarities, Moton reported, “The conditions surrounding the two schools have necessitated certain differences in their evolution. He explained those differences further:

The personnel of the two institutions is different. Hampton has always been governed by white people, and its teachers have come from the best families of the North. Tuskegee was founded by a Negro, and its teachers and officers have come the best types of the American Negro and from the best schools opened to them. Hampton deals with a different class of student material, including the Indian, who is almost as different in traits and characteristics from the Negro as he is in feature and origin...

This is not reflection upon either school, for each is unique and complete in its way, and any marked ethnic change in the management of either would be unfortunate. Hampton is a magnificent illustration of Anglo-Saxon ideas in modern education. Tuskegee, on the other hand, is the best demonstration of Negro achievement along distinctly altruistic lines...⁵³

Embedded within the passage was the recognition of the fact that at each institution there was a concerted effort to develop educational plans tailor-made for the students in question. Similar in approach, particularly with regard to the experiential nature of learning at both institutions,

⁵² Robert R. Moton, “Hampton Institutes Relation to Tuskegee,” in *Tuskegee and Its People: Their Ideals and Achievements*, ed. Booker T. Washington (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1905), 88.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

Tuskegee was not simply a copy of the Hampton program. As Hampton founder General Samuel Chapman Armstrong noted on a visit to Tuskegee, “It is the Hampton Idea adapted and worked into a most sensible and efficient application to the needs of the Alabama Negroes.”⁵⁴ The discussion below highlights the place-based dimensions argued to exist at Tuskegee although it is likely that the Hampton precursor deserves attention as well.

Published in 1905, *Tuskegee and Its People* offered a retrospective appraisal of the educational work conducted at the famed Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute. Since in its initial founding on July 4th, 1881 until the time of writing, Booker T. Washington, editor and school president from 1881 to 1915, reported that more than 700 students graduated from the Institute. a fraction of the nearly 6,000 students estimated to have participated in one form or another during the same period, Tuskegee represented an African American educational experiment that lives on today as Tuskegee University. More relevant for the present discussion, many of the educational ideals and practices of Tuskegee share remarkably close ties to modern experiments in place-based pedagogy. With that in mind, Tuskegee arguably represents an early precursor to place-based educational theory and practice, one of a handful of similar and uniquely African American examples. Like other curricular precursors, modern place-based educators have all but ignored the valuable educational experiences of Tuskegee.

The mission of the Tuskegee Institute was to provide educational experiences to African American students that might offer direct routes to self-sufficiency through economic prosperity. As Washington noted of the Institute’s mission, “The school has sought from the very beginning to make itself of practical value to the Negro people and to the South as well.”⁵⁵ “It has taught those industries that are of the South,” he added, “the occupations in which our men and women

⁵⁴ Moton, “Hampton Institutes Relation,” 97.

⁵⁵ Booker T. Washington, ed. *Tuskegee and Its People: Their Ideals and Achievements* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1905) , vi.

find most ready employment, and unflinchingly has refused abandon its course...”⁵⁶ Thus the first hint of the localized, or regionalized, work conducted at Tuskegee, a school reflective of the students and local economies served. Though Washington and his efforts at Tuskegee received wide support, the practical dimension drew strong criticism from a number of contemporary educators. Of particular note, W.E.B Dubois, a Massachusetts native and Harvard scholar, found Washington’s plan to be wholly uncritical of the social challenges faced by black Americans at the turn of the twentieth century. Though he was an early supporter, Dubois ultimately rejected the gradualism that Washington promoted. Described by Urban and Wagoner as “accommodation” versus “vigorous resistance,” Washington and Dubois clearly adopted distinct, and perhaps incompatible, reform methodologies.⁵⁷ While the Institute’s mission has sometimes been criticized, by both contemporary and modern observers alike, Washington maintained his advocacy. “The public, or at least part of it,” he wrote, “somewhat gratuitously, had the conclusion that Tuskegee Institute is a ‘servant training school,’ or an employment agency. That is a mistaken idea.”⁵⁸ Rather than simply train African American men and women for service, Washington argued that the intent of Tuskegee was to address one aspect perceived to be of particular importance in the lives of the students, namely economic liberty. With that in mind, Tuskegee maintained a community education function as it worked toward the identification and solution of problems experienced by those it served. Despite that community focus, however, Dubois and others insisted that the organization of practice at Tuskegee made “technical skill the object of education.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Washington, *Tuskegee and Its People*, vi.

⁵⁷ Wayne J. Urban & Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr. *American Education: A History* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2004), 151-153.

⁵⁸ Washington, *Tuskegee and Its People*, vii.

⁵⁹ W.E.B. Dubois, “The Talented Tenth,” As cited in Urban and Wagoner. *American Education*, 152.

In his review of successes and accomplishments at Tuskegee, Emmett J. Scott worked to debunk that popular notion that the Institute did little to address the fundamental inequities surrounding race in America, a critique frequently leveled by Dubois and other detractors. “So much has been said about Tuskegee Institute as a training-school in which to prepare young colored men and women for earning a living in the world of trade and business,” he noted, “that the ideals and spirit behind all this training are to a very large extent lost sight of.”⁶⁰ At the core of Tuskegee’s mission, Scott went on to remark, was the uplift of black men and women. To say it another way, Scott regarded Tuskegee as a community educational program geared fundamentally toward racial equity in America, though perhaps not through direct social critique as Dubois and others may have preferred. Economic empowerment was clearly central to that purpose, but, again, there was ample evidence to suggest that the institution’s organizers were interested in more than economic improvement alone. “Pride of race,” Scott added, “though not so written in the course of study, is as much a part of Tuskegee’s work as agriculture, brick-making, millinery, or any other trade, and quite as important.”⁶¹ “Unless the young man who goes away from Tuskegee as blacksmith, carpenter, printer, or as other mechanic is something more than these,” he continued elsewhere, “he has been incapable of perceiving and taking in the ideals that go with these accomplishments.”⁶² Tuskegee, through its founder and principal Washington, was established to do more than simply train Southern black men and women for a living, though critiques of gradualism were perhaps warranted.⁶³ All controversies aside, what

⁶⁰ Emmett J. Scott, “Present Achievements,” in *Tuskegee and Its People: Their Ideals and Achievements*, ed. Booker T. Washington (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1905), 19.

⁶¹ Scott, “Present Achievements,” 23.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 33.

⁶³ The purpose in working through the philosophical differences surrounding Tuskegee and its critics is simply to highlight opposition and the contemporary responses to those critiques.

remains most important for the present study was the localized, community-based nature of the work conducted at Tuskegee.

In the context of the present discussion of historical precedents in place-based education, equally important as were the institution's community improvement goals were the methods incorporated to achieve them. In short, Tuskegee's tradition of manual training in industry, home economics, and agriculture was in many ways arranged around what might be termed by modern observers as essentially place-based in that it was experiential and representative of local context.

Tuskegee was geared toward the improvement of a particular community, not merely the education of individual students. The passage below, from Roscoe C. Bruce, Director of the Academic Department at Tuskegee, was illustrative:

Does the value of Tuskegee lie in the fact that the school equips for happy lives merely as many persons as are subject to immediate play of its influences: that its circle of efficiency includes only as many as are enrolled in its courses? To that question every teacher in the school would give an emphatic, a decisive, No! The real value of the school lies in the service rendered to the people of the communities where our young folks go and live and labor. Now, work in wood and iron, however, assiduously prosecuted, never erected in any human being's heart a passion for social service; a finer material must be used, a material finer than gold. And so the plan and deeper intent of Tuskegee Institute are incapable of realization without the incentives supplied by history and literature.⁶⁴

If the passage was any indication, the mission of Tuskegee consisted of more than the education and training of the individual alone. The larger purpose of the school was to build within graduates the desire and capacity to make positive change within the communities of which they were a part. In this way, the Tuskegee example as situated within the context of a history of place-based pedagogy, challenged in some ways the common conception of community. In the first place, while not directed toward the improvement of a single, small community, as has so often been the case in localized educational initiatives, it was perhaps nonetheless the case that the Southern black experience that informed the work at Tuskegee represented some degree of

⁶⁴ Scott, "Present Achievements," 60.

cultural, social, and historical homogeneity, even if geographical boundaries were expansive. Undoubtedly, such an appraisal overlooks the diversity represented in the students who attended and graduated from Tuskegee over the years. Many of the students who attended Tuskegee were likely from locales outside the South and even a Southern, black experience would be difficult, then or now, to define neatly. At the same time, however, it seems reasonable to suggest that the Southern black experience and the challenges that African American communities faced in the South in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, were somewhat consistent from one locale to the next. With that in mind, although Tuskegee did not address only those issues and circumstances relevant to the immediate surrounds of Tuskegee, Alabama, the institution's commitments and mission were nonetheless geared toward the needs of a particular and unique community, even if that community was not geographically *localized* in the traditional sense of the word. A challenge in some sense to the common notion of community, Tuskegee's community educational format provided an interesting and early example of a place-based educational program. The mode of instruction adopted at Tuskegee offered further support for the claim.

Bruce went on to question further the purposes of education at Tuskegee where he asked, "If a clear title to forty acres and a mule represents the extreme upper limit of a black man's ambition, why call him a man?"⁶⁵ His query revealed much about the goals and approach of the Tuskegee program. At the same time that Bruce reinforced the notion that "social advance must be economic," he reiterated the fact that the institution was not in the business of graduating "hoe-hands or plowboys."⁶⁶ Going further, Bruce revealed the relationship perceived to exist between agricultural training and academic work. "To be sure," he wrote, "a flourishing garden

⁶⁵ Scott, "Present Achievements," 59.

⁶⁶ Roscoe C. Bruce, "The Academic Aims," in *Tuskegee and Its People: Their Ideals and Achievements*, ed. Booker T. Washington (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1905), 55; 57.

may be made and managed by bright-eyed tots just out of the kindergarten, but how can commercial fertilizers be carefully analyzed by a boy who has made no study of general chemistry?"⁶⁷ From Bruce's appraisal, the preference at Tuskegee was for an experiential form of teaching and learning, one in which students engaged directly in work that was often occupational, but which simultaneously highlighted the intellectual work underlying each activity. Bruce explained:

And so the successful teaching of the industries demands no mean amount of academic preparation. In this lies the technical utility of Tuskegee's Academic Department.

Then, too, a public service has been rendered by Hampton and Tuskegee in showing that industrial training – the system in which the student learns by doing and is paid for the commodities he produces – may be so managed as to educate. Among the excellences of industrial training, I would state that the severe commercial test in which sentiment plays no part is applied as consistently to student labor as is the force of gravitation to a falling body. Here we must keep in mind the unavoidably concrete nature of the product, whether satisfactory or not; the discipline such training affords in organized endeavor; the stimulus it offers to all the virtues of a drudgery which, though it repel an unusually ardent and sensitive temperament, yet wears a precious jewel in its head; and an exceptionally keen sense of responsibility, since on occasion large amounts of money and the esteem of the school at large and the lives of a student's fellows depend upon his circumspection and skill. Such training educates.⁶⁸

In addition to highlighting connections to another important educational institution, Virginia's Hampton Institute, Bruce hinted at a plan for learning built around first-hand experience and meaningful participation in the school community. Educational in and of itself, Tuskegee did not neglect the traditional academic curriculum. Bruce's descriptions of mathematics instruction at Tuskegee further clarified the experiential nature of at least certain dimensions of learning. He wrote: "Despite a much smaller time-allotment, our students, roughly speaking, keep pace with northern students because they are older and somewhat more serious, because the course is shortened by the elimination of uselessly perplexing topics in arithmetic like compound

⁶⁷ Bruce, "The Academic Aims," 57.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

proportion and cube root, but chiefly because the utility of mathematics is made vivid, and vigorous interest aroused by its immediate application in class-room and shop to problems arising in industries. Our students are not stuffed like sausages with rules and definitions, mathematical or other; they ascend to general principles through the analysis of concrete cases.”⁶⁹ Bruce offered little more to clarify the mode of mathematics instruction at Tuskegee, but even his brief description, coupled with others, suggested an effort to move beyond the more traditional, textbook-based approach and towards an alternative to academic formalism whereby mathematics was made relevant to the lives of students and the collective work ongoing at the institute.

Though perhaps to a lesser extent, English instruction, too, was framed around the lived experiences of learners. “...[A]n unusually large amount of written composition is insisted upon,” Bruce revealed, “the compositions being used not merely to discipline the student in chaste feeling, consecutive thinking, and efficient expression, but also to sharpen his powers of observation and stimulate him to pick out his daily experience the elements that are significant.”⁷⁰ Although Bruce’s portrait suggested a certain attention to the lived experiences of the Tuskegee student, an approach that was consistent with the package of traits recognized in this discussion as characteristically place-based, it was nonetheless the case that other elements of English instruction at Tuskegee, such as the curricular attention to Robinson Crusoe, Ivanhoe, or Rip Van Winkle, were arguably inconsistent with a localized, community-specific form of teaching and learning. While there were elements of what would today be regarded by observers as a place-based educational format recognizable in the work conducted at Tuskegee, such connections did not appear to be pure or all-encompassing.

⁶⁹ Bruce, “The Academic Aims,” 64-65.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

Additional insight into the work that took place at Tuskegee in the early decades of its formation could be found in the course catalogues produced by the school. There again, observers found evidence of an attention to the local surroundings. In a Junior-level course in geography, for instance, the bulletin indicated, however briefly, that the “Study of immediate vicinity”⁷¹ was a central component of the work under that heading. Elsewhere, in a description of a biology course, the catalogue noted that “Great pains is taken to lead the student to original and accurate observation...”⁷² What each of those brief descriptions revealed was that the Tuskegee plan operated to put learners into touch with the immediate surrounds of the school in an educational context. Written in 1895, the Tuskegee plan was consistent with the contemporary developments in nature study and geography education discussed in earlier chapters. Of course, in addition to traditional academic work in the sciences and geography, the agricultural and industrial work at Tuskegee was also thoroughly experiential and localized, not unlike that at the Penn and Berry schools. Whether through “object lessons” on one of several school farms, or through the carpentry repair department whereby students found educational opportunities in performing “...all the repair work on the grounds,”⁷³ or in the cooking courses where “All the bread and desserts for the teachers’ tables are cooked...,” the emphasis at Tuskegee was on learning through the experience contributing to the maintenance of the school plant and community. Learning in Tuskegee, Alabama was vitalized by the need and opportunity to create and manage a working school community. Like other similar models, the Institute was self-maintaining, and this feature provided real educational experiences for a community of learners. To date, Tuskegee has been all but ignored in the contemporary place-based educational literature, despite what appears to be an exemplar in practice.

⁷¹ *Tuskegee Bulletin*, 1895 (37), Tuskegee University Archives.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 42.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 45.

Summary. As noted at the outset of the discussion, the examples highlighted above were not openly affiliated with larger educational movements. The Penn School was clearly a vestige of post-Civil War Reconstruction, and the same might be said of Hampton and Tuskegee, yet there was no readily identifiable educational movement to which one might attach any of those initiatives. Similarly, while work at Berry seems to have been informed by the Country Life Movement, nature study education, and perhaps even Progressive Era reforms in geography education, it arose independently through Martha Berry's efforts to solve a social and educational problem at the local level. Of course, the same was true of Foxfire. Suffice to say, the initiatives highlighted above grew from the immediate, on-the-ground circumstances that challenged students and teachers in each locale. That each initiative also adopted similar localized strategies was also significant. In addition to each of the unaffiliated community educational illustration, place-based historical precedents all, there were educational developments under the formal phrase "community education" that sprung up in the 1950s and 60s. Those developments are considered in greater detail below.

Community Education as a Named Approach

Despite their independence, each of the illustrations noted above observers could term appropriately as "community educational programs" given their responsiveness to community change and improvement. Interestingly enough, beginning in the 1950s, an educational movement named explicitly as *community education* began to take shape, with both domestic and international educational and development goals. The community education movement shared some similarities with the localized approaches adopted and discussed by modern place-based educators and thus deserves attention.

Context for Community Education. The subject of the 1959 *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*,⁷⁴ community education gained special attention as both a domestic, but particularly international educational movement. Unlikely the first moment where the title had been adopted, C.O. Arndt addressed the nature of the debate that led to the 1959 *Yearbook* heading. He wrote:

The yearbook committee tentatively adopted the title “Fundamental Education,” using the term in the sense in which it was originally fashioned and subsequently developed by UNESCO. Fundamental education was understood to mean a kind of minimum and general education which was designed to help underdeveloped populations understand the problems of their immediate environments and their rights and duties as citizens. The translation of such concepts into appropriate community improvements was regarded as a further essential element of the concept.

As writing progressed, however, it became apparent that the title “Fundamental Education” is not sufficiently comprehensive. After careful study, it was decided to use as the title for the yearbook *Community Education: Principles and Practices from World-wide Experience...*⁷⁵

It was not clear from the passage that the phrase community education was entirely new, yet the use of the heading as the theme for the 1959 *Yearbook* was perhaps suggestive of the relative significance of the underlying educational motivation at the time of writing. In other words, it seemed that community education was indeed constitutive of an educational trend, or as phrased here, a movement. While the heading connoted domestic educational practices as well, and certainly a broad history of community education would have included such developments as the Country Life Movement or several of the reform initiatives described in this current chapter, much of the later 1950s concern was international. More specifically, the import of community education, which Arndt suggested dealt fundamentally with “the development of attitudes and abilities” toward social and economic change, was felt most by those scholars, professionals, and

⁷⁴ Nelson B. Henry, ed., “Community Education: Principles and Practices from World-Wide Experiences,” Part I. *The Fifty-Eighth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).

⁷⁵ C. O. Arndt, “Introduction,” Part I. *The Fifty-Eighth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), xiii.

stakeholders in international development contexts. Historically, community education arose within the general context of decolonization and post-war reconstruction. Newly independent states and those crushed during World War II faced considerable development challenges. Not surprisingly, education was one mechanism through which that development might be organized.⁷⁶

Willard W. Beatty's assessment of the "Nature and Purpose of Community Education" provided a useful background for the movement. In short, the purpose of community education was to affect change, through education, in developing parts of the world in such a way as to create a stronger foundation for some type of global community. The essential issue was economic development and Beatty reported "...that all the evidence indicates that the wealthy are becoming wealthier while the poorer areas are becoming relatively poorer."⁷⁷ "In the richer countries," he continued, "there has been an increasing trend toward equality of opportunity; on the other hand, most of the poorer countries have preserved as great internal inequalities among individuals, classes, and regions as there ever have been."⁷⁸ Attendant to poverty, Beatty recognized, were issues of malnutrition, disease, exploitation, and, of course, illiteracy. But while these conditions were certainly not new global experiences, the relative disparity in development had prompted calls to address the issue more directly. "Until fairly recently," Beatty wrote, "such conditions were accepted by many of the victims as part of their lot in life. 'They know their place,' whether they were cockneys on the streets of London, fellahin in the valley of the Nile, peons on a Latin-America finca, or sharecroppers in the American South. The

⁷⁶ Within the notion and practice of community education, particularly within the post-war, international context, ran streams of imperialism to which some readers are perhaps sensitive. This author neither affirms nor denies those issues and space does not permit a full consideration of the politics of international education.

⁷⁷ Willard W. Beatty, "The Nature and Purpose," Part I. *The Fifty-Eighth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 3.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

accident of birth had determined their status in life, and only a miracle could change their status.”⁷⁹ Community education, it seemed, played an important role in the realization of just such a miracle.

A Localized Endeavor. Community education, a broad concept and widely applicable, was essentially a localized affair in practice. Although community educators arguably shared the concern for development globally, the effort to realize the goal was an endeavor with highly localized ramifications. A community educator might have assumed, for instance, that the development needs of one locale might differ quite significantly from another. By the same measure, the solutions to a perceived development problem, disease, for instance, might have looked quite different from one area to the next as a function of cultural, political, or social realities on the ground. As Beatty noted: “The most pressing needs and problems of each community represent the starting point for a program of community education, and a development program of self-help should be keyed to the expressed needs of the people.”⁸⁰ In other words, community education represented the process by which educational systems were tailor-made to address the development needs unique to a particular locale. The following passage offered further clarification regarding the context and place-based nature of community education under Beatty:

Where endemic diseases are undermining the vitality of the people, a community health campaign in which health education is linked with curative medicine and sanitary engineering may take precedence over anything else. In bringing this about, the first step should be to acquaint the people with existing agencies of government designed to deal with these problems.

...[T]he need may for guidance and help in improving agricultural practices, whether these involve the introduction of superior strains of plants or livestock, familiarizing people with modern modes of enriching the soil, eliminating animal or plant diseases, or counteracting the wastage of natural resources through improvident

⁷⁹ Beatty, “The Nature and Purpose,” 4.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

agriculture or through deforestation which leads to erosion and interference with water conservation.⁸¹

Numerous other potential development issues could have presumably presented themselves, but the fundamental understanding behind community education was that such initiatives were place-specific and organized around the peculiar needs, attributes, and opportunities of a given locale.

A Whole-Community Approach. In addition to a deep consideration local context, a feature which positions community education as an interesting antecedent in the history of place-based education, community education was designed to address the learning needs of the entire community, not simply the school-aged population. Such programs "...must reach all sections of the community," Beatty insisted in his appraisal, "adults as well as children and women as well as men."⁸² In this way, Beatty imagined that the full force of the community could get behind the development initiatives to be implemented. As he noted elsewhere, "Community improvement depends on self-help which may involve the development of increased and better participation of people in their local community affairs, revitalization of existing forms of government, or the initiation of some effective form of local administration where this does not yet exist."⁸³ And Beatty implied that efforts the community together should be carried out through locally-appropriate mechanisms. In other words the cultural lifeways of a particular group should inform the "method of communication."⁸⁴ Citing a 1950 UNESCO publication which addressed the domain of *fundamental education*, Beatty noted that the "Use of puppet shows, simple dramatic expression, local folk dances, and recreational activities should all become part of any program seeking to help people develop what is best in their own culture, as well as helping them adopt

⁸¹ Beatty, "The Nature and Purpose," 12.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 12-13.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 13.

new ideas that will aid them in building a new and better future.”⁸⁵ In sum, community change was a whole-community affair.

Self-Determination. The significance of self-determination in community education projects could not be overstated. At every turn, the development projects designed and implemented within a particular locale were to be supported by the stakeholders in question. As Beatty suggested, “Experience has taught us that, in order to bring about constructive change, it is necessary to obtain the active participation of the people themselves. They are the best judges of their immediate problems; and only with their assent and understanding can lasting progress be made.”⁸⁶ This was not to suggest, however, that local programs for change necessarily be created by local community members. In other words, while one source for ideas toward development may have been the local community itself, Beatty did not believe that self-determination would necessarily be sacrificed should directions for change be developed outside of the community. This much was implied where he noted that “Regardless of the origin of technical leadership, it is essential that specialists familiarize themselves not only with the conditions in the community but with the people themselves.”⁸⁷ Less important perhaps than the origins of a given reform plan, it seemed, was the degree to which the idea gained the support of the peoples for whom it was designed. Absolutely critical in the process, Beatty concluded, was the requirement that “*the entire populace identifies itself* with the undertaking and works towards its successful completion. [emphasis in original]”⁸⁸

Non-standard & Problem-based. In his historical review of community educational precedents globally, David Scanlon reached the conclusion that the motivations of such

⁸⁵ Beatty, “The Nature and Purpose,” 13.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

initiatives represented a great deal of diversity. While all might have been geared toward the improvement and empowerment of local peoples, understandings of those ends was characteristically variable. In his discussion of motivations, he wrote:

It is difficult to assign specific motives for many community-educational programs. The technical-assistance program of the United States illustrates the variety of bases of bases for community education. To some Americans, community education as carried on by the government in less-developed countries is desirable as a humanitarian movement to help those people with problems of health, literacy, and economic development. To other Americans, community education is a political weapon in the “cold war” – a means of building allies. To still others, community education is a technique of building future markets for business investments and future trade. The variety of reasons offered for American technical assistance can be found in many other examples of community education.⁸⁹

A full consideration of the variety of meanings and motivations of community educational programs, those named and those fundamentally similar in type, is well beyond the scope of a historical review of place-based educational antecedents. Even where the conversation was limited to the collection of educational initiatives labeled explicitly as *community education*, motivations were far from unitary in the post-war era, ranging from what observers might regard as humanitarian efforts intended to improve the lives of peoples in developing nations to more political orientations which sometimes operated to influence the shape of an emerging Cold War. In all, Scanlon reminded, “...while the specific terms used to describe ‘community education’ may be of recent coinage, the process, cultural transformation, has been used for centuries.”⁹⁰ What was perhaps most immediately relevant in an historical consideration of locally-based teaching and learning were the illustrations of practice.

By some measure, a review of the literature available on community education reveals that much of the work took place in extra-school settings. Simply stated, community education,

⁸⁹ David Scanlon, “Historical Roots,” Part I. *The Fifty-Eighth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 62.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

with its emphasis on addressing local problems in direct ways, often looked quite unlike the formal schooling processes that the phrase might conjure for many readers. Health-related concerns such as sanitation or water quality might have been addressed effectively in a classroom-type setting, but this was not typically the case with community education projects that proliferated in the mid-twentieth century. Nor was theirs characteristically a formal curriculum to follow across academic terms and semesters. Where a community faced agricultural problems, community education initiatives addressed those issues. By contrast, if the primary concern was the lack of participation of women in local development processes, a community education initiative might work to address that concern as recognized. In sum, though an educational component was clearly present, the school itself, not to mention the student population, was often quite unlike the traditional conception of teaching and learning.

The Learner. While domestic and international community development programs were characteristically casual, need-based initiatives that tended to challenge widely held notions of formal education, an evaluation of the available literature revealed that many of the principles applicable to school-based teaching and learning were also evident in descriptions of community education and its somewhat less traditional operation. It was in this regard that community education of the late 1950s and beyond aligned with many of the core themes of place-based educational approaches, and to some extent, education generally.

A clear illustration of the consideration of method and curriculum development in community education was provided by Edgar Dale's review of *Instructional Materials in Community Education*, published 1959. In the first place, Dale understood that educators should make instructional decisions according to "the local, regional, or international setting or situation of the learner." And this was true for adult learners, the population of learners frequently

encountered in community education projects. In an effort to derive core principals through his experiences in Latin America, the United States, and the Philippines, Dale pointed again and again to the importance of building educational programs around the needs of the learner and the local experience. “An effort should be made,” he wrote, “to get intellectual and emotional reinforcement to learning by relating these materials to the daily life of the individual learner and his family.”⁹¹ Although Dale stopped short of suggesting an exclusively localized approach and noted that “There should be a wise blending of locally useful materials and activities with those coming from a state or national source,…”⁹² his appeal was clearly and deeply connected to a strong relationship between the instructional approach and the student. Such a commitment Dale reiterated where he questioned the utility of using resources developed by individuals and organizations “...physically and psychologically distant from the uses of the materials.” Better, it seemed, was to ask practitioners on the ground to engage in “Widespread try-out in the field, ...[as] a safeguard against materials which do not fit local needs.”⁹³ Local context and the fit between instruction and the learner’s experience were for Dale critical considerations in the context of community education, both domestically and at the international scale. In that way, Dale’s discussion of the field and of effective implementation in practice shared certain commonalities with essentially similar approaches described by modern place-based educators, though the non-school, adult-educational character of the former was somewhat distinctive.

Drawing on both his own explorations conducted through the Bureau of Educational Research and familiar accounts from community education initiatives in Jamaica, Dale offered an illustration of the sort of localized instructional approach that he believed was so significant in

⁹¹ Edgar Dale, “Instructional Materials,” Part I. *The Fifty-Eighth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 303.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., 304.

development work. In short, the passage below demonstrated an effort on the part of community educators to address both economic development issues in the areas of banana agriculture and resource conservation. The description offered a portrait of both the holistic nature of community education and the locally relevant methodology that Dale advocated so intently. He explained:

The basal readers make literacy an integral part of a general community-education program and must help the students not only to learn the technical skills of reading and writing but also to solve problems.

A rural family was depicted, and the chief character named after a well-known Jamaican patriot, George William Gordon. Careful thought was given to the development of each character portrayed.

...Thought was given to using the nouns most commonly spoken by Jamaicans.

Photographic illustrations were used for realistic depiction of characters and situations. These also helped build vocabulary by stimulating discussion, and student thus learned related words which do both appear in the text...

Another illustration is Reader I shows Martha washing clothes in a river. The teacher is instructed to discuss with the class how they wash their clothes and the source of available water in their area.

...There are 416 running words in Reader I with a vocabulary of 88 words, 79 being new. A limited vocabulary was used—a vocabulary of general words to which specific ones could be added as they related to the special situation in the particular community of the students.

There was a deliberate effort to combine two methods of teaching—the experience-centered method and the method in which specific teaching materials are used. In the experience-centered method, all the teaching material is developed by the teacher out of the experience of the class members.⁹⁴

The passage revealed a deliberate attention to the lived experiences of learners, experiences which organizers understood were outgrowths of particular local conditions. Organized around the lives of adult students, Dale reported that the initiative was successful in its endeavor to promote a functional literacy. And his successes were not unique.

Pedro T. Orata, a one-time employee for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, offered further illustration of the practice of community education. Drawing on nearly a decade of work in the Philippines, Orata described trends of growing support for the establishment of community education programs, whose mission, he revealed, “...was to make the community school really

⁹⁴ Dale, “Instructional Materials,” 301.

effective in helping sanitation and increasing food production without lowering educational standards.”⁹⁵ From there, Orata went on to identify what he believed were core principles in the success of the initiative. In the first place, he suggested, “Start with the simplest and most obviously felt need...”⁹⁶ While Orata did not use the phrase directly, the methodology that he described was generally consistent with a project-based learning environment. Beginning with the most immediate concerns of students, water quality, Orata and other educators associated with the program were able to develop a purpose through which the two essential goals were accomplished; that is, problems within the community itself were addressed at the same time that traditional academic understandings were reinforced. In his consideration of project success, Orata wrote:

Each project was educational through and through as well as practical and productive. The importance of flowing water was brought out through observation, readings, and discussion before survey was made of the possible source of water. The high-school students were led to realize the danger to the bean crops in the adjoining fields if water should overflow the dykes. Also, they were encouraged to accept the responsibility of raising the dyke on both sides of the canal to a requisite height, of filling holes in the dyke, and of taking further steps to follow up their initial work from then on.

...The participation of adults was secured in each case, since it was clear that it was the joint concern of all people that water should flow freely into the community.

The projects were related functionally to lessons in science, in arithmetic, in geography, in physics, in economics, in art and literature (the beauty and freshness of flowing water), in horticulture, in piggery and poultry raising, in home economics, not to name such other subjects as health and character education.⁹⁷

The excerpted passage revealed a project-based plan of education designed to engage students directly in the consideration and solution of local problems. If Orata’s representation was accurate, the approach was indeed thoroughly educational. While it was not entirely clear from the description what manner of instruction the teachers ultimately adopted, or even where the

⁹⁵ Pedro T. Orata, “The Grassroots Approach,” Part I. *The Fifty-Eighth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 165.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 166-67.

projects fit into the wider academic term and curriculum. Nonetheless, what Orata's Filipino experiences revealed was that community education could potentially balance both traditional academic goals with the improvement of local community life. Somewhere embedded in both trajectories, it appeared that student participants in the program also gained potentially valuable experiences in citizenship as they were, by all accounts, given opportunities to engage directly as contributing members in the community. With this in mind, it stands to reason that community educational experiences like those illustrated in Orata deserve some recognition in the context of an historical review of place-based educational precedents. While few modern place-based educators have endeavored to do so, it may be the case that lessons learned through the experience of designing and implementing community development projects through the school or even somewhat less formal educational programs might inform modern work that appears to be essentially similar in scope. To say it another way, the effort on the part of proponents of place-based education to engage directly in the improvement of the local community and the consideration and solution of local problems is not unique to the goals of twenty-first century place-based educators.

Social Science Connections. So much of community education was directed toward the solution of local problems in more or less culturally homogenous communities. The experiences represented in the 1959 *NSSE Yearbook* certainly support that general claim. With that criterion in mind, not to mention the post-colonial context that backgrounded so much of the formal community education movement, small, often non-Western societies were the sites for community educational projects. With the commitment to local lifeways that was so central to the scope of community educational programs, it was not surprising to find that the field shared some relationship to contemporary thinkers in anthropology, sociology, and psychology, three

related social science fields which appeared to offer much in the way of navigating the requirement to design and implement locally appropriate educational initiatives. Among the most popular contributors was famed anthropologist Margaret Mead.

In an article entitled “Cultural Factors in Community-Education Programs,” Mead addressed the potential of the behavioral sciences, particularly cultural anthropology to inform the organization and practice of community education generally. As a point of departure, Mead offered a reconsideration of pre-war community educational initiatives, which she regarded as generally ethnocentric and authoritarian. She wrote:

Up to World War II, community education, whether it was imposed by military force, transplantation of populations, monastic orders, or gentle doctrines of local participation, was primarily something that was done to or for some people by other more advanced people desirous of raising the cultural level of the less advanced...The assumption was made that, along with backwardness, illiteracy, low agricultural skill, superstitious and magical practices about health, and inferior forms of social organization, there were various other forms of inferiority which could be remedied. Depending upon the nature of the assumptions about the people to be benefitted and the people who did the benefiting, the level to which the recipient population was to be raised would be differently conceived...⁹⁸

From Mead’s illustration, the history of community education, whatever title it may have assumed, was largely authoritarian and generated from the top-down and outside-in. As she noted elsewhere, “...the local community had to be ‘stimulated to want’ change.”⁹⁹ Without denying flaws that remained, Mead went on to argue that in the post-war era, community education had shifted dramatically. “...[T]his time,” she suggested, “it is not an underestimation of the recipients, as too inferior to be able to learn all that the more advanced group has to teach.”¹⁰⁰ But while the cultural biases had perhaps been mitigated to some degree, new

⁹⁸ Margaret Mead, “Cultural Factors,” Part I. *The Fifty-Eighth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 66-67.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

problems emerged, not the least of which, in Mead's view, was the relative antiquity and traditionalism of the educational approaches typically adopted. Mead explained further:

So, instead of equipping the personnel of community-education efforts with the most advanced projections of what medicine or communication is likely to become in the next half-century, too often they are given sixteenth-century phrasings of religion and nineteenth-century schoolbook models. This, of course, has not been universally so; many programs have drawn on the most advanced *techniques* of education,...But too often this tapping of the rapidly moving sections of our culture has been limited to techniques – twentieth-century electronics devices to teach nineteenth-century methods of child care, anthropomorphic representations of germ theory to teach people who are fully ready to grasp the implications of the most modern psychosomatic medicine, medieval pre-Colombian religious geography to people who then to reconcile the medieval concreteness about heaven and hell with their experience of modern submarines and airplanes.¹⁰¹

In sum, Mead was of the belief that although community educational initiatives had improved considerably in the years following World War II, the educational approaches typically adopted were somewhat ill-fitted to the needs of learners and communities for whom they were intended to serve. Oddly enough, Mead's recommendations for community educators were nuanced, and she did not suggest that all elements of local culture should be respected. "Survivals of earlier types of culture," she insisted, "...may be festering points of maladjustment, preserving as they do parts of a culture which is no longer appropriate."¹⁰² Somewhat of a departure from the general understanding within the field of community education, Mead's position reiterated the importance of cultural understanding without promoting an uncritical adherence to cultural norms. In addition to the development of deep cultural understandings, Mead also called on community educators to reconsider their own cultural selves. Speaking to a range of potential educators and development specialists, she noted:

The success of the team members who go as Americans or as members of the UN technical-assistance teams of the UN agencies depends on their ability to see their own cultural practices, including sanitary habits and ethical insistences, as simply one set in a

¹⁰¹ Mead, "Cultural Factors," 72.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 93.

series which has varied over time and varies now among contemporary peoples. If an agricultural specialist or specialist in literacy techniques believes that the way he uses a knife and fork, a toothbrush, soap and towel, sits on a chair, holds a pen, sits on a chair, or wears clothes is intrinsically more “natural,” “righter,” or “truer” than the way in which other peoples manage these things, then no amount of conscious good will and tolerance will make the technical help that is offered really palatable to the receiver...¹⁰³

As important was the need for a certain awareness and sensitivity to the cultural lifeways other than one’s own, Mead presented a powerful case for the reconsideration of the assumptions underlying one’s own cultural position. Part of this, of course, demanded that community educators consider, to the extent possible, the potential consequences of their efforts and involvement. In all, what Mead offered to the field of community education was not simply a recognition that issues surrounding culture might deserve attention, a principle which generally enjoyed wide appeal, but rather a complex vision of culture, change, and perception which, in many ways, served to add complexity to the entire endeavor. While it was not immediately clear what sort of impact Mead’s writing had on community education initiatives in the middle decades of the twentieth century or since, the effort to highlight the significance of culture in the development of localized educational programs, not to mention the potential partnership between educators and the behavioral/social sciences, raised important questions.

Chapter Summary

To be sure, this discussion of community education has been far from exhaustive. To explore fully the range of community educational initiatives, those named or those un-named, would require far more investigation than this endeavor to uncover place-based educational precedents could reasonably provide. But even through the several programs and trends highlighted above, it was relatively clear that the core elements of educational plans designed around the improvement of particular communities, in both school and extra-school formats,

¹⁰³ Mead, “Cultural Factors,” 94.

were established far in advance of essentially similar themes in the modern era. This includes not only modern place-based education, but perhaps other similar initiatives in service-learning as well.

Across the board, the community education examples referenced above were sensitive to local context, a feature perhaps synonymous. At Penn and Berry, for instance, the agricultural context of life became an intimate part of the entire school curricula. Local history, local geography, and local agricultural lifeways were central features. And the same could be said of the work at Tuskegee, where local occupations and the “study of the immediate vicinity” were common themes. In Foxfire, too, students engaged in the investigation of “home remedies, folk expressions and weather signs.” And in each of the formalized community education initiatives reviewed in the second portion of this chapter, it was the local problem and gave rise to particular dimensions of programs developed.

The educational models highlighted above were also experiential in nature asked that participating students engage first-hand in the variety of projects available. At Berry, Penn, and Tuskegee, students often worked through industrial and agricultural lessons. At the same time, however, even the traditional subjects often took an experiential character, such as the effort at Penn to engage in mathematics training through the school acres. With Foxfire, and Berry to a lesser extent, language and literacy were broached not through classroom instruction alone, but rather through the research and creative work required to produce the school magazine. Although the initiatives attached to the formal expression of community education were sometimes extra-scholastic in nature, there, too, one often found a consideration for the nature of the learner. Those programs were typically experiential and designed with the “simplest and obvious felt need” of learners in mind. In many ways, discussions surrounding the learner in the reform

initiatives reviewed in this chapter were implicit and perhaps not as pronounced as the reform programs reviewed in previous chapters. Nonetheless, the unique needs and nature of the student remained important concerns in community education in all its various manifestations.

And finally, in each of the illustrations, whether domestic or international, students and teachers paid explicit attention to the identification and solution of local, community problems. Perhaps more than any other defining feature of the initiatives reviewed, each placed a significant interest on the community of which the school was part. While Berry and Foxfire sought to improve the educational opportunities in Georgia's Appalachian highlands, Penn and Tuskegee addressed the needs of African Americans in the post-Civil War era. Named community educational programs added to those examples an international development agenda. And the community improvement functions were not exclusively educational, as larger community problems also became focal points. In Foxfire, in particular, social and economic uplift gained special attention as the initiative challenged stereotypes regarding mountain life and took on a direct role in the economic development of the region, specifically land price concerns and zoning issues. Community education and community improvement were virtually synonymous.

This chapter has identified a range of community educational initiatives as historical precedents for modern place-based education. Few of the examples cited above have received attention in the literature representative of the field. Although Foxfire has generally been recognized as a precursor, perhaps a reflection of the program's relative youth, its operation, successes, and failures, have been completely understudied. The important developments at Berry, Penn, and Tuskegee have been equally ignored. As is perhaps true each of the representations of theory and practice outlined throughout this study, it may be the case that a

more concerted effort to identify and explore the efforts of educators historically could provide potentially valuable insights for the proponents of the contemporary agenda. Chapter 8 addresses themes across times and the potential worth of continued historical investigation in the field of place-based education.

CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

Introduction

If this study has accomplished anything it has been to demonstrate the longevity of place-based educational theory and practice. Despite the recent coinage of the phrase, the essential features that define place-based education are indeed quite old. The relationship between the local, the learner, and the community in the educative process have been perennial concerns since antiquity, though perhaps in distinctive ways from one scholar, generation, and reform movement to the next. Despite sometimes subtle distinctions, the core ideas embedded within contemporary place-based pedagogy stretched back at least to Aristotle in the 300s B.C. and were well established in Comenius by the early 1600s. But perhaps more surprising than the antiquity of the localized approach to teaching and learning, was the nature of its continual reoccurrence. Rather than singular, vague instances, this study found clear illustrations of what modern observers would consider place-based educational strategies in the writings of virtually every foundational figure in Western educational thinking. From Comenius and Rousseau, to Pestalozzi and Froebel, to Herbart and Dewey, characteristic themes of place-based education have been recycled, reiterated, and reconfigured over time. With regard to the history of American education, in particular, this study revealed that place-based pedagogies have been presented time and again in every decade since at least the American Civil War (1861-1865). In the development of the Penn School in South Carolina's Sea Islands and in Louis Agassiz's experiments at Penikese Island, Massachusetts, to cite two early illustrations from the many

available examples, place-based thinking in education received wide support from American school reformers. Colonel Francis Parker, followed by scores of educational progressives, began to promote place-based pedagogies in the late 1800s.

Repeatedly throughout the years and across an array of educational movements and isolated experiments, the essential features of what is today referred to as place-based education have been presented by theorists and practitioners alike as alternatives to mainstream schooling. Given the longevity of the approach and the numerous reiterations over time, it seems as though place-based education has indeed represented something akin to a “proto-theory”

¹ of educational reform. Place-based approaches to teaching and learning were in many ways ubiquitous in the history of American education. Despite that legacy, Lawrence Cremin’s appraisal that “...reform movements are notoriously ahistorical in outlook”² remains remarkably accurate when applied to modern place-based educational scholarship. To this point, the developing field of place-based education has remained largely ahistorical. In the main, place-based reformers have not endeavored to investigate the historical antecedents to theory and practice in substantive ways or to build upon past knowledge. Following Tanner, this study was established with the understanding that “...history is inextricably tied to professional knowledge,” and further, that the past contains potentially “useable knowledge” for contemporary reformers.³ Although this study does not represent an authoritative or exhaustive history of place-based education, it has established the potential value of historical exploration in the field.

¹ Michael Duffin, “Portrait of an Urban Elementary School: Place-Based Education, School Culture, and Leadership” (doctoral dissertation, Antioch University, McGregor, 2006), 24.

² Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 8.

³ Laurel N. Tanner, “Curriculum History as Useable Knowledge,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 12, no. 4 (1982): 410.

Chapter 8 represents a review of the study's findings by returning to the three research questions established in Chapter 1. The questions which guided this study were as follows:

- A) What are the historical precedents of modern place-based education?
- B) How have sociopolitical contexts influenced calls for place-focused pedagogies?
- C) How might past experiences with place-focused educational initiatives inform contemporary efforts to reform schools?

In the first place, the discussion below briefly revisits the range of historical antecedents to place-based education established throughout the foregoing evaluation. In so doing, Chapter 8 outlines in an explicit fashion the historical precedents for place-based education once again. In addition, this chapter also reviews the sociopolitical contexts that gave rise to place-based educational programs over the years. While the discussion surrounding the review of precedents and historical contexts is largely a restatement of themes presented throughout the study, Chapter 8 also addresses the manner in which an historical review of place-based educational strategies might inform contemporary theory and practice in the field and identifies several fruitful directions for future research.

Historical Precedents of Place-Based Education

The study found a wide range of historical precedents for place-based educational theory and practice. As outlined in Chapter 1, this historical review of place-based pedagogies was built around the presence of several defining criteria. In the forgoing historical examination, place-based educational strategies were explored to the extent that measures emphasized the local contexts for learning and the nature and needs of students. In addition, though in a wide variety of ways, place-based educational strategies often contained within them some sort of community responsiveness function as well, designed either to directly improve the local community or, by

contrast, to expand the capacity of young learners to become thoughtful and skilled citizens in democratic societies.

Earliest Roots. Chapter 2 addressed the earliest roots of place-based educational thinking. The study found that beginning with Aristotle in the 300s B.C., the recognition that first-hand experiences with familiar objects and phenomena had become cornerstones for an effective educational plan. Comenius echoed and refined similar concerns in the seventeenth century and like Aristotle suggested that "...all knowledge begins by sensuous perception."⁴ The local garden and the country surrounding the school provided ample opportunity for intellectual growth. In the eighteenth century, too, there was evidence of early place-based educational antecedents. In Rousseau's *Émile*, for instance, the learner's needs and unique character gained special consideration. Instead of "Words, words, nothing but words,"⁵ Rousseau recognized the importance of an educational plan more in tune with the character and capacities of the students in question. In addition to developmental readiness, Rousseau's reform ideal also drew heavily on the first-hand experiences of students, experiences which perhaps implicitly stemmed from the home and neighborhood. This study revealed that while neither Rousseau, nor Comenius or Aristotle before him, drew explicit connection to the improvement of the community, their attention to the local and to the learner nonetheless represented early place-based pedagogical models.

The study also found precursors to place-based education in the major works of educational scholars throughout the nineteenth century. Pestalozzi provided one illustration in his

⁴ M. W. Keatinge, *Comenius* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1931), 85.

⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile: Or Treatise on Education*, trans, William H. Payne, Great Books in Philosophy (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2003), 78.

work “to stop the springs of misery”⁶ for the poor and underserved in Switzerland. Based in the principle of *Anschauung*, or “sense-perception,” Pestalozzi looked repeatedly to the learning opportunities provided in the streets and the gardens surrounding the school and the neighborhood. Based in assumptions about the utility of proceeding from the simple to the more complex, *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children* represented perhaps the most complete early antecedent to modern place-based theory and practice. Froebel, a student of Pestalozzi’s, did much to continue and expand his mentor’s work. In the first place, Froebel maintained the belief that “the learner be viewed in accordance with his nature.”⁷ Based in that understanding, he called for sense-experiences that began locally in familiar environments such that students could “enumerate the works of man in the surrounding district (the house, the village, the road, the bridge, the wall, the plow, etc.),”⁸ Contemporary with Froebel and Pestalozzi, Herbart’s educational philosophy, too, represented some of the essential features of place-based education. In particular, his writing on geographic study in “the pupil’s immediate neighborhood”⁹ and his concern for the child’s apperceptive powers bore close resemblance.

Inspired by German and other European thinkers like Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Herbart, American educational thinkers, too, adopted localized and learner-centered ideals for school reform in the nineteenth century. Parker, the Father of Progressive Education, and Dewey, a scholar who did much to refine and popularize certain strains of progressive educational thinking, both spoke to the value of localized teaching and the importance of recognizing the unique needs and attributes of students. Both called for local study across disciplines and

⁶ Johann H. Pestalozzi, *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*, trans. Ebenezer Cooke, 2nd ed. (Syracuse, New York: C.W. Bardeen, 1898), 32.

⁷ Friedrich Froebel, *The Education of Man*, trans., W. N. Hailmann, International Education Series (New York: D. Appleton, 1911), 14.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 259.

⁹ John Frederick Herbart, *Outlines of Educational Doctrine*, trans., Alexis F. Lange (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901), 263.

emphasized the importance of first-hand observation, inquiry, and problem-solving. Under Parker at Cook County, early nature study practices developed and in Dewey's Chicago Lab School the emphasis on occupations and the "embryonic community" gained experimental attention.¹⁰ Although their motivations may have been somewhat distinct, one practical and one theoretic, both Parker and Dewey paid close attention to the nature and needs of the student and the value of localized learning. Dewey added to that combination of traits, an acute interest in democratic citizenship education and the potential connection of the school to the community (and society). In various iterations, then, from Aristotle to the beginnings of the American educational progressivism in the late nineteenth century, Chapter 1 revealed that educational scholars emphasized the defining features of modern place-based education long before the modern movement.

Educational Progressivism. As detailed in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, this study also found three important place-based educational precedents in the nature study movement, the "new geography," and the educational wing of the Country Life Movement. Each of the contemporaneous reform efforts represented large-scale programs that were essentially progressive, adopting and refining many of the ideas and practices of the figures highlighted above. Nature study, which was popularized by Agassiz's famous pronouncement in the 1870s that students "study nature not books,"¹¹ asked that students and teachers take advantage of the natural environments within close proximity to the school. Jackman helped to popularize the approach in the 1890s into a widespread movement.¹² Hershman, Bailey, Holtz and other key

¹⁰ John Dewey, *The School and Society*, in *The School and Society and The Child and the Curriculum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

¹¹ Special Dispatch, "The Anderson School: Opening of the Establishment on Penikese Island by Prof Agassiz," *New York Times*, July 8, 1873.

¹² Wilbur S. Jackman, *Field Work in Nature Study: A Handbook for Teachers and Pupils*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: A. Flanagan, 1894)

figures associated with the movement emphasized an approach to schooling, often elementary science education in particular, which was highly localized in scope.¹³ The notion that the local “environment suggests the curriculum,”¹⁴ as Bailey once wrote, became a dominant theme. Nature study advocates were very much interested in the nature and needs of learners as well. Scott’s *Nature-study and the Child* offered an exemplary illustration of the learner-centered dimension of nature study and, although he was not alone, demonstrated the widespread emphasis on student interest and motivation, not to mention the role of inquiry, problem-solving, and first-hand experience.¹⁵ Proponents often looked to school gardens, the field excursion, and school specimen collections as useful nature study methods. In addition to the local and the learner, a number of nature advocates also attached to their reform models a community improvement agenda. In many instances, in Bailey’s work for example, conservation and sustainability became important goals and direct contact with nature was believed to promote a sense of environmental stewardship. Elsewhere, as was the case in Holtz, plans called for direct civic action in the community. Yet nature study was surrounded by several other, similar, place-based pedagogies. Its core features were not altogether unique.

Like the nature study movement, the study revealed that similar emphasis on the learner, the local, and the community could be found in the educational reforms proposed within the domain of geography education, sometimes regarded as the “new geography.” Based in part on the German *Heimatskunde* model and American home study, the “new geography” moved instruction out of the textbook and, as Long phrased it, to the possibilities “lying just at our

¹³ W.H. Hershman, *Manual of Nature Study by Grades* (Chicago: A. Flanagan, 1898); Frederick L. Holtz, *Nature-Study: A Manual for Teachers and Students* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1908); Liberty H. Bailey, *The Nature Study Idea*, 3rd ed. (New York: MacMillan Company, 1909).

¹⁴ Bailey, *The Nature Study Idea*, 10.

¹⁵ Charles B. Scott, *Nature Study and the Child*, (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1910).

doors.”¹⁶ Geography educators in the era of educational progressivism solidified the expanding horizons approach in the American school, much of which was a reflection of assumptions regarding the nature of young learners. Sometimes drawing on the earlier work of Herbart, geography reformers like Frank and Charles McMurry, W. M. Davis, and others called for an initial focus on the local and familiar contexts of the home and neighborhood. Student interest and motivation were essential components of learning.¹⁷ In addition, a common theme within the “new geography” was the emphasis on observation, understanding of cause and effect relationships, and problem-solving. Like many nature study initiatives, field trips were an important part of Progressive Era geography education. On some occasions, “new geography” educators also addressed social problems and the notion that students might gain the capacity to carry on social and community affairs. Tarr and McMurray’s attention to immigration in New York and Rugg and Hockett’s suggestion that “studies of local needs”¹⁸ might become important provided two illustrations of the community/social responsiveness function.

Chapter 5 reviewed a third Progressive Era antecedent to modern place-based education in the form of rural improvement and the educational initiatives attached to the Country Life Movement. Sometimes drawing on the models provided for geography and nature study reform, Country Life education also sought to arrange learning around those objects and phenomena within close proximity to the schoolhouse and neighborhood. As Kern phrased the overall agenda, the “material and social environment”¹⁹ of the country were to be emphasized. Oriented

¹⁶ C.C. Long, *Home Geography for Primary Grade* (New York: American Book Company, 1894), 3.

¹⁷ See Charles A. McMurry, *Special Method in Geography: Third and Fourth Grades*, 4th ed. (Bloomington, IL: Public-School Publishing Company, 1899); W. M. Davis, “The Teaching of Geography,” *Educational Review* 1 (May 1892).

¹⁸ Ralph S. Tarr and Frank M. McMurry, *Home Geography*, Greater New York Edition (London: MacMillan Company, 1903); Harold Rugg and John Hockett, *Objective Studies in Map Location*, Social Science Monographs No. 1, With Emma Schweppe (New York: The Lincoln School of Teachers College, 1925), 8.

¹⁹ O. J. Kern, *Among Country Schools* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1906), 66.

around the “farmplace, the fields, the streams, and the forests”²⁰ and more generally, “the terms of country life,”²¹ Country Life educational reforms were also framed around assumptions regarding the needs and nature of rural learners. Foght, who suggested that “the experience of the child’s daily activities”²² should guide instruction, offered one illustration. Throughout the literature representative of the Country Life Movement, reform advocates repeated their belief that a city-based curriculum was ill-suited to the needs of rural students. But in addition to relevance and student interest, reformers associated with the movement also called for the development of problem-solving skills and first-hand educational experiences. Of course, the school reforms that grew out of the Country Life Movement also contained a clear agenda to change rural life itself. To bring a new dignity to rural life, to transform agricultural method, and to establish an educated rural leadership class were among the openly stated community improvement goals. Like many nature study supporters, conservation goals were also frequently attached to the movement. Together, the nature study movement, the “new geography,” and the Country Life Movement represented three historical place-based educational precedents. Closely allied with a larger movement of educational progressivism, each of the reform agendas emphasized the local contexts for learning, the needs and nature of students, and the relationship between the community and the school.

Outdoor & Community Education. In addition to the Progressive Era reforms explored in Chapter 3, 4, and 5, this study also found historical antecedents of place-based education in outdoor and community education, respectively. Outdoor educational reforms gained popularity in America beginning in the 1940s and grew throughout the 50s, 60s, and 70s. In outdoor

²⁰ Harold W. Foght, *The Rural Teacher and His Work* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1924), 206.

²¹ Liberty Hyde Bailey, *The Country Life Movement in the United States* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1911), 95.

²² Harold W. Foght, *The American Rural School: Its Characteristics, Its Future and Its Problems* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1910), 240.

education, proponents called for first-hand experiences in such activities as the observation of seasonal change, specimen collections, conservation projects, and community and school gardening, many of which had legacies in nature study, the “new geography,” and Country Life reform. Added to those methods was a new advocacy for school camping, which gained wide support. Outdoor learning initiatives took numerous forms, large and small, and were designed to supplement the traditional classroom. Like other place-based educational precedents historically, the learner and the local gained particular attention. Across the curriculum, advocates argued, first-hand experiences in inquiry, observation, and problem-solving in those spaces just beyond the school could enliven traditional practice, which was typically viewed as “removed from reality”²³ and detached from the lived experiences of the child. But the goals were also social in many cases and geared towards the improvement of society. Advocates frequently attached outdoor education conservation commitments and reasoned, like other reformers before them, that direct contact with (local) natural settings might result in the establishment of certain stewardship sensibilities. Elsewhere, democratic citizenship education was the goal and Kilpatrick’s claim that “living democracy best teaches democracy”²⁴ enjoyed wide approval. Efforts to design instruction “in and for”²⁵ the outdoors represented an important chapter in the history of place-based educational theory and practice.

The final set of historical precedents identified through this study took the form of community education initiatives. In the 1950s, following the end of World War II, international development gained renewed attention and education was broadly viewed as a useful avenue to

²³ Donald Hammerman, “A Case for Outdoor Education,” *The Clearing House* 38, no. 1 (September 1963): 54.

²⁴ William H. Kilpatrick, “The Role of Camping in Education Today,” in *Outdoor Education: A Book of Readings*, eds. Donald Hammerman and William Hammerman, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Burgess Publishing Company, 1968), 21.

²⁵ Lou Donaldson and George Donaldson, “A Camp is a Children’s Community,” in *Outdoor Education*, eds. Donald R. Hammerman and William M. Hammerman, 2nd ed. (New Jersey: Burgess Publishing Company, 1968), 19.

improvement. Supporters of “community education” engaged in a variety of programs geared specifically toward the unique social, economic, political, and health-related problems that plagued locales across the world, particularly those contained within newly independent states. Advocates looked to create tailor-made solutions through locally appropriate and relevant mechanisms. Unlike the other educational programs reviewed in this study, formal community educational initiatives of the 1950s were often non-traditional in the sense that they approached not only youths, but adult learners, and did not necessarily take place in the school or as a supplement or response to a well-defined academic curriculum. While not dismissive of learning theories, per se, community education was designed primarily with the intent of improving the community, in educational terms or otherwise.

Although a formal educational movement termed *community education* took shape in the 1950s, this study also located a number of educational initiatives, essentially similar in type, but unattached to any larger educational reform agenda. For instance, the study found that the Penn School in South Carolina and the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama each represented place-based and community educational goals. In both programs, the lived experiences of students were incorporated into an experiential and localized educational plan, plans which also worked to promote opportunity for underserved African American communities in the American South. At the Berry School in the northwest Georgia, similar reforms developed independently. Recognizing the unique needs of rural Appalachian farmers, Martha Berry established an industrial school for boys. With a whole curriculum designed around local economic and social realities, the Berry School, too, provided an experience-based program intended to improve circumstances for white, rural farm families. And finally, in a more recent illustration, Georgia’s Foxfire initiative represented a clear historical precedent for place-based education which served

an identifiable community directly. Built upon a model of “cultural journalism,” Foxfire grew out of the necessity to inspire and motivate learners. Experiential and problem-based, the initiative provided opportunities for students to investigate mountain culture and the historical contexts of their own lives. In addition to those noteworthy goals, Foxfire worked to improve the community itself. Challenging stereotypes regarding Appalachian lifeways, connecting local youth and elders, and in some instances, seeking to directly influence local policy were among the community improvement functions provided in the heyday of Foxfire’s operation.²⁶ Whether named or unattached, the community education initiatives evaluated in Chapter 7 revealed historical precedents for modern place-based education, many of which have gone unnoticed by contemporary scholars in the field. These findings surely have not exhausted the full range of available historical connections. Nonetheless, this study has provided a solid starting point for future endeavors and clarifications surrounding the practice and theory of place-based education.

Social & Political Contexts of Place-Based Education

The unique social and political contexts in which each of the movements and initiatives reviewed above flourished deserve close attention and this has been a guiding theme throughout the study. Based upon the evidence available, many of the initiatives identified in this study as historical precursors to modern place-based educational strategies gained momentum as the partial result of larger sociopolitical forces. In other words, the study found that the nature of the reforms proposed and their successes were often linked to broader circumstances not directly tied to the work of educators and institutions alone. The variety of contexts that have backgrounded place-based educational reforms historically are reiterated below.

²⁶ See John L. Puckett, *Foxfire Reconsidered: A Twenty-Year Experiment in Progressive Education* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

As highlighted in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, the study found that a number of important historical antecedents for place-based education were outgrowths of the range of developments associated with the Progressive Era in America. Characterized by Cremin as the consequence of “a stormy period of early industrial growth,”²⁷ the American experience post-Civil War was one of significant cultural, religious, economic, and political change. And perhaps most significantly, with the new opportunities spurred on by industrialism, many new problems presented themselves as well. Semel and Sadovnik noted that as “Factories gave way to huge corporations” and scores of eastern and southern European immigrants packed into the nation’s cities, “...the gap between the rich and poor had never been as great...”²⁸ The several decades stretching from 1890 to 1920 marked a period of dramatic change and the Progressive Movement was the response. It was in that reform-oriented environment that nature study, the “new geography,” and Country Life programs gained attention and support. But within the larger Progressive Era transformation there were specific social and political forces at work which created room for place-based pedagogies. The nature study movement was a reflection of a growing sense of disconnect between the natural world and American life. The growth of cities, the rapid use of resources, and the quickening pace of life were perceived by many to be quite distinctive when compared to romantic notions of the past where contact with nature and aesthetic appreciations were thought to be commonplace. Regaining those relationships with nature gained new meaning near the turn of the twentieth century.²⁹ According to Armitage, Americans “...were uneasy about the impersonal and dispassionate nature of social and economic life...[and] citizens

²⁷ Lawrence Cremin. *The Transformation of the School*, 15.

²⁸ Susan F. Semel & Alan R. Sadovnik, eds., “*Schools of Tomorrow*,” *Schools of Today: What Happened to Progressive Education*, Vol. 8. History of Schools and Schooling. (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 4.

²⁹ See Kevin C. Armitage, *The Nature Study Movement: The Forgotten Popularizer of America’s Conservation Ethic*. (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2009); Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, *Teaching Children Science: Hands-On Nature Study in North America, 1890-1930*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

‘groped for some personal connection with the broader environment.’³⁰ Nature study was consistent with those concerns. Add to that a rising tide of American environmentalism and the strong advocacy for nature study as a school reform measure was even more fitting.

Like nature study initiatives, the reforms that surrounded the Country Life Movement were also informed by a desire to protect and maintain the nation’s natural resources. In addition to forests and soils, however, Country Life supporters regarded the nation’s agricultural peoples and communities as central to the continued progress of the nation.³¹ As Kliebard rightly noted of Liberty Hyde Bailey’s motivations for rural reform, “...he preached a reverence for the soil and for farm life, a way of life he saw in danger of disappearing.”³² The preservation of rural lifeways gained wide appeal, and one of the primary purposes of the redirected rural school was to bring new dignity to the prospect of staying on farm. Grounded in the understanding that “...the cheap land was gone; the jobs, the money, and the opportunity had moved to the city,”³³ the school was charged with the task of creating a renewed appreciation for rural living.

A third Progressive Era characteristic was a new, modern American appreciation for scientific inquiry. Underway since the mid-nineteenth century and as a consequence of the profound paradigmatic shifts that occurred through the influences of thinkers such as Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer, science and the appeal of rigorous methods of investigation touched virtually all areas of life.³⁴ Universities grew in number and disciplinary interests were altered as well. “Social sciences” also found life as anthropology, sociology, and geography

³⁰ Armitage, *The Nature Study Movement*, 2-3.

³¹ William L. Bowers. *The Country Life Movement in America, 1900-1920* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1974).

³² Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum*, 122. Kliebard did not make explicit mention of the Country Life Movement and the excerpt cited above he used in the context of his brief mention of nature study as a branch of manual training/industrial education. What was most important was the connection between the school and cultural preservation.

³³ Cremin, *Transformation of the School*, 75.

³⁴ See Cremin, *Transformation of the School*; Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum*; Malcom P. Douglass, *The History, Psychology, and Pedagogy of Geographic Literacy* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998).

solidified as independent intellectual fields. As revealed in Chapter 4 of this study, changes in the nature and practice of geography were particularly significant. Once a purely descriptive field of study, often serving to complement other disciplinary researches, geography began to change in the latter decades of the nineteenth century into a bifurcated field where cause and effect relationships between human and physical geographic phenomena gained new consideration. As geographic study at the university-level shifted, similar changes were also evident in the transformation of geography education at the elementary and secondary levels. Holistic and systematic inquiry, observation, and problem-solving became key concerns.³⁵

The modern spirit of science also touched education in a significant way. The era of educational progressivism, whereby the patterns of American schooling were critiqued, reworked, and tested, had a profound influence of the establishment of nature study programs, the “new geography,” and Country Life educational reform. Although each of those movements grew out of multiple, overlapping social and political trends, each was also clearly attached to a larger mood of educational progressivism and the non-traditional alternatives that the movement made possible.³⁶ In particular, antecedents to place-based educational practice were closely aligned with what David Tyack termed “pedagogical progressivism.” In contrast to the “administrative progressives” whose focus was primarily efficient school management and administration, the pedagogical camp emphasized child-centered school reform programs, experientialism, and democracy.³⁷

³⁵ See Douglass, *The History*; Stuart G. Noble, *A History of American Education* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1954).

³⁶ See Cremin, *The Transformation of the School*; Urban & Wagoner, *American Education*; Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum*.

³⁷ David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Historians have used numerous other typologies to distinguish between the various, competing brands of educational progressivism. The point here is simply to recognize those distinctions and the diversity represented within the movement.

This study demonstrated that the effects of the Progressive Era and of certain dimensions of educational progressivism were lasting. While the tolerance for progressive reform began to wane considerably after World War II, certain characteristic elements have been reiterated and recycled even into the present.³⁸ In the 1940s, outdoor education gained momentum as an essentially progressive reform strategy. Built around health and physical fitness and civic competence, the experiential programs that surrounded outdoor learning initiatives were refinements of well established notions and learning objectives. In part, outdoor educational initiatives gained support out of a growing fear that Americans had become sedentary and physically unfit.³⁹ As highlighted in Chapter 6, the recent memory of World War II and the apparent rise in military service rejections may have added additional support. Aside from fitness, outdoor educators also hoped to address ongoing concerns that stemmed from modernization. The same essential sense of detachment that inspired nature study organizers in the 1890s again prompted calls for change by outdoor educators in the 1940s and 50s. And finally, outdoor education, particularly in the 1960s and 70s gained support from environmentalists. The publication of *Silent Spring* and the popularization of an American environmental movement offered renewed attention to the notion that teachers might move learning out-of-doors.⁴⁰

In Chapter 7, a range of additional contexts were provided to highlight the establishment of place-based educational practices. Although each initiative served distinct populations, several important themes grew out of that discussion. The study found that place-based educational strategies historically have sometimes extended from the urgency to address the needs of

³⁸ See Semel and Sadovnik, “*Schools of Tomorrow*,” David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1995).

³⁹ Julian Smith, et al., *Outdoor Education*, 2nd ed. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

particular communities and peoples. In the case of the Berry School, place-based educational reform was a response to the challenge to provide economic and educational opportunities for rural whites in the highlands of northwest Georgia. Foxfire offered a similar, more recent illustration. Fundamentally similar were Washington's successful initiative at Tuskegee and the earlier model established at the Penn School in the Sea Islands of South Carolina. In both instances, the unique needs and life experiences of rural, Southern blacks found tailor-made educational programs to be valid alternatives to the lack of opportunities otherwise available in the Reconstruction Era South.⁴¹ As indicated in Chapter 7, illustrations were not exclusively domestic. In the 1950s, and following the turmoil of two world wars, international development gained new relevance. Health-related concerns, economic development, governance, and literacy were among the wide-ranging concerns that confronted newly independent states.⁴² There again, the motivation to address the peculiar needs of individual locales through education almost necessarily assumed a highly idiosyncratic and customized form. This study has revealed that social and political circumstances have significantly impacted the establishment of place-based educational strategies over time. While the contexts that background place-based pedagogies historically were not singular, it was nonetheless true that the mood for change could often provide avenues for redirections within the school.

Informing Contemporary Practice

As outlined in Chapter 1, this study was framed in part around Tanner's proclamation that "...curriculum history is more than useful; it is essential for improving the character of

⁴¹ See Urban and Wagoner, *American Education*.

⁴² Nelson B. Henry, ed., "Community Education: Principles and Practices from World-Wide Experiences," Part I. *The Fifty-Eighth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).

curriculum reform efforts.”⁴³ Given the recurring nature of place-based educational approaches, several important findings have emerged from this historical review of theory and practice which deserve explicit attention in the context of the modern field. Although many of these important findings were outlined in context in the foregoing chapters, each is highlighted again in the discussion below in an effort to provide explicit commentary on the manner in which this study might inform contemporary practice. In other words, a clarification of historical developments is intended to provide a synthetic appraisal that might serve to inform the solution of educational problems attached to the contemporary field, not to mention provide foundations for continued historical investigation.

A Response to Academic Formalism. This study has shed light on the varied contexts in which place-based educational reforms have taken shape historically. From the theories and models evaluated in the foregoing chapters it appeared that, in many instances, a return to the local developed in response to the perceived formalism in mainstream curriculum and practice. A theme echoed throughout the Progressive Era reforms surrounding nature study, the “new geography,” and *Country Life* was the notion that the exclusive attention to the textbook, to tests, and to recitations had overwhelmed the most important function of the school – to educate. Symbolism over learning was the charge and a renewed emphasis on observation, problem-solving, and inquiry represented sound alternatives. “Nature, not books,”⁴⁴ was the mantra for many and a reconsideration of the educative value of first-hand experiences just beyond the school door gained wide appeal. Perhaps more pronounced, the rejection of formalism was not unique to educational progressives of the early twentieth century as similar critiques were voiced as far back as Rousseau who recognized that symbols, words, and texts did not necessarily

⁴³ Tanner, “Curriculum History as Useable Knowledge,” 410.

⁴⁴ Special Dispatch, “The Anderson School.”

equate to student learning.⁴⁵ As the exploration of early roots in Chapter 2 outlined in detail, similar responses were evident in Pestalozzi and Comenius as well. In its response to the educational needs of Sea Islanders, the Penn School echoed similar themes in its attack on the “education that is plastered on” and arranged around “isolated facts...not because they fitted into life but because they fitted into the examinations.”⁴⁶ More recently, in *Foxfire*, a return to the local and first-hand experience yet again offered a powerful alternative to otherwise bland English and grammar instruction, testing, and rote memorization.⁴⁷

It is not altogether surprising that place-based reform literature has proliferated in the past two decades. The past twenty years in American education have been marked by concerted efforts at the state and federal levels to raise academic achievement through standardized curricular mechanisms. In a climate dominated by the strictures of *No Child Left Behind*, given the instructional and curricular fixity that such policies sometimes produce, the localized, student-centered, and experiential nature of place-based education stands in fairly stark contrast. This twenty-first century response to academic formalism has arguably taken on a new intensity, yet it is not altogether new.

This study has revealed that critiques of academic formalism, of testing mechanisms, and of standardization, have not necessarily guaranteed the adoption or success of place-based educational reforms historically. Mainstream traditions were more easily critiqued than they were transformed. One valuable lesson that modern place-based educators might build upon in the pursuit of contemporary reform is the need for wider public support. As Wilbur S. Jackman noted more than a century ago alongside his advocacy for nature study, “It is of great importance

⁴⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile: Or Treatise on Education*, trans, William H. Payne, Great Books in Philosophy (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2003).

⁴⁶ Rossa Cooley, *School Acres: An Adventure in Rural Education* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), 36.

⁴⁷ See Puckett, *Foxfire Reconsidered*.

to enlist and cultivate the interest of the parents in field work.”⁴⁸ Given the unorthodox nature of nature study and its non-traditional fieldwork component, Jackman recommended that advocates embark on campaigns that might “disarm their prejudices.”⁴⁹ And he was not alone. O.J. Kern, a respected rural school reformer, too, recognized the challenges to changing mainstream practice and the fact in most instances “...there is inertia to overcome and prejudice.”⁵⁰ Without vocalized rationales for practice, to both parents and administrators alike, Kern predicted that Country Life reform would be perceived by many observers as “faddish,” “frothy,” and “contrary to the sacred course of study.”⁵¹ This study revealed similar understandings in Chapter 7 through a historical review of community education. Foxfire, for instance, grew to prominence, in no small part, because of the support it received from the wider community.⁵² Through these several examples and there were others still, this study found that alongside critiques of mainstream academic practice proponents of reform were nonetheless sensitive to the need for wider public acceptance. Contemporary place-based educators might build upon the lessons of past reformers and the mechanisms developed to elicit parental, administrative, and public support for the installation of practices that might otherwise be regarded as unorthodox and threaten to dismantle school and curricular change.

Curriculum Articulation. Historical explorations throughout the preceding chapters found that place-based reforms often arose as responses to perceived academic formalism, yet that contextual feature did not serve to replace commitments to thoughtful, integrated curricular, and instructional plans. Instead, this study revealed that place-based approaches have sometimes manifested as articulated courses of study. In fact, there were numerous instances where place-

⁴⁸ Jackman, *Field Work*, 10.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁰ Kern, *Among Country Schools*, 67.

⁵¹ Kern, *Among Country Schools*, 10.

⁵² See Puckett, *Foxfire Reconsidered*.

based reforms grew into something of an entire curriculum. Nature study and Progressive Era geography education provided two relevant illustrations. In both instances, advocates worked to develop extended courses of study with the intent to avoid overlap and presumably the waste of instructional time. In the case of geography education, in particular, efforts to develop an articulated plan led to the creation of what educators have since labeled as a curriculum of “expanding horizons,” a generalized plan for geography study across the grades. In McMurry’s *Special Method in Geography*, readers found a localized and graded course outlined in detail and *The Oswego Normal Method* offered a secondary illustration.⁵³ With nature study, too, and not to overlook the existence of multiple frameworks, the local emphasis remained throughout the curriculum, but the specific subject matter to be investigated was carefully graded. Hodge’s *Nature Study and Life* and Holtz’s *Nature Study* each outlined sample courses of study through the eighth-grade.⁵⁴ Chapter 7 found that the course plans outlined in the bulletins and catalogues of the Berry School provided yet another relevant example. With those several illustrations in mind, historical practices of place-based education often managed to navigate between the overly rigid academic program and the complete lack of curricular structure. At the same time that nature study plans could express “...endless variation in the details and in the little applications,”⁵⁵ room for a well thought out and transferable plan was nonetheless possible (and encouraged).

Without becoming standardized, this study found that historical place-based methodologies geared toward the invigoration of student learning often represented sets of standard practices nonetheless. To clarify, Chapters 3, 4, and 5 demonstrated that insect study,

⁵³ McMurry, *Special Method in Geography*; Amos W. Farnham, *The Oswego Normal Method of Teaching Geography* (Syracuse, NY: C.W. Bardeen, 1896).

⁵⁴ Holtz, *Nature-Study: A Manual for Teachers and Students* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1908); Clifton F. Hodge, *Nature Study and Life* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1903).

⁵⁵ Bailey, *The Nature Study Idea*, 10-11.

local geography study, the field excursion, school garden work, and specimen catalogues all became relatively standard practices in the place-based reform initiatives surrounding nature study, the “new geography,” and school redirection in the era of Country Life. As indicated in Chapter 6, the emphasis on school camping, too, was an instructional tool that gained widespread popularity among outdoor educators in the 1950s. Even the cultural journalistic program established in Foxfire developed into a specific mode of practice adaptable to wider audiences. So while the practices of historical place-based reforms often assumed standard forms, thus gaining some measure of appeal and refinement, flexibility and localized practice typically remained intact. To state it another way, the study found that although many historical illustrations of place-based theory and practice represented assaults on formalism, most reforms were not presented as complete curricular departures. The exploration of outdoor education, for instance, revealed that supporters were explicit in that regard where they noted that learning outdoors and indoors both served particular purposes. Outdoor learning was not intended to replace the traditional academic curriculum, but instead to offer an important supplement to the larger school experience. And whereas County Life reforms and many community educational programs assumed localized characteristics, this study found that the core of the traditional academic curriculum remained relatively intact. Whether large or small, place-based educational strategies generally maintained certain elements of the traditional academic curriculum at the same time that certain mainstream practices were challenged.

This study found that place-based educational initiatives took on a variety of forms historically, from articulated courses of study to occasional supplements to the existing academic curriculum. It is not entirely clear at present, however, what sort of character contemporary place-based educational practice will assume. It is also true that the content that gives shape to

the disciplines represented in modern academic curricula are in many cases unique to this generation. In other words, biology in 1910 did not look like biology in 2010 given advances in the field and technological change. All of this to say that while the curricula outlined in the historical illustrations of place-based education reviewed in this study were likely ill-fitted to present needs and circumstances, the manner in which those whole-curricular and supplemental efforts were designed may inform contemporary practice in valuable ways. Of no small significance, historical examples highlight possibilities. In particular, where the goal is to expand modern place-based practice, what contemporary practitioners might build upon is the possibility of balancing the sometimes idiosyncratic nature of the localized teaching and learning with the need for standards of practice, instructional refinement, and curriculum articulation. This study has demonstrated that localized curriculum and instruction were not antithetical to the creation of robust and widely applicable educational programs.

Local and Global. This study of place-based educational precedents has revealed potentially valuable insights regarding the relationship between the local and the non-local. At some point or another, the distance between the local and the non-local, or global, deserves attention in the context of any place-based educational program, past or present. To say it another way, a feature that arguably plagues contemporary theory and practice in place-based education, though it is rarely mentioned, surrounds the degree to which a localized approach to teaching and learning can address concerns that are non-local. Most reasonable observers would agree that those things most worth knowing are not always or necessarily located directly within our homes, schools, and neighborhoods. Froebel was clear that for all the value held in the home and neighborhood, it was but part of a larger domain of knowledge. Just "...because instruction is to be connected wholly with the boy's locality," he wrote, one should not assume that "...all

things are to be excluded that lie beyond his circle of experience.”⁵⁶ How can a place-based education, one rooted in local circumstances and communities, bridge the non-local divide? The short answer to the question, of course, is that it probably cannot where local allegiances are entirely pure.

This study found that an education that is exclusively based within local circumstances cannot easily address non-local issues directly. But the historical illustrations of place-based thinking presented here demonstrated that local learning was often transferable to non-local study. The local and the non-local were not mutually exclusive. In fact, as Chapter 4 detailed, Progressive Era geography reform was based squarely on that assumption. To clarify, explorations of the “new geography” revealed that experiences gained locally, around local geography or any other academic domain, were to be used at later stages of learning through analogous comparisons to understandings already gained. In some sense, the process was a representation of the Herbartian principle of apperception writ large.⁵⁷ So while the investigation of local government could not reveal much about Chinese governance or the United Nations directly, the locally-derived understanding of the purposes and functioning of government, the role of citizens, or the influence of power, could become transferable lessons where they were organized effectively. Again, as demonstrated in Chapter 4, the reformed geography curriculum offered at the turn of the twentieth century was organized around similar assumptions.

Though not exclusively, the “global problem,” as it might be phrased, is perhaps most directly related to the social studies. Given the dominant science emphasis within place-based education today it is not particularly surprising that the issue has received relatively little attention. Regardless, the extent to which a place-based approach can be utilized across the

⁵⁶ Froebel, *The Education of Man*, 262.

⁵⁷ John Frederick Herbart, *Outlines of Educational Doctrine*, trans., Alexis F. Lange (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901).

grades and across the academic curriculum deserves attention where wider acceptance is a goal as a purely localized curricular and instructional framework will likely prove limiting. This study and the historical illustrations presented have helped to shed light on the global problem and modern place-based educators would be well served to build upon those important lessons.

Teacher Education. Although it was certainly not true in all instances, this study found that many of the place-based antecedents highlighted achieved a great measure of success in the sense that the principles and practices advocated gained wide institutional support. One area where that support was especially pronounced was with regard to the attention that reformers paid to the training of teachers. The number of texts and descriptions associated with the Country Life Movement, and particularly nature study and the “new geography,” geared exclusively toward teachers was noteworthy. Chapter 6 demonstrated that within the literature associated with outdoor education, too, emphasis on teacher education and normal school training was pronounced. The presence of normal school courses designed around localized, observational study was also noteworthy, an indication of the support that each of those reform movements enjoyed, if not a cause as well. Even Foxfire, an independent reform initiative, today holds summer courses designed to familiarize practitioners with the approach. Across the variety of reform initiatives explored, this study found that the teacher education component was a common theme and, arguably, an indication and mechanism of appeal.

Oddly enough, while there are numerous instances of place-based education in practice across the United States today, very little in the way of teacher training has emerged in the past two decades. Matt Dubel and David Sobels’ “Place-Based Teacher Education” and Reese Todd’s “Place-based Learning in Teacher Education,” both published in 2007, represent two partial counterexamples, but, suffice it to say, the domain remains underdeveloped. The handful of

available illustrations in the literature have not indicated any real momentum for change. While some of the themes represented in place-based educational approaches are likely evident throughout teacher education programs in the United States, it seems clear that the contemporary movement has not attempted or succeeded in developing a presence within that critically important domain. Given the robust nature of normal school support historically, the issue likely warrants attention from modern proponents seeking to expand support and opportunities to wider audiences. On a similar note, lessons gained through this historical study suggest that the lack of availability of place-based educational resources (e.g., texts, description of methods, etc.) that are locally relevant is peculiar and arguably thwarts expansion to some extent. The study pointed to teacher training and instructional resources as critical determinants in the development and spread of historical precedents of place-based education, valuable lessons for proponents of the modern field.

A Multi-Disciplinary Approach. With a few notable exceptions, place-based education today is centered primarily on the sciences in terms of both sources for representative literature and illustrations of practice. As detailed in Chapter 1, a healthy majority of scholarly publications appear in journals with environmental or science-based perspectives. Similarly, illustrations of practice, like those found in Gruenewald and Smith's edited volume published in 2007, suggest a strong science focus.⁵⁸ Work in local streams and projects designed around environmental issues within a given community are commonplace. To be sure, from this author's perspective at least, it is entirely positive to engage students in experiential, project-based science programs within their home communities. That practice certainly has strong historical roots in nature study and outdoor education among other notable developments. Nonetheless, it

⁵⁸ David Gruenewald and Gregory Smith, eds., *Place-Based Education in the Global Age: Local Diversity* (New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2008).

seems that the utility of place-based education is not fully realized at present. David Sobel's early call for a broad application has not been realized.⁵⁹

This study found that a science-environment focus has been an important part of place-based educational models for centuries. Agassiz's work on Penikese Island and the nature study programs of the early twentieth century provided two solid examples. Historically, however, reformers supportive of localized educational strategies applied the approach across a wide range of disciplines. Language arts, mathematics, geography, history, and political science were among the numerous disciplinary domains represented. Burkett and Swartzel's *Farm Arithmetic*, the reforms surrounding the "new geography," and the literary projects associated with Foxfire represented but three of the numerous disciplinary applications.⁶⁰ This study found that certain disciplines, namely geography and science subjects such as botany or horticulture, possess characteristics which were perhaps naturally fitted to localized, experiential strategies. That would do much to explain the predominance of localized geography education, which dated back at least to Herbart and Froebel as Chapter 2 demonstrated. Science, too, from nature study to outdoor education to modern place-based education, have received consistent attention. Attached to that concern, of course, were conservation and sustainability objectives. From nature study and the County Life Movement and well into the 1960s and 70s with outdoor education, this study found a perennial desire to promote stewardship sensibilities in young people attached to localized educational programs. But to return to the original critique, this study has also demonstrated that place-based education should not be regarded as an approach specific to one discipline or another. Instead, this historical exploration revealed multidisciplinary application.

⁵⁹ David Sobel, *Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms and Communities*, Nature Literary Series No. 4 (Great Barrington, MA: The Orion Society, 2004). In Sobel's definition for place-based education (see Chapter 1), he identified a broad-based multidisciplinary plan. Few scholars have moved beyond the sciences, however.

⁶⁰ Charles W. Burkett and Karl D. Swartzel, *Farm Arithmetic* (New York: Orange Judd Company, 1913), v; See Chapter 4 and Chapter 7 for more detailed analysis of the "new geography" and Foxfire, respectively.

As antecedents of the field clearly demonstrated, place-based strategies might today serve to invigorate teaching and learning across the full range of disciplinary domains. In addition to teacher education, expanding modern place-based education into a more holistic, multidisciplinary reform movement represents an important growth edge for contemporary proponents. That endeavor could be informed by and build upon historical successes.

Institutional Appetite for Place-Based Education. This study highlighted the strong appetite for rural uplift in the early part of the twentieth century, a desire which included vocal support from a popular president and federally funded research commissions. That level of institutional support, the study found, fostered the palatability of Country Life school reform. Likewise, as David Danbom suggested of the era, the diminished popularity for Country Life reform following World War I was in some ways attributable to the growing perception that food scarcity was no longer a serious domestic threat.⁶¹ But in addition to the wider social and political contexts, exploration of the County Life Movement revealed that unique local circumstances also played a significant role historically in the successes and challenges surrounding place-based initiatives. Similarly, the review of Foxfire found that Wigginton's successes in Rabun County, Georgia were very much tied to the unique administrative circumstances and school climate that he encountered at the Nacoochee School. By contrast, the sometimes less hospitable climate that Foxfire organizers confronted at Rabun County High School in the later years of the initiative presented new and unique challenges to effective implementation.⁶² Without overlooking the intricacies of the reform measures themselves and the effect of larger social and political contexts discussed above and throughout the study, the point

⁶¹ David Danbom, "Rural Education Reform and the Country Life Movement," *Agricultural History* 53, no. 2 (1979): 462-474. As indicated in Chapter 5, part of the rural reform mission was geared toward keeping farmers on the farm and improving agricultural techniques. David Danbom's critique is not a settled one, but the notion that context matters with regard to school reform remains an important consideration.

⁶² See Puckett, *Foxfire Reconsidered*.

here is simply to demonstrate that additional, ground-level circumstances, whether specific to a certain locale or individual institution, also affected the development and implementation of reforms considered over the years, not to mention the appetite for adoption. A rather commonsensical conclusion, the same is surely true for contemporary place-based efforts as well. Histories of place-based education provide important case studies that might inform modern practice in that such illustrations point to potential obstacles and opportunities in the creation and implementation of reform practices.

The Utility of Place-Based Education. The various themes and trends outlined in this chapter each represent important aspects of the contemporary field of place-based education and the range of historical precedents which came long before. It may be the case that experiences of past educators, theorists, and philosophers can inform modern theory and practice in meaningful ways. But beyond those lessons, there is yet another important insight to be gained through this extended historical review of place-based pedagogy. To return to the claim stated at the outset, that localized, experiential approaches to teaching and learning are ubiquitous to American educational history, the question that almost naturally arises is “Why?” Why is it the case that educators throughout the centuries have endeavored time after time to situate local contexts at the heart of so many of their plans for educational reform? The reoccurrence of place-based educational strategies likely suggests something important about the approach and its efficacy. To state it more plainly, one might argue that the perpetual return to the local has had a great deal to do with the fact that the approach has effectively solved essential problems in the educative process and has met the needs of a wide range of learners. Without denying the difficulties that surrounded the development and implementation of reform strategies, place-based education has represented somewhat of a commonsense approach to teaching and learning. In the first place,

place-based education has required that practitioners ground learning in the local, the home, and neighborhood. It made practical sense to take advantage of readily available materials, processes, and phenomena as stimuli for learning. Of course, closely related to the local emphasis in place-based education was the attention paid to the learner. A localized approach served valuable purposes for learners, perhaps young learners in particular, by providing opportunities for first-hand, observational, and inquiry-based experiences in contexts that were often familiar and rich with existing knowledge, understanding, and social and cultural assumptions. Such a strategy has worked to address interest, motivation, and the developmental needs of students in a surprisingly efficient manner. The student-centric dimension was not unique to place-based education, but the local emphasis often worked to engage the requirements of learning in practical ways. And lastly, this study found that place-based pedagogies have historically addressed what was perhaps a fundamental concern of all educational models, the relationship between the school and the community/society. Whether it was Pestalozzi and the poor, Tuskegee and southern blacks, or Berry and white highlanders in northwest Georgia, place-based educational approaches were often oriented, at some stage or another, toward the study or solution of community problems. Again, without denying the challenges associated with a service-oriented agenda (i.e., the political dimensions, the difficulty of producing change, etc.), localized approaches have invited stakeholders to engage, individuals who were both potential change agents and beneficiaries of change itself. Again, it seems reasonable to suggest that involving local citizens in the identification and solution of local problems represented a relatively straightforward approach to community improvement. Although the conclusion is a rather simplistic one, this study has revealed that historical and contemporary experiences with place-based pedagogies support the notion that the ubiquitous nature of the approach has been due, in

large part, to the effectiveness of such strategies and the capacity to address a range of educational problems simultaneously under one platform. To start with the local was historically, and remains, a commonsense response to the challenges associated with the development of curriculum and instruction. Given the longevity and demonstrated successes of the approach, it seems reasonable to assume that continued refinement remains a worthy endeavor for modern educators. Modern advocates of place-based education might find in appraisals of historical precedents like this one a powerful rationale to expand access to the approach to wider audiences. This study has highlighted the utility of localized pedagogies and has provided a starting point which might allow scholars associated with the contemporary field to learn from the challenges and build upon the successes of the wealth of experience contained within the long history of the approach.

Implications for Future Research

Modern place-based education is arguably in its infancy as a reform strategy. Despite the proliferation of literature in the field, place-based teaching and learning has not exactly reached a mainstream audience. If expanding the place-based educational agenda is identified as a goal there are several important directions that might prove fruitful based upon the findings of this study. In the first place, the historical consciousness of the field will not be remedied by the present study. There were undoubtedly important place-based precedents which did not find their way into this extended historical review. In addition to identifying those gaps where they may exist, future historical research would benefit from a more critical analysis. The lessons from Foxfire provided in Chapter 7 outlined a useful model for such investigations, where the peculiarities of success and failure were explored in considerable detail. In other words, and to return to Tanner's description of *processes* and *products* outlined in Chapter 1, future

explorations in to the history of place-based education might do well to emphasize the former where evidence is available.⁶³ Although continued effort to identify products will surely yield valuable insights, it is in the understanding of experiences of practice generated through a consideration of processes that that the most significant gaps lay. To follow such a program could work to deliver rich and nuanced historical case illustrations that might further inform contemporary practice.

Aside from the opportunities for continued historical research, and there are many, this study has also highlighted many critical growth areas for the modern field. Teacher education, in particular, deserves attention and seems to represent a profound difference between historical illustrations and modern place-based education. Next, the modern field would do well to better advocate for wider disciplinary appeal. Place-based education and environmental education are not interchangeable terms, even if science-related and sustainability goals dovetail nicely with localized instructional approaches. It is not entirely clear to whom this important task will fall, but it does seem critical to expansion. And finally, this study points to an important theoretical dilemma surrounding the extent to which localized instruction can address non-local learning. Historical illustrations uncovered in this study would suggest that the dichotomy is largely a false one, but modern educators will have to confront the issue directly if a more expansive agenda is desired. These several suggestions do not exhaust the full range of implications, but do nonetheless highlight critically important objectives for the future.

⁶³ Laurel Tanner, "Curriculum History and Educational Leadership," *Educational Leadership* 41, no.3 (1983): 39.