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CONCEPTS, THEORIES, & INTRODUCTIONS

Canadian Contexts: Place as Pedagogy

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Folk, Knowledge, Place

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How can place be used as a pedagogy? How can place be used to deconstruct architectural education, for example, by engaging with deeper, more meaningful contexts? This begs the question: Why do we not more deliberately teach Other architectural voices and ontologies, particularly those that draw upon and listen to Indigenous perspectives about issues such as sustainability, climate change and context? This paper questions how 'place' can be used as a transdisciplinary methodology applied to many different fields and disciplines (including architecture, design and human geography in this paper) to contend with a myriad of complex and deeply intertwined contemporary dilemmas facing students today, ranging from post-colonialism to catastrophic climate collapse using autoethnography, phenomenology, alongside other methods such as storytelling and 'spatialization'. The paper focuses on a particular assignment centered on the notion of place that is then tested and analyzed using three very different student groups at three very different Canadian university campuses. The background and context for this assignment is presented in terms of exploring and discussing a broad range of literature and theoretical texts to form a foundation for this exercise, followed by unpacking how 'place' is understood and applied to student work. A material example of a highly successful response is provided, with analysis of outcomes and approaches throughout. The goal of this paper and this ongoing project is to demonstrate how this approach and the centrality of 'place' presents a pedagogical alternative to traditional essays and assignments. This project directly draws upon ongoing work in critical pedagogy, decolonization, post-colonialism and vernacular and Indigenous design theories and practices.

Introduction

I teach place as a methodology with a clear purpose across a range of disciplines, including architecture, environmental design and human geography in Canada. This paper discusses the teaching of a pedagogy of place through one assignment in particular. This assignment becomes a vehicle for understanding and communicating how place can be used as a pedagogy to address numerous gaps in our relationships to nature, the

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environment, and to how we imagine the futurity of the built environment relative to climate change, social and spatial inequity, and a world in a state of peril. The goal of the assignment under discussion is to give students the tools and methods to approach post-colonialism, sustainability, climate change and a myriad of other systemic challenges that face them today. The assignment adheres to the belief that a knowledge-based system rooted in place can serve as a methodology to reshape how we perceive and behave (spatially) in a more holistic, reflexive and deconstructive way as a form of reparation.

These are not new ideas, and inasmuch, much of this work draws upon a new generation of Indigenous authors. To achieve my own pedagogical goals, I ask students to read a series of texts to engage the notion of place as seen from several vantage points as they concurrently discuss and apply phenomenological methods to case studies. The students explore these concepts via exercises, including an assignment I refer to as 'practices in place', which is the focus of this paper. This paper is primarily about critical pedagogy that explores the use of place and spatialized knowledge as a set of intertwined pedagogical tools positioned to counteract the combination of pervasive greenwashing and loss of emplacement (as well as fear) that haunt the imaginaries of students across Canada. The critical pedagogy is partly enacted by an assignment positioned to provoke positive reflective autoethnographic responses to place and provide a means for students to access intergenerational knowledge systems, to revive folk culture and value spatial and place-based ways of knowing that they may have never noticed.

Autoethnography and storytelling in place are essential ingredients in this assignment. Adam Grydehøj (2025) has written that "The scholarly literature rarely shows awareness that autoethnography by definition turns the researcher into the research subject" (p. 8). This realization informs my own approach and desire to take up autoethnography and place positioned in tandem as a very particular pedagogical methodology and means to revalue local vernacular 'folk' material cultural practices. My goals are to place students in a position where they might recognize their own agency within a complex interweaving of spatial, temporal, and biometric experiences framed as 'place'. In order to consider the pedagogical value of teaching place as a pedagogy, I discuss the assignment used to achieve these goals and its theoretical foundations, alongside an analysis of the results from three different Canadian universities.

Theoretical Frameworks: Indigeneity and Deconstruction

Many Indigenous scholars have proposed the necessity of a pedagogy that disassociates from the ossified methods and critiques of white critical geographers (e.g., Cannon, 2011, 2017; Miller & Nay, 2022). Cynthia Chambers (2006) writes about the possibilities of 'a curriculum of place' as a method going forward by drawing from her past and her identity as a method. Understanding the built environment as a manifestation of place requires an ontological shift in how students see themselves temporally, bearing in mind that place is both a temporal and spatial construct. This

Figure 1. Aanischaaukamikw Cree Cultural Centre (2011) designed by architect Douglas Cardinal through a series of visioning sessions and close collaboration with Elders and Rubin Rotman Architects of Montreal. (Ouje-Bougoumou, Quebec). Fralambert. (2014). Copyright: Oujé-Bougoumou en août 2014. [online image]. Wikimedia Commons.

ontological shift through the teaching of place allows a confrontation with settler colonialism, racism and other forms of architectural oppression, as articulated and expressed below:

> 'Deep time,' as an alternative ontology to crisis management [is used] to argue for the application of a broad decolonial approach in lieu of contemporary green design practices. Methodologically, this paper substantiates it claims by utilizing conventional academic 'knowledge' production, as represented in literature, references, and case studies, but also supports the expansion of knowledge through a deeper exploration of place, pattern, and time demonstrated by intermingling deep time principles with Indigenous spatial practices. (Nay, 2022, pp. 65–76)

Such an approach cannot remain abstract and generalized but must also move on to take up real life case studies to be tangible for students using a more thorough contemplation of what land and nature might mean to provide a disruptive epistemological foundation to derail how a white, Western imaginary frames and knows land as property and nature as an abundant source of raw materials waiting to be exploited. Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie (2015) explore these concepts when they write, "Relational validity prioritizes the reality that human life is connected to and dependent upon other species and the land" (p. 636). Reframing social histories through the eyes and experiences of another, including seeing the land as yet another

subject, is an important means of critically re-reading human narratives otherwise left untold or undervalued. Cynthia Chambers (2006) refers to this as a form of 'visiting' places, that has nothing to do with tourism but has everything to do with seeing and renewing relationships through a practice of 'place-making' that resituates how both place and space are conceptualized pedagogically, experientially and phenomenologically.

Another useful material example appears in Paula Madden's (2009) study of how African Nova Scotians and Mi'kmaw social histories, narratives, and ongoing racial tensions are intertwined in the fabric of the city. Madden revisits the richness of stories told in place, retelling them through multiple lenses and frameworks and thereby unearth erased narratives re-centered in memories and tales told in place as a methodology. Similarly, critical race scholars like David Goldberg (2006) and Sherene Razack (2002) have told their own stories of racial and spatial injustice to produce moments of uncomfortable, but productive reckoning with a purpose by situating narratives in space and place to deconstruct the modern notion of space and place as fixed ontological objects.

Renisa Mawani (2005) performs an analysis of the 'genealogies of the land' to unearth layers of erased narratives, bodies and spatialities. Derek Hook (2005) analyzes the site of a bloody mass shooting in a monumental space dedicated to an icon of the apartheid movement in South Africa, focusing on the haunting of figures who are ever-present by their own erasure in experiential space and place. He proposes applying new methods of place-based deconstruction to real life case studies. Hook explains how situating the uncanny presence of 'haunted' figures present in both real and imagined space in narratives can become a methodology for reckoning with regimes of hatred, racism and death. Hook (2005) states, "The uncanniness of monuments operates not only in how they evoke a sense of presence, but also, so it would seem, by the way they evoke certain kinds of absence" (p. 699). Both Mawani (2005) and Hook (2005) show how stories told in and through place are manufactured and re-manufactured and affect daily life in rituals performed and experienced as place. Scholars like Sherene Razack (2002) go further by suggesting that the liminality of place can be further deconstructed to project how the "un-mapping" of place can be done using "spatialization" while foregrounding how Indigenous epistemologies and experiential narratives can be taken up as a methodology to "denaturalize geography" by "asking how spaces have come to be" (p. 5). This can form a strategy to "dislodge naturalized racialization and spatialization processes" while revealing "the settler mythologies underpinning them" (Baloy, 2016, p. 213). Such settler narratives are manufactured by telling specific narratives though the manufacturing of place as demonstrated in settler myths.

Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015) suggests that the links between race, sovereignty, and 'white' possession are always centered on 'property'. The quintessential framing of land in the Western capitalist lens owes its legacy to Locke, Hobbes, Rousseau and the project of the Enlightenment that

Figure 2. Viking figures overlooking L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site in Newfoundland (Canada). The site, while inhabited for centuries before 'discovery', prominently features a reconstructed Viking encampment with costumed interpreters, offering visitors a glimpse into the daily life of Norse explorers who are celebrated at the site as the first Europeans to settle in North America. However, L'Anse aux Meadows was a significant location for both Norse and Indigenous peoples. While the Norse settlement, dating back to around 1000 AD, is well-known, Indigenous peoples also had a long history of using the site for at least 4,000 years prior and that story is less prominent. Dorset Paleo-Eskimo people had camps there, and evidence suggests other Indigenous groups also utilized the area, but these stories are just now becoming known and celebrated. Copyright: Photo by Eric Nay (2025).

we all live with today. Moreton-Robinson's (2015) analysis of the 'white possessive', following Cheryl Harris' (1993) foundational legal argument that 'whiteness' is itself legally a form of property, intertwines notions of property ownership, human beings as property, and dispossession from the land as part of a larger, more insidious settler colonial project that is ongoing, with the assault of the figure of the land at the epicenter of colonial dispossession and settler conquest. Patrick Wolfe (2006), too, reminds us, "Settler colonialism was foundational to modernity" (p. 394). Likewise, "the insatiable dynamic whereby settler colonialism always needs more land" (Wolfe, 2006, p. 395) is foundational to the rift between how Indigenous people and settler colonists can see the same body of land using altogether different epistemological lenses. The land remains central in discussions of Indigeneity, sovereignty and settler colonialism (and heritage too). The applications of 'spatialization' (Razack, 2002) as a methodology and the need for a pedagogy of place has been well researched and argued by these scholars and many others.

Indigenous Perspectives and Pedagogical Approaches

This pedagogical approach and this assignment operate conditionally and consciously within the space of settler colonialism and within the liminality of educational institutionalization and knowledge production regimes. They also operate within the narrow space carved out between the confines created

and reinforced by professional education paradigms, program accreditation and other applied and regulated limits. The core desire in this pedagogical approach is to shift research and analysis processes inwards to broaden human desires and needs, which will hopefully carry through later in life, potentially including architecture and planning practices as well as numerous other applications in everyday life.

The study of place, however, is not innocent and presents several problematic relationships to pedagogy, particularly when discussed by settlers, like me. These ideas and methods are discussed at length in the work of settler scholars working with Indigenous methods, including Natalie Baloy (2016), Clare Land (2015) and Margaret Kovach (2009) as well as in the work of Indigenous scholars writing about the need for alliance with settlers to pursue decolonization (Cannon, 2011). There are also significant scholars who reject the idea of alliances with settlers altogether in lieu of framing decolonization as something other than a mere 'metaphor', seeking to define an action demanding no compromises (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Teaching place, therefore, is a multi-tiered and complicated project. This is evident in the work of noted architecture, planning, and geography scholars like Christopher Alexander et al. (1977), Tim Creswell (2004) and Jane Jacobs (1961/2002), who have studied and defined place within the built environment in a very particular way. However, these texts and methods of interpreting and instrumentalizing place to serve architecture, for example, often fail to capture the much richer and deeper understandings of place needed to address the absences present in universal modernism. Remedies, when framed and discussed within an Indigenous ontological context and as defined by Indigenous authors whose knowledge systems embody more complex relationships with place, space, land, etc., will appear much more tangible to students.

For example, the cataloging by Christopher Alexander et al. (1977) of 'patterns' of human interaction across time periods and cultures seen within the built environment in the form of everyday apparitions such as a bench informs us about how ergonomics and practicality have shaped design by centering the human body and human experience over time. This simple bench has evolved over centuries, but the complexity of meanings behind everyday rituals like sitting is undervalued (Alexander et al., 1977). Likewise, Jane Jacobs' (1961/2002) paradigm-shifting work on the city helped us see how we use and share common spaces like sidewalks as spatial extensions of our homes and how common property is how we forge community and sense of belonging. Yet, even Jacobs' work can be seen to reinforce Western lenses that re-establish the centrality of regimes of property as well as class divisions as a recurrent theme utilizing white fantasies about the idealization of the American middle-class lifestyle despite the best intentions. Tim Cresswell's (2004) work, while also significant, also tends to also over-generalize and homogenize place by adhering to Western concepts such as 'typology' while fantasizing about the neo-liberalization of democratic space through the

positive forces of 'globalization' and other fantasies, while reinforcing the universalizing theme of the modern project, which has proven to be neither overly successful nor democratic (Cresswell, 2004).

However, the body of scholarship contributing to the intertwining of place and pedagogy, which is the subject of my paper, is abundant and growing. For example, education theorists like David Greenwood (2008) have looked at how place and its social and spatial aspects influence learning, while the architect Jane Rendell (2019) explores 'site writing' to reconsider the writing-subject versus site-object dichotomy. Other more experimental approaches to place can be seen in how place is addressed through the lenses of phenomenology and resistance to oppressive colonial systems of regulation and control in spatial performativity, as appears in Paoli Patelli and Giuditta Vendrame's (2018) Friction Atlas Project, which explores the often invisible 'frictions' between people, systems and urban environments by deconstructing space and place through critical cartography and human interaction with an attentiveness to modes of resistance spatial regulation and control by the state as a recurrent thesis.

Teaching place respectfully and thoroughly, which must include foregrounding Indigenous methods and perspectives, presents a moral and pedagogical challenge for all settler instructors, but one that is worthy of engaging. This challenge must be reckoned with and acknowledged fulsomely. Exposing students to and discussing texts written by Indigenous authors is highly effective for giving students access to Indigenous ways of understanding place that eliminate the abstractions of Western frameworks. It also opens up for collectively considering place as a spatio-temporal phenomenon that can be located simultaneously in the classroom; in students' non-school communities; and in the space in-between the classroom and community. Exploring the intertwining of place and pedagogy can be far more meaningful and accessible when it includes the work of Indigenous authors, who have explained the concept of place using their own narratives and lived experiences, thus delaminating the layers of abstraction often laid down by Western scholarship.

Nevertheless, it can be challenging for non-Indigenous teachers to refer to Indigenous authors and ways of understanding place. Settlers who teach and discuss place have an obligation to foreground Indigenous authors and their perspectives but must also proceed with care and humility while avoiding assuming authority over knowledge that is not theirs to disseminate or to claim. Margaret Kovach (2009) and Clare Land (2015) are amongst those who have written extensively about methods for settlers to work respectfully and effectively with Indigenous methods. Martin Cannon (2011) has written about how building settler-Indigenous alliances through pedagogy is critical to achieve decolonization.

In architecture, *Our voices, Indigeneity and architecture* (Kiddle et al., 2018) assembles a rich collection of voices, work, writing and ideas from several Indigenous architectural scholars and practitioners that adds presence

to how place, Indigeneity and the built environment currently interact in the built environment. These ideas and built artifacts actively deconstruct archaic notions, such as that cities are devoid of Indigenous presence, as Rebecca Kiddle explains:

> Capacity needs to be built and Māori need to be involved in placemaking processes if Aotearoa cities are to flourish as unique places that cater to the diverse realities of the Māori. Cities have always been Indigenous places. Hopeful and forward placemaking approaches are needed to draw new Māori maps and crate new Māori places. These approaches must be centered on participatory, co-design processes whereby Māori are acknowledged as urban experts whose values and aspirations are important for the making of successful places. (Kiddle et al., 2018, p. 58)

I tend to further ground my own research in place by including Canadian Indigenous authors like Cynthia Chambers (2006), who writes eloquently about place in her work from Lethbridge University in rural Alberta. Chambers frames her own life's embodied spatial narrative and trajectory of self as intertwined with the places she has lived and embodied in her journey from reserve to academia. Chamber's voice is particularly resonant because it is centered on a journey back and forth between colonial institutions and places that are reconciled though her own emergent sense of self and its reliance on Indigenous belief systems as a 'place'. Chambers' own subject formation results from repeatedly 'visiting' places again and again over time as she travels back and forth between her two worlds. Other similar texts include *Wisdom sits in places* (Basso, 1996). When teaching architects, I try to make as many references as possible to the words and work of Canada's most significant Indigenous modern architect, Douglas Cardinal (1989), which all add voices to shape place as a pedagogy and method of analysis. Other Indigenous voices include Taiaiake Alfred (2009) and Ailton Krenak (2024), who provide clear and accessible tools for beginning to understand Indigeneity's relationality to place within a greater context that students can apply to their own narratives and journeys.

This is, however, risky behavior that needs care. Despite the best of intentions, unless relationships to knowledge systems and spatial ontologies are entered into with the necessary respect, there is the potential for classroom discussions to result in Indigeneity and place being misinterpreted, homogenized, trivialized and ultimately devalued. If Indigenous knowledge systems are handled poorly or are provided to students who are entirely new to the subject matter, this can reinforce post- and neo-colonial tropes and ideologies while perpetuating dangerous racist mindsets, including the framing of contemporary Indigenous peoples as existing outside of time in a state of pre-industrial nature (a recurrent settler fantasy). The work of Penelope Edmonds (2010) remedies this particular fantasy in its descriptions

of how Indigeneity and urbanism are not, and have never been, unrelated; cities too must be seen as frontiers and sites of displacement and injustice. Such essentialized and embodied colonial fantasies, when perpetuated, can be seen today in how climate, community, and relationality to the earth are often framed within neo-colonial discourses using sustainability and ecological knowledge as embodied appropriated Indigenous values, for example when performed to activate settler desires to return Indigeneity to a pre-industrial state of nature.

In this way, Indigenous authors and perspectives are critical to read; to teach; and to understand. It is vital to ensure that classroom discussions and deconstruction of the idea of place are handled with cognizance of and respect for Indigenous knowledge and sovereignty by situating place in relationship to intergenerational storytelling and other ontological tools that students can access with relative ease. This pedagogy can only be effective for settler instructors like me if they tread carefully and respectfully. However, this too is fraught with complications since both Indigenous peoples and peoples who are Othered in different ways are all placed at risk. This includes those who are new to Canada and often are struggling with issues including displacement, loss of culture and the ongoing intergenerational trauma that often accompanies resettlement. The assignment and its place-based approach seeks to uncover a spatial practice that risks being overlooked; that demonstrates a relationship to biomes, nature, food, etc.; and that tells a deeper story of relationality to place, even if at a seemingly insignificant scale. It is within this pedagogical framework that Indigeneity and place are discussed and introduced.

Post-colonialism, Place and Positionality

Modern networks and systems—like food security, air quality and the futurity of work—can be seen as both reactions to and at risk from climate change and an ongoing and unfettered human desire to over-consume. These are lasting by-products of the modern project, and movements such as fair trade and green consumerism may be seen as white fantasies that serve only those in wealthy first world nations (Davidson et al., 2005). Some scholars such as Hilton (2009) and Grimes and Milgram (2001) look for a remedy in "the vibrant but unknown movements" of localized informal consumerism that exist outside of Western prototypes, but always in the shadow of an ongoing colonial project. Pedagogy of place is one such project.

Dolores Hayden's (1995) book *The power of place: Urban landscapes as public history* explores a number of complex social histories. Hayden uses urban space to deconstruct place-based paradigms by telling spatial stories to connect people's lives and livelihoods to the multitudes of urban landscapes and urban communities spread across Los Angeles. She hereby questions how to understand, preserve, and commemorate urban landscape history as an African American, Latina, or Asian-American experience and as a methodology to deconstruct Los Angeles' self-imagination.

On a more practical level, students are asked to use pedagogies of place to supersede the details and nuances that the conscious rational mind often overlooks. These assignments are situated to test how autoethnography can be applied to everyday rituals and spatial practices to critically question relationships with universal modernism, climate change and the value of regionalism and folk culture using several trans-disciplinary lenses. For architecture and design students, the contemporary built environment is re-seen critically. For human geography students, intergenerational spatial narratives told in place provide valuable assets for both adapting to change and forming productive means of resistance to the very particular threats caused by climate change.

For students of architecture, planning and design, the pedagogy of place takes on greater importance than others in many ways, allowing them to move beyond the spectral wrath of universal modernism and late capitalism that shapes our global built environment, reflecting upon more environmentally engaged practices that reckon with site, climate and context. As far back as 1976, Peter Blake (1977) begged for new voices to disrupt the canon when he wrote, "Those like Saarinen, Johnson, Rudolph, and the Detroit architect Minoru Yamasaki, who are struggling with different ways of synthesizing the three great traditions (Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright) passed on to them, are the more important men of the new generation" (420). The master narrative remains a problem, as are its 'faithful followers' as Blake discusses. A pedagogy of place can deconstruct both the modern masters and the notion of mastery altogether in a productive post-colonial turn.

The current state of modern architecture has shifted its gears back to technocratic formalism, driven in ways by a renewed adoration for placelessness and digital fabrication fueled by new developments in parametric modeling and synthetic building materials as design intention drivers (Sabin, 2019). This is problematically driven by a regressive fascination with technology as an 'innocent' ideology. All the while, current trends in historic preservation and in museum studies have paved the way for much more interpretive versions of cultural representation and 'heritage' reflected in recent UNESCO World Heritage Committee decisions and the emergence of 'outstanding universal value' in the form of 'intangible cultural heritage':

> In recent decades, there has emerged a wider legal recognition of the social role of heritage as 'living tradition'. In particular, the establishment of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO 2003) broadened the recognition of heritage beyond physical buildings, monuments and landscapes. The Convention highlighted intangible or 'living' practices of heritage such as song, dance, traditional ecological knowledge, ritual and performance. (McDermott & Craith, 2024, p. 3)

In all of this post-colonial revisionary imaginary redefining work, there remains an expressed desire to reclassify the world of objects, places and things according to some revised 'order of things' (Foucault & Frye, 1973), which requires that dominant narratives, foundational discourses, recognized power structures and colonial taxonomies be deconstructed rather than using the "narrow and specific ways" (Smith, 2012, p. 11) by which we have defined heritage in the past. The tendency to frame heritage today as an 'industry', or even to extend heritage to produce hybrid fields like 'architourism' (Lasansky & McLaren, 2004; Ockman & Frausto, 2005) defines a burgeoning architectural 'heritage industry' that eases the colonial conscience yet perpetuates colonialism in altogether new ways. The validity of learning to worship a collection of dead white men is getting more and more ridiculous with each passing year.

Assignment Outcomes and Findings

Because an ontological analysis of relationality to place is a difficult proposition for most students to grasp, an autoethnographic approach is helpful for personalizing data and analysis. Theoretically grounded placemaking and spatialized knowledge practices are analyzed (and discussed with students in class) using a pedagogical approach that prioritizes student's lived experiences. A corollary to seeing the world through students' eyes is to ponder the application of placemaking as an ontological means of dealing with fears about climate change, climate catastrophe and other issues that are often imagined as existing beyond human comprehension using the limited ontological tools at our disposal (e.g., Bendell, 2021; Ghosh, 2017).

Case study universities include OCADU, the Daniels School at the University of Toronto and Mt. Allison University. This body of student work provides the fodder for deeper analysis about how relationships with traditions, spatial practices and biomes as a research objective are formed and maintained—all foregrounded by readings to establish a base literature that interweaves human geography and place (e.g., Cresswell, 2004; Massey, 2005); architecture and urban design experientiality (e.g., Alexander et al., 1977, 2013; Mumford, 1937; Rowe & Koetter, 1975); heritage and preservation (e.g., Jacobs, 1961/2002; Mumford, 1937); critical urbanism and its relationships to capital (e.g., Harvey, 2008; Soja, 1980) as well as contemporary architectural theorists working in more slippery areas such as phenomenology (e.g., Koolhaas et al., 1998; Pallasmaa, 2024).

What follows this prompt varies somewhat by student age and program type, but also, and more importantly, by regional and cultural differences. These differences become interesting data when seeking to understand how students perceive themselves in relation to their human geographical relationships with place, while providing rich insights into the demographic shape of Canada's university students today. A recent version of the assignment prompt follows:

> In a short essay illustrated with photographs, diagrams, maps and any other additional visual data that you have either produced yourself or had a relative send you describe a 'spatial practice' that produces material evidence of a practice that demonstrates a broader cultural human-environmental relationship with the planet, a biome, and a culture of place using spatial behaviours rooted in place as evidence. Celebrations, rituals, clothing, food, farming methods and even forms of housing may be good places to begin. Describing and theorizing a spatial practice embedded in place is the objective. (Nay, 2024)

At the University of Toronto in ARC3319 Fall 2020, an advanced graduate seminar in architecture history and theory focused on space and place with 16 enrolled students, consisting mostly of third-year Master of Architecture students, one PhD candidate in architectural history, and one second-year graduate student studying urban planning. Students were a mix of Canadian-born students from across all provinces and cultures, multiple international students, and a few Torontonians. The University of Toronto is Canada's top ranked tier-one research institution and attracts students from across the globe. "The University of Toronto is ranked first in Canada and among the top 20 universities in the world across all five broad subject areas tracked by the QS World University Rankings by Subject 2025" (Kalvapalle, 2025).

At Mt Allison University, GENV1201 Fall 2024 is a broad, general studies elective introducing human geography at the first-year undergraduate level taught online with more than 100 students representing nearly every discipline offered on campus, from music to aeronautics, framed within the collegiality and intimacy of a small liberal arts university located on a rural campus in New Brunswick. Most students were from small rural coastal communities nearby, but some were international students (Africa, India and China) and some others hailed from one of Canada's major urban centers (Calgary, Toronto, Vancouver). "Nearly 40 per cent of the 2,300 students at Mount Allison are New Brunswick locals, while the rest come from across Canada and 85 countries around the world" (McClean's, 2025). Mt. Allison University is regularly recognized as Canada's top-ranked primarily undergraduate university (McClean's, 2025).

At OCAD University, VISD3008 Winter 2025 is a 75-person lecture/seminar course offered annually for third-year students across art and design disciplines, teaching sustainable design theories and practices. OCADU is Canada's largest and oldest art and design university and teaches a pedagogy based in using a mostly hands-on approach through practical studios supported by lecture courses. Most students are from the massive and sprawling Toronto area with substantial numbers of international students

attracted to OCADU's urban setting. Persian and Chinese students form the largest ethnic groups among students, but students are from across the globe, as would be expected in a city of Toronto's caliber.

Further Analysis and Reflection

What became obvious, using the data formed by categorizing and analyzing the subjects students chose to write about for their practices in place assignment, was that place was more important to them than one may have thought, and that their identities were heavily influenced by geographical relationships with place, even if not consciously acknowledged. Indeed, human geographical relationships were as important or more important to them were nationality, race, religion and other tools for their constructions of self. These relationships with place were often shaped by their own personal narratives and trajectories, and for second-generation immigrant students, it was often their parents' narratives that they valued, in lieu of having faced similar struggles of their own. Autoethnographic methods proved to be very useful for students and revealed how much place or diasporic relationships with place shaped their identities, ontological relationships with geography, and daily lives.

At the University of Toronto in ARC3319 Fall 2020, students read more complex readings (e.g., Harvey, 2008; Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1980) and undertook and analyzed more sophisticated case studies that did not shy from tough ussies like racism, classism and even violence. These students often chose topics that placed them within larger more controversial discussions, often at a global scale, or framed by geopolitics and current events. Amongst the more memorable case studies chosen were the revival of abandoned cobalt mines in northern Ontario; Kurdish villages on the Turkish-Iraqi border wiped out as the result of recent dam construction; the remains of an abandoned residential school in Alberta; and others in the same realm of the conflation of geopolitics and identity formation.

At Mt Allison University GENV1201 Fall 2024, undergraduates took a much more focused interpretation of spatial practices and place. Student projects focused less on the intergenerational trauma and geopolitical intrigue that had appealed to the graduate students and more on gentler memories tied to growing up in rural coastal communities where relationships with land, sea, food and community framed their perceptions at a very local scale. Cultivating food, canning, fishing, hunting and getting around on boats and living on the ocean formed most of their case studies. A deep understanding of the cycles of nature and climate emerged with an often more mature and resilient attitude towards climate change. Some place-based practices, particularly amongst those who were from Indigenous communities, included statements about respecting the land and nature as belief systems.

At OCAD University VISD3008 Winter 2025, the results were mixed but also revealing. OCADU presents a very different teaching and learning context. On the one hand, Toronto is a global city and a large class like this one provides a unique glimpse into its 'cultural mosaic'. Most students are

themselves the children of recent immigrants who have maintained many of their cultural practices, as is the goal of the Canadian Charter of Rights. Many live in established and prosperous ethnic pockets north of the city where it is entirely possible to maintain one's Persian identity, for example, without sacrifice. Inasmuch, case studies like those of Mt. Allsion students, were often situated in gardening, food and celebrations, but very differently were often framed as diasporic practices. For example, how does one use plants, interior paint colors and balcony spaces to bring a transnational spatial practice from one context to another despite the lack of climatic 'fit'? The case studies presented were mostly focused on such spatial diasporas and modes of adaptation that highlighted Toronto's ongoing housing crisis and its failure to support newcomers when placed in modern apartment blocks.

Seeking out and teaching forms of place-based resistance and local knowledge systems as a pedagogy continues to evolve, and this project reflects how these efforts have produced results in a series of different classroom settings across Canada. However, I still worry that these courses have all been framed within the same hegemonic colonial construction as such courses always have been. As a result, I have spent the past several years honing methods that place students in control of their own narratives. Antonio Gramsci's (Gramsci et al., 1971) hegemonic system, like modern architecture's particular version of universal modernism, depended upon the omnipotence and submission of individual will for the greater common good, which relied on education as a method to achieve absolute compliance. Gramsci, by way of Marx, proclaimed that civil society operated though social classes, which needed to be empowered to maintain hegemony, while ruling the political and economic landscape simultaneously. Educational regimes are the platforms on which hegemony is most clearly shared and facilitated within civil society. Such regimes are particularly apparent in architectural education, as I and many others have written about extensively (e.g., Gürel & Anthony, 2006; Nay, 2022, p. 2018, 2024).

A central tenet of this project is that the expansion of autoethnographic critical methods also includes reading and listening to Other voices who have been marginalized and made invisible within conventional pedagogy and practice. This project suggests that one truly universal methodology to achieve the goals of disrupting universal modernism and potentially save the planet might begin by teaching students about their own often neglected narratives told in place that may, in turn, create revivals of place-based knowledge systems and practices that just need to be re-seen and re-valued by a new generation.

An example of a student project follows. This example belongs to a first-year undergraduate student at Mt. Allison University who carefully describes their relationship to their place, their history and their biome. They use their relationship with nature and the land to explore the concept of place as knowledge, taking Port au Choix, Newfoundland as a case study. The remoteness and isolation of Port au Choix is framed as a gift rather than a

Figure 3. "Port au Choix, Newfoundland, Canada" Copyright: Adavyd, 2018. From Wikimedia Commons.

hindrance in their work. For context, Port au Choix was incorporated as a town in 1966 and today has a population of less than 1000. It is situated in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador on the Atlantic coast of Canada. Port au Choix is estimated to have been inhabited for more than 6000 years. Its rich natural resources have drawn fishermen and hunters for millennia. Diverse First Nation cultures (Maritime Archaic; Dorset Paleo Inuit; Groswater Paleo Inuit; and more recent groups including the Cow Head, Beaches, and Little Passage complexes) have inhabited the area where the town is now identified and located, with extensive remains of these cultures still very much present (Whelan, 2018). An excerpt from this student's project follows:

> My family and I are from a small outport town on the Northwest coast of Newfoundland called Port au Choix. This town has a population of about 800 people (Canada census data, 2016), and it is not easily connected to any major population hub, town or city. Because of its isolation, our town is very self-sufficient. One thing that is particular to Port au Choix is its climate. The average temperature is below 5°C for 6 months of the year, and below 0°C 4 months of the year, not including windchill (NOAA)... Because of this unique climate, we have a unique relationship with our climate. A lot of our practices are formed around the effects of nature, rather than controlling nature. Sustenance is built around variability, low waste production, and vastly changing the habits of the town between seasons... A lot of our foodways are based on

> Indigenous knowledge... Construction takes on ways of living in respect with nature.... Seasonality is hugely important to the way we lead our lives. When the winter comes, the Labrador current brings ice floes that prevent travel by boat, and storms can make the one road to our town inaccessible.

Conclusion

Reform and resistance can manifest themselves in numerous ways. Teaching 'place' provides an opening for so many valuable discussions to enter the space of the classroom and to challenge the sanctity of the student essay and other conventional deliverables. Indigenous voices can help disrupt the modern canon, using notions of place to deconstruct dominant colonial voices and practices. This can actively engage students in their own spatial narratives and ways of being, regardless of who they are or where they come from. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) states, "The critique of Western history argues that history is a modernist project which has developed alongside imperial beliefs about the Other" (p. 31). Thinking though place helps deconstruct ossified systems of authority and allows students to regain agency. This sense of agency and belonging is further reinforced when its advocates include a broad range of voices and perspectives when seen in conversation with one another, which is the ultimate pedagogical goal of this assignment and this approach.

It is the intention of this paper and the author to provide a framework and a case study for how others might incorporate and expand upon the use of place as a pedagogy. However, what this paper suggests is that a pedagogy of place can potentially push the place-pedagogy relationship further to address the continuum and remedy fissures that exist between the academic sites of learning and the communities that students are part to demystify the educational process and the role of the university in the ongoing works towards decolonization underway in Canada and elsewhere.

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