Mindful Place-Based Education: Mapping the Literature

S. Anthony Deringer

Abstract
Place-based education and mindfulness are not new concepts, but the idea of combining the two bodies of work to explore what mindful place-based education might look like may provide a useful new perspective. The purpose of the literature review is to take place-based pedagogical methods and examine how mindfulness might influence the experience of educators engaged in place-based teaching. In this literature review, I examine the constructs of place-based education and sociocognitive mindfulness with special attention to literature that offers insight about possible overlap between the two constructs. I examine methodological choices and findings of foundational research describing both constructs. This literature review found that place-based education and mindfulness are closely linked, and that a mindful place-based pedagogy may help teachers and students experience place in a deeper way and think more critically about the societal norms and power structures that surround them. Outdoor educators should use mindful place-based education to help deepen student and teacher experiences of place with the intent of encouraging students to critically examine power structures and strive for deeper learning experiences.

Keywords
place-based education, mindfulness, mindful place-based education, and mindfulness and place.

Over the past decade, I have had the good fortune of spending hundreds of nights in the wilderness with groups of students as an outdoor educator. During these experiences, I often see students engaged in learning, pushing their personal limits,

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and overcoming challenges. The most rewarding part of my job is watching students learn through real-life experiences in outdoor places. Listening to students relating anecdotes in outdoor settings, I have formed the belief that students accomplish some of their most profound learning when they are most closely connected with places. This article is an exploration of literature that will aide educators in helping their students experience place more deeply through incorporating the practice of mindfulness. I intend to develop a theoretical foundation for mindful place-based pedagogy by mapping the literature of both mindfulness and place-based education (PBE). In this article, I (a) establish a need for mindful place-based pedagogy, (b) outline previous research done in PBE and in mindfulness, and (c) suggest areas of overlap between PBE and mindfulness and discuss how mindfulness might enhance place-based pedagogy.

Over the past several decades, PBE has become increasingly popular and is now practiced in charter schools, private schools, and even some public school classrooms in the United States and other countries around the world (Molyneux & Tyler, 2014). In recent years, the literature base has grown substantially with the publication of scholarly papers and academic books on the topic (Greenwood, 2013; Smith & Sobel, 2014; Sobel, 2004). The recent scholarly activity surrounding PBE is, in part, a response to weaknesses in the U.S. school system. The increase of standardized testing and standardized curriculum has removed many of the nuances of place from the educational process and has decontextualized learning for many students and created an urgent need for schools to consider the importance of community, and the construct of place, within education (Gruenewald & Smith, 2014). The U.S. school system has made incremental change that emphasizes efficient production of economic products—good workers, over personal enrichment and connection with lived experience. This system, based on standardized curricula, has also not sufficiently considered the dehumanizing and colonizing implications of the banking model (Freire, 1970) of education which is the preferred delivery method for schools trying to improve their standardized test scores. PBE builds on the foundation of other progressive pedagogies by rooting a dynamic learning process in the context of the local community (Sobel, 2004). In addition to responding to weaknesses in the school system, PBE also offers an important critique of imperialistic, neoliberal perceptions of colonization in the United States and other countries that displaced native people (Furman & Gruenewald, 2004). PBE helps students better contextualize their experiences and solve real-world problems affecting their own communities.

Mindfulness, according to Ellen Langer, is the process of drawing novel distinctions that improve a person’s sensitivity to context, perspective, and ability to control aspects of life (Langer, 2000). PBE is rooted in the context of places. A person’s experience of place is likely to be enhanced by an improved sensitivity to context, thus there is a need to examine the two concepts and look for areas of commonality or overlap. Mapping this literature will allow the examination of research that has been done on PBE and mindfulness with special attention to areas of overlap, and with the intent of understanding how mindful PBE might enhance student experiences of place.
An initial scan of the literature was conducted, and the constructs of PBE and socio-cognitive mindfulness without the use of mediation were chosen. The choice to use these constructs, as opposed to other constructs such as meditative mindfulness, will be discussed in more detail later in this article. After choosing the constructs, a deeper scan of the literature was conducted using electronic databases, and literature was chosen based on rigor and contribution to the topic, as described in Machi and McEvoy (2016). Search terms for this article included the following: place-based education, place-consciousness, place-orientation, outdoor education, environmental education and place, mindfulness, mindfulness in education, and mindfulness and place.

**PBE**

The term *place-based education* may be fairly new, but the philosophical underpinnings of PBE are not, they come from thinkers like John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Gregory Smith, David Sobel, and David Gruenewald (Smith, 2002; Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000). Dewey advocated for many of the same educational philosophies that are the foundation of PBE. For example, Dewey (1897) believed that education and the experience of living were not separate, “...education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living” (p. 1), an idea he later discussed at length in his book, *Experience and Education* in 1938. Freire (1970) emphasized a problem-posing form of education that has also been a foundation in development of PBE. Freire argues that students learn best, and have the most humanizing experiences when their learning is facilitated using a series of problems posed by the teacher.

Gruenewald (2003b) said, “place-conscious education, therefore, aims to work against the isolation of schooling’s discourses and practices from the living world outside the increasingly placeless institution of schooling” (p. 620). The belief that the community should not stop at the walls of the schoolhouse, and that pedagogy should be rooted in the experience of solving local problems is a common idea throughout PBE literature (Gruenewald, 2003b; Sobel, 2004). Aside from its emphasis on the incorporation of community, PBE can be difficult to define because of its adaptability within different locales (Smith, 2002). Smith (2002) identified five thematic patterns of PBE that can be adapted to different settings: (a) cultural studies, (b) nature studies, (c) real-world problem solving, (d) internships and entrepreneurial opportunities, and (e) induction into community processes (pp. 587-590). These themes provide a framework for understanding PBE even as it transforms to meet the needs of diverse communities. David Sobel (2004) attempted to define PBE more directly:

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. (p. 4)

Sobel and Smith both leave their definitions of PBE necessarily broad because of the highly variable ways in which PBE can be applied. A definition of PBE must be adaptable enough to fit any community but specific enough to have meaning.
Themes of PBE Programs

**Critical thinking and problem-posing education.** Part of understanding place deeply involves the ability to think critically about one’s own situation (Azano, 2011). As students consider their homes and communities, homogeneous experiences from their family’s traditions and cultures may begin to construct inaccurate perceptions of place (Azano, 2011). PBE urges students to think critically about their places and emphasizes the “local diversity” of a place (Gruenewald & Smith, 2014, p. xxi). Instead of thinking only about familiar aspects of their place, PBE challenges students to think critically about their places and consider the diversity of their place and the people within it. Where PBE is well established, students are challenged to inquire into local concerns, and engage to solve real community problems.

**Engagement through community connection.** Through the use of familiar information, teachers have the opportunity to make complex information more accessible to students (Azano, 2011). One teacher found he was able to activate prior knowledge to serve as hooks for students as they encountered less familiar curricular texts (Azano, 2011). A teacher can use cultural knowledge, held by the community, to make new information more accessible for students. PBE also emphasizes the engagement of the community through community and school partnerships.

**Environmental justice.** Environmental justice has a wide range of meanings (Schlosberg, 2013); however, this article is primarily concerned with the use of the term as it pertains to fair treatment of people and places as society attempts to mitigate further loss and accept the burden of environmental degradation that has already occurred (Rhodes, 2005). It is difficult to contemplate place without including the environment and discussing the implications of the creation of place on the natural environment. A more intimate connection with the local environment creates a heightened awareness of environmental issues (Gruenewald, 2003b; Mayer, Frantz, Bruehlman-Senecal, & Dolliver, 2009). Gruenewald (2003b) said, “...places such as ecosystems, oak trees, and wilderness have other qualities that transcend the often place-destructive purposes of human beings” (p. 626). When students learn about constructing their places and take responsibility as place-makers, they are able to connect place-making with environmental responsibility (Gruenewald, 2003b). Knapp suggests that educators use Aldo Leopold’s (1949) ideas about knowing nature to help teach students to “read the book of nature and culture” (Knapp, 2005, p. 281). Knapp suggests that by learning from Leopold, educators can lead students to a clearer and more holistic understanding of place.

**Social justice.** PBE is, in many ways, a social justice movement. The problem-posing format of PBE allows students to question authority and construct their own realities. Gruenewald and Smith (2014) said, “place-based education in our minds is something more than a curricular reform, another means to address the issues of equity and excellence that dominate discourse about American schooling” (p. 345). PBE aims to
increase the interest of the community on both biological diversity and cultural diversity (Furman & Gruenewald, 2004). PBE is an opportunity for formal education to create a more humanizing and generative society through identifying injustices and promoting compassion at a local level. PBE draws much of its social justice emphasis from work done in critical pedagogy.

David Gruenewald (2003b) established PBE’s connection to critical pedagogy in his article “The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place.” He posits that PBE and critical pedagogy are mutually supportive and argues for a conscious synthesis of the two (Gruenewald, 2003a). Critical pedagogy is primarily concerned with the power structures surrounding education. It examines schooling in historical and social contexts, in terms of class divisions, and in terms of the capitalist society in which it exists in America. Critical pedagogy focuses on disrupting the status quo and problematizes the acceptance of maxims that perpetuate injustice. McLaren (1989) argued that the current school system is designed to produce “compliant, productive and patriotic workers” (p. 187). If the school system is allowed to be little more than a cog in the wheel of neoconservative capitalism, the system will have little incentive to listen to the voices and stories of those do not fit the neoconservative narrative. Within the neoconservative narrative, those who are not equipped to succeed academically or economically are simply not putting forth the effort required to succeed at the same level as those who are successful. The false assumption that success is directly related to the amount of effort put forth does not recognize the significant disadvantages that some students and their communities experience. Critical pedagogy questions assumptions of the educational system and rejects a blanket value system that empowers some and marginalizes others. Critical pedagogy is a central theme for many PBE programs, and is one of the foundations on which PBE theory has been built.

**Outdoor PBE**

Outdoor education is a broad term that describes a method of learning that is experiential, occurs in the outdoors, requires the use of all senses and domains, is based on interdisciplinary curriculum matter, and is a matter of relationships involving people and natural resources (Priest, 1986). As society becomes increasingly urban and globalized, outdoor educators have begun to recognize the importance of grounding lessons and experiences in the context of their places (Mannion & Lynch, 2016). Current outdoor educators have often valued experiences over places, yet the primary lens of experience is the place in which the experience occurs (Wattchow & Brown, 2011). Grounding outdoor education experiences in place can have a variety of benefits for the student: (a) a deeper connection with the community, (b) higher academic performance, and (c) deeper connection with other students (Leather & Nicholls, 2016). Outdoor education is already heavily reliant on place as classroom, instructor, and conduit for learning. Introducing outdoor PBE is a natural step in formalizing a pedagogy of place within outdoor education. Outdoor PBE deepens student relationships with places and enhances outdoor learning experiences (Leather & Nicholls, 2016). Experiences within outdoor education that do not value the context of the places in
which they occur miss an opportunity to provide deeper pedagogical experiences. Outdoor education relies on sensory experiences within communities and in outdoor spaces, thus outdoor education is uniquely fit to be seen through the lens of a pedagogy of place (Wattchow & Brown, 2011).

### Mindfulness

The roots of the study of mindfulness can be traced back to Buddhist psychology, elements of Greek philosophy, phenomenology, existentialism, transcendentalism, and humanism (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007). Current literature divides the construct of mindfulness into two groups: (a) meditative mindfulness, sometimes referred to as an eastern approach, that is focused on awareness of the present moment and calmness (Kabat-Zinn, 1994), and (b) sociocognitive mindfulness, sometimes referred to as a western approach, achieved without meditation and focused on the drawing of novel distinctions (Langer, 2016). This literature review will focus on sociocognitive mindfulness, achieved without meditation, with special attention paid to mindfulness as it pertains to education and potential areas of overlap with PBE. The choice to review literature concerned with the construct of mindfulness without meditation, instead of meditative mindfulness, was made for two reasons: (a) to broaden the application of the research to teachers, students, and organizations that may prefer to practice mindfulness without meditation, and (b) to capitalize on existing research examining the link between sociocognitive mindfulness, which is rooted in psychology, and education (Ie, Ngnoumen, & Langer, 2014). Although this intentional narrowing of the term mindfulness disregards large bodies of high-quality research on other types of mindfulness, it allows for less ambiguous interpretations of the work in this literature review.

Langer (2000) defined mindfulness as, “the simple act of drawing novel distinctions” (p. 220). In the practice of mindfulness, novel distinctions that are drawn do not need to be important distinctions; they can be trivial distinctions as long as they are new to the viewer (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000). Many studies describe mindfulness by juxtaposing a description of mindlessness (Frauman, 2010; Langer, 2000; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000). Langer (1992) described mindfulness and mindlessness as, “A state of conscious awareness in which the individual is implicitly aware of the context and content of information” (p. 289). This article will focus on mindfulness as it applies to two themes that I suspect may contribute to place-based pedagogies, or may have overlap with place-based or place conscious philosophies: (a) mindfulness and learning, and (b) mindfulness and social and environmental justice.

### Themes of Mindfulness

**Mindfulness and learning.** A large body of research exists concerning mindfulness and learning (Langer, 2016; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000; Langer & Piper, 1987). Several studies, discussed below, suggest that many positive effects of mindfulness exist within education, such as increased creativity and higher levels of student engagement.
Mindful teaching as problem posing. Though mindfulness research rarely uses terms such as inquiry-based, problem-posing, or problem-based to describe learning strategies, there is a clear connection between Freire’s problem-posing pedagogy and the suggestions that mindfulness researchers make for education. Langer and Piper (1987) suggested that mindlessness may limit creative thinking, but problem-posing situations that leave room for participants to cocreate knowledge, or draw novel distinctions, may lead to creativity. This learning format is similar to the problem-posing education adopted by place-based educators. Outdoor educators should challenge themselves to cocreate trip plans and menus with students, and in some cases, educators should withhold expert opinions and pose problems. A mindful problem-posing pedagogy can flatten the hierarchy of outdoor education and allow students to feel empowered.

Engaging and meaningful. Some research suggests that mindfulness and meaningfulness are connected. Lieberman and Langer (1997) examined the learning of students who were asked to memorize information compared with students who were asked to make information meaningful. The group that was asked to make information meaningful was able to better utilize the information and use it in more creative ways than the memorization group (Lieberman & Langer, 1997). Being mindful of what is meaningful to students helps students to learn subject matter with greater depth and intensity. Mindfulness and PBE share the goal, and in many cases the outcome, of providing engaging learning experiences for students.

Mindfulness and social and environmental justice. Mindlessness is often characterized as disengagement from one’s surroundings (Langer, 1989; Moscardo, 1999). When visitors to recreation areas are mindful and engage in their experience, they may be likely to partner with resource managers in caring for the environment, engaging in efforts such as giving money or joining a “friends of the parks” group (Frauman & Norman, 2004, p. 388). Although it seems intuitive that people who are mindfully connecting with the environment would be more likely to contribute to conservation or environmental justice efforts, the research base for this topic is small.

One of the primary distinctions between mindfulness and mindlessness is rejecting prescribed societal categories in favor of a willingness to constantly construct and evaluate categories on an individual level (Langer, 1992). Critique of societally imposed categories and assumptions is a first step toward promoting a more socially and environmentally just society. Like PBE, mindfulness seeks to promote critical thinking about societal norms and hearing the voices of those who are not included in the dominant societal conversation. Outdoor educators often have the benefit of being removed from society during learning experiences. Wilderness can provide insulation from societal oppression and offer the chance for groups to think critically about social constructs that negatively impact some students. This unique situation lends itself to the possibility of leaving behind preassigned social roles and creating freshly equitable learning experiences for marginalized students.
Review of Pertinent Research

In an effort to better understand the literature base for PBE and mindfulness, this literature review will analyze research in both areas and the methodological choices made by the researchers through the use of charts. I have chosen to analyze place-based research that has been widely cited, that has helped establish a path forward for place-base education research, and that most closely relates to mindfulness. The selected mindfulness literature is work that has been done in sociocognitive mindfulness without the use of meditation.

PBE Research

I have included foundational work that has helped establish PBE as a valuable pedagogical tool (see Figure 1).

As I considered this research, one of my primary objectives was to contribute to building this forward path in PBE. Place-based educators are beyond defining the term; it is time to begin to imagine how practitioners can best weave place-based principles into their work. Considering mindfulness as a tool for improving place-based pedagogies is my attempt at contributing to the progress of PBE.

Mindfulness Research

You will likely note that many of the selections below were authored or coauthored by Ellen Langer; as I mentioned earlier in this article, I chose to narrow the definition of mindfulness to make the work more digestible. I attempted to find as much variety as possible when looking for the most impactful work done on mindfulness. Langer and her associates have done a great deal to advance the field of sociocognitive mindfulness without the use of meditation and it is very difficult to discuss this particular type of mindfulness in any great depth without heavily relying on their work (see Figure 2).

The table for mindfulness research above shows some of the most formative and widely cited work on mindfulness, as it is defined in this article. The works chosen above were chosen to construct an understanding of mindfulness as it may relate to PBE.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this article, I have attempted to establish a need for place-based pedagogy and outlined previous work done in PBE and mindfulness. I will now suggest areas of overlap between PBE and mindfulness and discuss how mindfulness might enhance place-based pedagogy. An examination of the literature surrounding PBE and mindfulness suggests that the two concepts are closely linked. Some areas of significant overlap between PBE literature and mindfulness literature are: an emphasis on social justice, engagement, and problem-posing pedagogies (see Figure 3).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author and Year</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Brief Description of Research</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gruenewald (2003a)</td>
<td>Theoretical</td>
<td>Provides a theoretical rational for place-conscious education.</td>
<td>Place-based education should include examining power relationships, appreciating diversity, and attending to the health of the environment and people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gruenewald (2003b)</td>
<td>Theoretical</td>
<td>Discussion of Critical Pedagogy of Place</td>
<td>Critical place-based pedagogies can help contextualize and humanize education as a decolonizing agent within society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennings, N., Swidler, S., &amp; Koliba, C. (2005)</td>
<td>Mixed Methods</td>
<td>Researchers interviewed and surveyed teachers about their thoughts on conflict between standards and place-based teaching practices.</td>
<td>According to teachers in Vermont, place-based education and standard reforms may not be as conflicting as some place-based researchers have suggested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knapp, C. E. (2005)</td>
<td>Theoretical</td>
<td>Knapp defines place-based education and environmental education and discuss the implication of Aldo Leopold’s work.</td>
<td>Knapp posits that place-based education, if land ethics are valued, can lead to a greater ethic of conservation and realize conservation goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howley, A., Howley, M., Camper, C., &amp; Perko, H. (2011)</td>
<td>Qualitative Case Study</td>
<td>Examined place-based education teaching practices.</td>
<td>The study revealed a connection between a variety of supports and the success of place-based curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powers, A. L. (2004)</td>
<td>Mixed Methods – primarily relying on qualitative research</td>
<td>Powers looked at 4 programs and tried to understand what strengths were common among programs.</td>
<td>Identified 4 areas of strength from 4 place based programs: 1) Effective start-up approaches; 2) Create teacher, administrator and community buy-in; 3) Partnerships and collaboration; 4) Communication.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
**Smith, G. (2002)**  
Theoretical with minor qualitative  
This theoretical piece was a landmark piece for place-based education; it was the first place-based education piece published in a major educational journal.  
In this article, Smith outlines 5 common themes of place-based education: real world problem solving; nature studies; introduction to the community process; internship and entrepreneurial opportunities; and cultural studies.

**Smith, G. A. (2007)**  
Theoretical with minor qualitative  
This article recounts the history of place-based education, talks about different facets of place-based education, and argues that it can be a decolonizing force in schooling to re-inhabit our places.  
Smith argues that place is an aid to social justice and argues for a shift in pedagogical practice towards meaningful student involvement.

**Sobel, D. (2004)**  
Theoretical  
This early article helped further define place-based education and show several examples of the possibilities of connecting the classroom to the community.  
This article argues for the value of connecting the classroom and the community.

**Figure 1.** A précis of place-based methodologies.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author and Year</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Brief Description of Research</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brown, K. W., Ryan, R. M., &amp; Creswell, J. D. (2007)</td>
<td>Theoretical</td>
<td>Authors compare mindfulness to other established theories.</td>
<td>Mindfulness is a powerful subject that needs more research to be fully understood. Mindfulness may be a way to understand more about humanity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frauman, E. (2010)</td>
<td>Theoretical</td>
<td>Elements of mindfulness were adapted to create a mindfulness model for an outdoor education setting.</td>
<td>Mindfulness in outdoor settings may help retain students better and help them learn more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frauman, E., &amp; Norman, W. C. (2004)</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>In an attempt to better understand how the construct of mindfulness might apply to an outdoor setting.</td>
<td>The study found that the more mindful a person was, the more likely they were to participate in park services and nature oriented activities. The authors concluded that these findings might be helpful in engaging visitors at other parks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant, A. M., Langer, E. J., Falk, E., &amp; Capodilupo, C. (2004)</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>This study looked at the effect of drawing as a mindfulness treatment.</td>
<td>The authors found that mindfulness is related to perceived competence and self-worth, and that drawing is a means for increasing mindfulness. They also found that when people are hesitant to engage in mindful creativity, the instruction to draw distinctions is sufficient to initiate the mindful process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langer, E. J. (1992)</td>
<td>Summary of several quantitative studies; primarily a theoretical piece.</td>
<td>This study sought to bring together findings from several studies from Langer and others to look at the importance of mindfulness in cognitive function. They found that natural limitations can be more adequately described as self-imposed restrictions.</td>
<td>(continued)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Implications</td>
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<tr>
<td>Langer, E. J. (2000)</td>
<td>Theoretical</td>
<td>Langer considers the mindlessness of our current understanding of learning. She considers different assumptions of learning and offers suggestions of overcoming false assumptions.</td>
<td>It is important to be actively drawing distinctions and noticing new things as we learn. This will help learners to avoid accepting assumptions that may be incorrect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langer, E. J., Cohen, M., &amp; Djikic, M. (2012)</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>This study tested the hypothesis that mindfulness is (a) perceived and preferred by children; and (b) has positive effects on them.</td>
<td>Langer et al. found that children preferred interacting with mindful adults and devalued themselves after interacting with mindless adults. The authors discuss the implications of mindless adults interacting with children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langer, E. J., &amp; Piper, A. I. (1987)</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>This study examined the creativity of participants based on the circumstance of what they were asked to do. One group was told, unconditionally, what an object was. The second group was told, conditionally, what an object may be. The creativity of both groups was examined.</td>
<td>The findings of this study showed that groups who were given conditional information were much more likely to be creative with the answers they provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moscardo, G. (1996)</td>
<td>Theoretical</td>
<td>This article attempts to outline a design for mindful tourism at heritage sites. The article is based on work from many different areas including mindfulness.</td>
<td>The authors argue that mindfulness can be used to enhance the quality of visitor experiences and create a sustainable link between tourism and built heritage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2.** A précis of mindfulness methodologies.
Perhaps the most important area of overlap is the use of problem-posing pedagogy to engage learners. Established strategies for promoting mindful critical thinking through the use of problem-posing pedagogies may increase the value of place-based lessons to learners in the same way that mindfulness studies have shown improvements through the use of these strategies. If teachers involved in PBE can use elements of mindfulness to help them be more attentive to their places, they may be able to pose more authentic problems for their students. Teachers may be able to have deeper experiences of their places by engaging in mindful practices, and if they do, authentic problem-posing place-based lessons should be easier to identify and plan.

Mindfulness literature may also help place-based educators expand their notion of social justice to include encouraging students to make an existential shift in the way that they accept societal norms. The concept of mindfulness may be able to strengthen PBE by challenging students and teachers to approach their communities with greater sensitivity and openness to new information. A promising advantage of mindful PBE is the possibility of helping teachers and students become more critical of the power structures that surround them. Outdoor educators may be able to use mindfulness to help their students examine societal and environmental norms while they enjoy insulation from those norms though the use of wilderness. The combination of these ideas may lead to a more powerful, and more tangible recognition of the need for environmental justice. Alternatively, the combination of these ideas may be intimidating or overwhelming for educators. Mindful-place based education may be disregarded as another “thing” that is only marginally understood and thus not very useful. I am sympathetic to this perspective, however, though what has been suggested in this article is a complex combination

![Figure 3. Mindful Place-based Education.](image)

*Note. PBE = place-based education.*
of ideas, the adjustments to practice are likely small and simple to implement. Future work will examine these ideas as they might, and likely already do, exist in practice.

In my role as an outdoor educator, I am excited by the promising pedagogical combination of mindfulness and PBE. As Wattchow and Brown (2011) suggested, outdoor educators must be present in our places, and not privilege experiences over the places in which the experiences occur. When outdoor educators take a group of students from the south to canoe one of the beautiful desert rivers of the western United States, mindful PBE can help students and teachers draw novel distinctions that create deeper experiences of the chosen desert river. This does not discount the value of the experience, but it does raise the value of the place. The use of mindful PBE may result in a strengthened pedagogy that is more equipped to fulfill the needs of local communities and contextualize education for students in a rapidly globalizing educational system. Based on this literature review, I have initiated research in which I plan to study mindful PBE in practice and learn more about what this potentially powerful pedagogical strategy might be able to offer teachers and students in traditional school settings and in outdoor learning environments.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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