Making Meaning of Place: Facilitating Ecological Place-based Experiences with Youth

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By Pia Houseal

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This Dissertation for the Doctor of Social Work Degree by

Pia K. Houseal

has been approved on behalf of the

Graduate School by

Dissertation Committee:

(signatures on file)

_____Heather Girvin_____
Committee Chair

_____Marc Felizzi_____
Committee Member

_____Juliana Svistova_____
Committee Member

                                        Date: March 27, 2018

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to those who guide youth into nature and introduce them to a way of life, a tool for emotional and physical health, and a love for the natural world.

It is also dedicated to the youth who inspire us to do this work…We need more of all of you out there in the wild!

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EXPERIENCES WITH YOUTH

By

Pia K. Houseal

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Millersville University

Directed by Dr. Heather Girvin

While there is evidence for strong outcomes for youth who engage in ecological place-based experiences, there are still limitations to implementation of these experiences in school-based programs in this country, as well as limited research on the role of the facilitator in these experiences.

This qualitative research study examines the role of facilitators in ecological place-based learning experiences with youth. The research study included two phases and was conducted via walking interviews with a photography elicitation component in phase I in Finland (six participants) and interviews with a photography elicitation component in phase II in the United States (3 participants). Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a constructivist grounded theorist approach. An organizing framework emerged from this research, Facilitating EPBL (ecological place-based learning) Organizing Framework. This framework has seven components including: learn by doing; appreciation for place/nature; knowledge; awareness of barriers; be present; engagement; and reflection.

Chapter 1

Introduction, Specific Aims, and Relevance for Social Work

Recognizing that people and cultures are place-makers suggests a much more active role for schools in the study, care and creation of places. Educationally, this means developing connections with diverse places that allow us to learn from them…[S]chools must provide more opportunities for students to participate meaningfully in the processes of coming to know places and shaping what our places will become (*Gruenewald, 2010, p. 144).*

Introduction

In the growth of the school-based nature experience movement, there are a variety of concepts that are identified as assets for youth experiences and engagement in learning. Research shows relatively positive outcomes for youth well-being (physical, social and emotional, and cognitive) based on nature-based experiences (McCurdy, Winterbottom, Mehta & Roberts, 2010; Robinson & Zajicek, 2005; Louv, 2008; Ward Thompson, Aspinall, Roe, Robertson, & Miller, 2016). Simultaneously, in the United States, in Finland, and globally, there is a push to get youth more involved in nature (Louv, 2008; Sobel, 1996; Sobel, 2004). While there is evidence for strong outcomes for youth who engage in these experiences (see youth outcomes variable in Chapter 2: Literature Review), there are still limitations to implementation of these experiences in school-based programs in this country, as well as limited research on what is needed for larger scale implementation of school-based nature program experiences (see discussion of implementation in Chapter 2: Literature Review). Additionally, there are other influential factors including cultural, economic, and social inequities in place that are barriers to youth engagement in nature-based experiences.

This research examines existing literature on the benefits of nature place-based experiences for youth. Original research using walking interviews and photograph elicitation was conducted in Finland. Additional research using photograph elicitation and mini-interviews was then conducted in the United States. This qualitative research focuses on the concepts, beliefs, and philosophy upon which ecological place-based learning (EPBL) facilitation is organized. This research was carried out by conducting walking interviews, photography elicitation, and mini-interviews with participants. The reality is that there are many unanswered questions and areas for expanded research in this field. However, it was clear that this researcher needed to start with the role of the facilitator and what facilitators are doing to engage youth through EPBL experiences. Based on the current literature, this researcher could not answer the question, what role do facilitators play in engaging youth in these types of experiences? Additionally, this research focuses on conceptualizing nature; place can be seen as subjective and has a role in this research that will be captured through the participants' experiences. Place can have a visible presence in research and the relationship between place and facilitators was further explored.

This research was designed using a constructivist grounded theory approach (see Chapter 3: Methodology). This constructivist approach fosters reflection, which is mirrored in the facilitator's process. Additionally, the constructivist approach focuses on this researcher's belief that it is better to build from nothing than to re-build with the same problems that have existed previously in this field. Therefore, while this researcher had a foundational understanding of the work of EPBL, they adopted a methodological approach that created an organizing framework for EPBL experiences with youth rather than relying on previous frameworks or literature.

The organizing framework that eventually emerged from this research (see Chapter 4: Data Collection and Analysis) is called Facilitating Ecological Place-based Learning. This

framework has seven components including: learn by doing; appreciation for place/nature; knowledge; awareness of barriers; be present; engagement; and reflection.

Ecological Place-Based Experiences

This research focuses on ecological place-based learning (EPBL) connected to school or educational experiences. This focus includes local programming that brings school-aged youth into nature but does not include wilderness therapy or overnight nature-based experiences. Currently, education-based nature experiences can be defined by looking at environmental education, outdoor education, experiential education (Adkins & Simmons, 2004) and place-based education (Sobel, 2004). A variety of terms are used, each in a slightly different way, yet, the most all-encompassing is place-based education which is defined as "the process of using local community and environment to teach concepts in…subjects across curriculum" (Sobel, 2004, p. 6). While knowledge of the many different terms that are used is valuable, this research study will focus on school-originating ecological place-based experiences, thereby including the broad definition of outdoor learning but not necessarily limiting the conversation to the academic-only endeavors of environmental education. While the experiences will originate from a school system, the experiences do not necessarily need to occur on school property and they are not limited to academic foci. Place-based learning indicates a commitment to the location where the learning is happening, an engagement with the youth as a person, and involvement of other stakeholders (community, family, educators, etc.). It is important to note that ecological place-based experiences for youth can also include care farming, animal assisted interventions, green exercise, and other similarly related areas (Haubenhofer, Elings, Hassink, & Hine, 2010). These are not the focus as they broaden the research to focus on a relationship beyond the human-natural world.

The use of Gruenewald's (2003a) term ecological place-based learning is the most relevant for the purposes here as it acknowledges the trajectory of place-based education and learning as well as the need to connect learning to the natural world. This natural world connection includes both the responsibility of being a citizen of the world that recognizes sustainability practices and consequences and one that recognizes benefits from an individual's relationship with the natural world. Place-based learning is "concerned with context and the value of learning from and nurturing specific places, communities or regions" (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 3). Ecological place-based learning focuses on those places being identified in the natural world. Important to the context of place-based learning is that being in a specific place or space has a context and that "spatial, geographical, and contextual dimension" (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 4) in a place changes based on one's relationship to that place. The place-based learning milieu is seen as a separate entity from a traditional system of education and often is overshadowed by an educational system that essentially ignores place. "Listening to what places are telling us- and to respond as informed, engaged citizens- this is the pedagogical challenge of place-conscious education" (Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 645). Place-based education encouraged "hands-on, real world learning experiences (Sobel, 2004, p. 6) and more specifically works to connect youth with their own communities" (Sobel, 2004; Beltran, Hacker, & Begun, 2016). The "quantity and quality of nature as well as the length of this exposure" (Collado & Staats, 2016, p. 4) is the focus of the place-based experience and thus, the focus of those facilitating these experiences. The characteristics, perspective, and approach of the facilitator shape the educational experience and therefore has a key role in the relevant outcomes. While the place-based learning foundation is important, it does not stand alone in offering an approach for how to engage youth in these types of experiences.

Place-based education has five themes as part of the multi-faceted, interdisciplinary approach that are considered relevant to this field. While it is essential for an EPBL facilitator to know these themes, specific ways for facilitators to learn these skills or engage students in such skills are not discussed in the literature. Additionally, these themes refer to the teaching pedagogy and not the process of youth engagement in EPBL. These five themes include cultural studies, nature studies, real world problem solving, internships and entrepreneurial opportunities, and induction into community processes (Smith, 2002). Ecological place-based learning includes the focus of place-based education which is the "process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach" (Sobel, 2004, p.7) with a focus on sustainability and understanding a community as a foundation for the ecological component of that learning. Sobel's (2004) definition specifically includes a focus on the core subjects that are taught in an academic setting. His writings explore why this place-based approach should be used more in place of traditional education. Much of the research on nature-based outcomes for youth are related to non-cognitive skills (McCurdy, et al., 2010; Maynard, Waters, & Clement, 2013; Robinson & Zajicek, 2005; Weinstein, Przybilski, & Ryan, 2009; Chawla, Keena, Pevec, & Stanley, 2014; Louv, 2008; Taylor, Kuo & Sullivan, 2001; & McMahan & Estes, 2015). It is clear that facilitators of these experiences have many resources for teaching academic materials in these settings, but the literature provides little practical guidance related to skill development and engagement strategies, particularly as they relate to desired, specific outcomes.

While the literature reflects positive outcomes associated with place-based learning, researchers may misinterpret or overlook implementation barriers (e.g., factors related to neighborhood, family, school, and peers), defining them as disruptions to well-being, but failing to consider them as barriers that facilitators may need to address (e.g., differences, youth

identify, and ability). Similar to a social work systems theory approach, Chawla (2014) identifies the benefits of considering various systems, including family, life, and schools, that are involved in a child's life where there are opportunities to engage in various ways; "[t]o these systems, it would be possible to add the different forms of nature experiences that have been connected to children's health and well-being" (Chawla, 2014, p. 117).

While those facilitating these experiences may be educators or teachers, they may also be naturalists (those with specific outdoor/nature knowledge and training), social workers, school counselors, administrators, community members, or others in the community. For the purposes here, the adult engaging the youth in the ecological nature-based experience will be referred to as a facilitator, unless the use occurs in a direct quote where the author uses a different term. The specific use of facilitator also is purposeful in that a facilitator, different from the traditional teacher who *provides instruction*, is one who facilitates an experience, *engaging* those involved in the experience and *assisting* their progress.

Despite evidence of positive outcomes associated with engaging youth in nature-based learning experiences in school and elsewhere, as a whole, schools in the United States have failed to implement EPBL experiences. There are gaps in the literature about the implementation of EPBL experiences, particularly when it comes to the identification of assets and barriers related to facilitation. The larger picture of implementing EPBL on a universal level cannot be addressed until there is better understanding of the barriers to individual facilitators of these experiences. A better understanding of micro-level dynamics within these EPBL experiences may shed light on information needed in this area. This articulation of the facilitator's role as well as optimal engagement and pedagogical strategies is needed. Social workers are uniquely qualified to be a part of this work.

Aims and Research Questions

Factors that impact ecological place-based learning outcomes are varied but include the youth involved, the various possible outcomes, the place where the learning is occurring, the role of the facilitator, and society/cultural/community influences. Research has demonstrated positive outcomes for youth, yet the United States has not implemented these experiences to any significant degree. Advocates for EPBL experiences have emphasized outcomes from a youth focused nature place-based learning agenda but this approach has not lead to universal implementation of EPBL. EPBL experiences are used sparingly as an educational alternative, rather than becoming a normative educational strategy (Gruenewald & Smith, 2010). What is needed is a clear articulation of the processes that EPBL facilitation comprises. This research explores the development of the EPBL processes, their component parts, and the structures that facilitate their successful implementation. Essentially, this research addresses what is needed in order to get the desired outcomes, rather than focusing on what the outcomes are. The literature provides little by way of theoretical framework and clear pedagogy for EPBL advocates and facilitators, resulting in the sometimes-haphazard implementation of EPBL experiences that may have some impact but, in terms of overall outcomes and contribution to the literature (i.e., rigorous program evaluation), their contribution is not significant.

Research Questions

The overarching research questions that were asked included: What do facilitators of ecological place-based learning (EPBL) experiences with youth need in order to facilitate these experiences? What components need to be present in an organizing framework for facilitators engaging in EPBL with youth? Specific research objectives included: to identify the assets/qualities needed for successful facilitation of EPBL (from an insider's perspective); to

identify the barriers in facilitating these EPBL experiences (again, from an insider's perspective); and to analyze the relationship between place and facilitation in EPBL.

The progressive, evolutionary nature of qualitative research lends itself to EPBL experiences, which are also progressive and evolutionary. A constructivist grounded theory approach was chosen as the research methodology as this type of research allows for some uncertainty and unpredictability in the safety of a known entity, similar to the place-based approach itself. The alignment of the EPBL experience and this research methodology is intentional, as flexibility and reflexivity are necessary for both.

Research Agenda

Experiential learning is a key approach in EPBL. However, there is a lack of research on the process of experiential learning, including "few explicit theoretical models, testable hypotheses, and little empirical evidence of specific adventure mechanisms that affect processes of change" (Allison and Von Wald, 2013, p. 25). Knowledge of immediate physiological measures of children's responses to nature (Chawla, 2014) therefore provides information to build upon within the pedagogy. A qualitative approach is one that gives attention to the natural setting, such as Lincoln and Guba's (1985) naturalistic inquiry approach. A study of how facilitators engaging in EPBL experiences use *natural* places as a tool aligns with a *naturalistic*, qualitative research approach. An enhanced understanding of theoretical frameworks would inform the pedagogy of the larger place-based learning work. Additionally, research that clarifies the gaps in the literature, specifically around the facilitation of these EPBL experiences for youth, is needed. Specifically, this research responds to gaps in the literature by identifying the key role of the facilitator, carefully developing a theoretical framework through direct research with those facilitators, and identifying key considerations to youth engagement in EPBL from the

facilitator's point of view. The operationalization of the ecological experience should include a whole system approach, and therefore, must specifically include the facilitator, a role that has been largely absent from the literature on ecological place-based experiences.

This research is also a cross-cultural examination of EPBL facilitation experiences and includes facilitators from Finland and the United States of America (U.S.). The global conversation about EPBL resembles those from the literature produced in the United States: it reflects similar themes, is wide in scope, focuses on outcomes (rather than process), is nonspecific or inconsistent in terms of regions or comparison points, and is biased toward an inclusion of high-income countries (Chawla, 2015). Work and research in place-based learning is happening globally. The literature includes research from Israel (Berger, 2008); Canada (Blenkinsop, 2012); Sweden (Gustaffson, Szczepanski, Nelson, & Gustaffson, 2011); Scotland (Harrison, 2011; McArdle, Harrison & Harrison, 2013); Australia (McInerney, Smyth & Down, 2011); England (Stan, 2009); and the United States (Caldas, Broaddus, & Winch, 2016; Sobel, 2004; James & Williams, 2017; and Lawson, Alameda-Lawson, & Richards, 2016), among others. This researcher was intentional in the cross-cultural comparison, remaining open to the emergence of a universal framework while coding and analyzing data from two different countries and cultures.

The examination of specific countries in a cross-cultural comparison provides a foundation for continuing to engage in a global conversation about EPBL instead of viewing implementation in isolation. This research includes Finland in phase I. Finland is seen as a leader in education worldwide because of the country's specific approaches and educational outcomes (Hancock, 2011; Tung, 2012). A shift in the Finn's educational processes, beginning in the 1970's, has benefited the students of Finland. However, recognition of this educational

leadership did not emerge until the early 2000's when results from the first Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), an international survey about educational systems, began being used and identified Finland as an educational leader globally (Hancock, 2011). Finland's current educational system includes such innovations as a focus on critical thinking, project-based learning, and a movement away from standardized testing as the foundation for decision-making about changes in a student's education (Tung, 2012). Finland has developed a national curriculum that provides guidelines for teachers and was developed with teacher input (Hancock, 2010). In 2016, Finland adopted a universal curriculum that outlines their basic values of education, which include the uniqueness of every individual child; humanity, culture and civilization; and the necessity of a sustainable way of living (Halinen, 2016). This universal curriculum, confirmed in 2012 and adopted in 2016, includes a commitment to environmental and nature studies, encouraged through inter-disciplinary studies (Government Decree, 2012).

Meanwhile, the number of schools in the U.S. that have implemented EPBL in programs is unclear. Phase II of this research focuses on the U.S. perspective on facilitating EPBL. There are a variety of examples of individual programs cited in various publications and websites on place-based learning or ecological place-based learning. Examples of this include: Co-SEED-over 13 schools in Massachusetts (Smith, 2016); Place-Based Education Evaluation Collaborative (Place-based Education Collaborative, 2016); The Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative (Smith, 2016); Antrim, New Hampshire and Bays School Project (Sobel, 2004), multiple examples in Gerald Lieberman's work from California to Pennsylvania (Lieberman & Hoody, 1998; Lieberman, 2013); and programs like Trails to Every Classroom (TTEC) (Appalachian Train Conservancy, 2017) or Forests for Every Classroom (FFEC) (National Park Service, 2017). There is an increase in the recognition of the outcome-related benefits and

therefore, a correlated increase in recognition and funding of these experiences or groups that promote these experiences in schools. In 2017, in Pennsylvania alone, $1.2 million was given to 79 different projects through an education grant from the Department of Environmental Protection (PA Governor's Office, 2017). However, perhaps even due to the increased funding or perhaps the climate and environment focus, there is a commensurate increase in EPBL being seen as an outlier or alternative option in education. There are many examples of small groups, schools, or districts in the U.S. that are enacting place-based learning, but there appears to be no accurate count at state and national levels. Regarding programs that do exist, little is known regarding their content and specific function. Web sites are substantively superficial and, as noted above, research- if it does exist- lacks rigor.

It is not the intention of this research to compare directly EPBL in Finland and the United States but rather, to examine facilitator's engagement in a country that has implemented this approach and is perhaps more advanced in its approach because of its progressive educational system advancement. By nature, the research involves comparisons because there are two countries but the intention is to look at both countries to see how, when combined, the research can contribute to the larger conversation about EPBL.

Relevance for Social Workers

Social workers are in a unique position to add to this dialogue as they are trained to consider all of the possible implications of a problem or issue within a population and to promote an approach that "supports the profession's historic commitment to promote wellbeing for all and helps create just and democratic societies" (Midgley & Conley, 2010, p. 204). Social work's commitment to a person-in-environment approach, where all elements or systems are valued in considering how to work with a person or a population, is relevant in place-based learning. Just

as EPBL targets youth, their learning, their place or educational setting, and their community, thus considering the whole picture, those trained in social work pedagogy do as well.

For social workers, there are practice and research implications for implementing EPBL as both the educational system and the natural environment are factors in these experiences. Thus far, there has been a piecemeal approach to research in EPBL experiences with a focus on the outcomes for youth but limited and vague attention has been given to the process involved in facilitating ecological place-based experiences. Research reporting positive outcomes is criticized for inconsistencies related to the definition of variables (e.g., whether experience refers to a specific quantity, quality or length of exposure) (Collado & Staats, 2016).

Social workers are qualified to consider all of the relevant variables and to identify potential interactions and/or relationships among them. Facilitating EPBL is more than teaching a subject or connecting with a youth, it is pulling together multiple elements, considering how those elements fit together and are interrelated, and then identifying how that interrelationship can benefit those involved. This is a framework with which social workers are familiar. Social workers practice with attention to multiple, interrelated variables and EPBL is a natural fit with this skill set.

The present research is also relevant to professional social workers in a more clinical sense. Aligned with ecotherapy, "psychotherapeutic activities…undertaken with an ecological consciousness or intent" (Jordan & Hinds, 2016, p. 13), use of nature or natural setting with specific intent, can have benefits to clients, both adult and youth. Considering an alternate milieu for treatment is not a new concept in the social work world but this ecotherapy approach specifically aligns with the emerging knowledge related to EPBL. Ecotherapy can use "natural settings" (Jordan & Hinds, 2016, p. 15), in addition to activities or processes that align with

EPBL experiences (e.g. walking or hiking in nature, reading or listening to music in the outdoors, or engaging in horticultural therapy). Knowledge about facilitating these experiences could serve social workers engaging in clinical work with clients or groups as well as those working in schools or community activities. The integration of both EPBL and ecotherapy into standard practice has practical implications for social workers or counselors working in school settings. These professionals can introduce the EPBL processes and through these processes, youth (and their teachers, administrators, and parents) will benefit, as indicated by the outcomes identified in a review of the literature (See Chapter 2: Literature Review).

Social workers are committed to social justice issues and their involvement in EPBL experiences may inform advocacy and policy efforts. There is the current reality that an "ecological crisis necessitates the transformation of education and a corresponding alignment of cultural patterns with the sustaining capacities of natural systems" (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 5-6). How do communities interact with the ecosystem? Does nature have a place in education? How can culture or community be examined or considered without addressing nature and natural systems? Who is being left out of this place-based conversation? Who has the responsibility or role to facilitate this alignment? Who has the capacity to facilitate it? Based on the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (Workers, 2008) that social workers commit to embracing, social workers are in the position to look at global inequities with a critical lens, identifying where dominant culture discourse permeates the view on a topic. EPBL experiences can happen in a setting ripe to host social change but underutilized by social work practitioners who often are confined by hierarchical structures that mirror those found in public education. Social workers, and others doing this work, have the responsibility to both promote and engage

in an approach, in a place, that honors the community *and* to be conscious in their own

awareness of the social justice issues in the environment.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

> An environment-based education movement- at all levels of education- will help
>
> students realized that school isn't supposed to be a polite form of incarceration, but a
>
> portal to a wider world. (Louv, 2008, p. 226)

In the literature, several theories frame research related to the phenomenon of EPBL and the facilitation of these experiences. Nature theory and biophilia theory together help provide a foundation for nature-based work. The theoretical lens of experiential learning theory provides a look into the world of place-based learning and relevant considerations. Additionally, place-based learning has its own multi-faceted approach which contributes to the understanding of the value of EPBL. While those combined theories begin to provide a foundation for examining EPBL and the facilitator's role, they by no means create a comprehensive theoretical framework. Rather, they create a mix of theories that hold much in common but do not align in consistent ways that might provide facilitators with the skills, approaches, and positionality necessary in this work.

This research considered the flexibility and openness of a constructivist grounded theory (ConGT) methodological approach as a parallel to a potential theoretical framework for EPBL experiences. This research study identified that those already facilitating EPBL experiences can contribute to the literature by sharing their work thereby generating new knowledge that could form the foundation of a theoretical framework. The process of doing this inductively through ConGT allowed this researcher to see where the data guided the themes rather than deductively by relying on already existing literature to attempt to plug gaps. Through approaching this

research with an openness to being guided by the data, this researcher was not bogged down by the current messy attempts at framing this area of study but instead developed a framework that is emergent and guided by the process of ConGT.

Biophilia Theory and Nature Theory

Support for the natured-based element of this work with youth is best considered by briefly examining biophilia theory and nature theory. Essentially, biophilia is the theory that humans have a genetic predisposition towards natural environments while nature theory identified that being in nature is good for humans (Neill, 2005). However, a significant gap in the nature theory approach is that it lacks an explanation of how natural environments impact humans (Neill, 2005). While there has been more recent evidence that nature-based experiences can have a positive impact on outcomes for youth (Louv, 2008; Maynard, et al., 2013; McCurdy, et al, 2010), the theoretical approaches are varied and vast. Biophilia theory focuses on the "human need to connect with nature…[as a] deeply engrained biological processes" (Besthorn, 2005, p. 124). Nature theory is further developed in biophilia theory as this theoretical approach suggests that the relationship between human and nature is essential to live to one's full potential in engaging in a productive life.

Additionally, Neill's (2004) research has provided a systems framework for outdoor education using a nature theory foundation. This foundation provides a valuable overview of the various domains present in a systems approach to ecological place-based learning. Without an accepted organizing framework for EPBL, a systems theory approach serves as the next best lens, identifying the various components that should be considered when using an ecological place-based lens with youth. The domains that should be considered include individual, group, instructor (could be interchanged with facilitator or educator), program, environment,

activity/task, and culture (Neill, 2004). While Neill (2004) chose to use the individual youth as the center of the systems, the focus here will be on the role of the facilitator as the center of the systems. While the research has been focused on outcomes, mostly related to youth, the facilitator is an essential part of the ecological place-based experience when originating in a school or educational setting. Further articulation of how this approach is implemented as well as of how youth are engaged by those facilitating these experiences is necessary.

The Role of Experiential Learning in Nature-based Experiences

In examining EPBL experiences and the advantages of these experiences for youth (Place-Based Learning Collaborative, 2001), it is helpful to look at these experiences through the lens of experiential learning theory. Experiential learning is learning by doing; "education must be grounded in experience and that experience with reflection will result in knowledge acquisition" (Fox, 2013). There is an essential link between experiential learning and place-based learning, emphasizing a similar approach as that proposed by John Dewey where the pattern of inquiry is in and about the location where the learning is happening (Fox, 2013; Allison, Sproule, Gray, & Martindale, 2015). When youth are faced with challenges that can be addressed and possibly overcome, this contributes to the learning process, including emotional learning for the youth (Allison, et al., 2015). A mutually constructed learning process is one of the essentials of experiential learning. Paulo Friere furthers this approach by emphasizing *conscientization* or the uncovering of real problems related to what is known in one's life and thus turning that into action (Fox, 2013). It is not that the process of critical thinking is taught as such but it is learned through the process of experiencing the activity or place (Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 640). This action-based approach is the foundation for experiential learning which serves as an important component of the pedagogical framework of place-based learning.

Kolb's four step cycle of experiential learning is often at the center of outdoor-learning-based programs. This cycle includes concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualizations, and active experimentations which become increasingly more critical and "allow students to explore and participate in experimenting" (Fox, 2013, p. 70). Involvement in an experiential learning approach requires active engagement from the students involved as well as the facilitator. While experiential learning theory points to the process of educating students with a specific approach, it is not prescriptive. When learning is "active, experiential, and applied in real-world contexts, it is memorable" (James & Williams, 2017, p. 65). Increased independence and engagement in learning through meaningful experiences can be accomplished in outdoor learning experiences. These are benefits to increasing individual skills but also group skills (Allison et al., 2015). Exposure to nature involves a variety of "emotions, cognitions, and values" for children (Besthorn, 2005, p. 126). For vulnerable student populations, the variable of outdoor learning may have a long-term benefit for well-being, particularly for students with identified high irritability (Fiskum & Jacobsen, 2012). However, further research is necessary to determine how and why these experiences are beneficial (James & Williams, 2017, p. 68). The outcomes are known but there are gaps when the *process* of engaging youth in ecological place-based experiential learning is addressed. These gaps seem significant enough to pause the nature place-based movement from moving ahead and gaining more widespread appeal and are a potential barrier to widespread implementation of nature place-based nature learning.

While these theories provide background information for understanding EPBL, they do not provide a solid organizing framework that facilitators and those in the field can rely on to inform their EPBL practice. They provide a broader context for understanding this phenomenon but not a specific framework for engaging with this knowledge to act in more informed ways that

would increase youth access to and universal implementation of this phenomenon. Missing from the framework compiled from theories reviewed thus far are key variables that may shape EPBL processes: youth, place, the role of the facilitator, and cultural/societal/community influences. Finally, a final variable is youth outcomes in nature place-based experiences; the work around this variable has been oversimplified. The interrelatedness of the key variables identified above is an identified research area.

Youth as a Variable

There is rich discourse about the benefits of nature-based experiences for youth in the country and around the world (Louv, 2008; Sobel, 2004; Karpinnen, n.d.; Gruenewald & Smith, 2010). However, cultural assumptions about nature exposure for youth, such as those professed by Louv (2008) and others, can "obscure core issues and inadvertently promote messages of weak sustainability" (Dickinson, 2013, p. 2). A vague impression that these programs are valuable does not justify increasing youth involvement in them if there is not concrete evidence as to why they are valuable. The reasons for the lack of nature-based experiences for youth in certain communities or place must be examined. The ecological place-based movement is missing opportunities for the existing empowered connections to nature to be informed by the communities themselves (Warren, Roberts, Breunig, & Alvarez, 2014) instead of through a prescribed manner of how this interaction should occur. There are countless examples of how environmental issues that plague the world, globally and locally, have the most impact on vulnerable populations and "race is the most salient variable in predicting environmental disparities" (Beltran et al., 2016). The barriers that youth of varying ethnic and racial backgrounds, genders, socio-economic backgrounds, and nature exposures may experience have a central role in this discourse. "A multi-disciplinary framework for place-conscious education

that is attuned to both ecology and culture" (Gruenwald, 2003b, p. 647) is needed. The framework must be both people centered, not created in a vacuum, and inquiry based, not prescribed.

Additionally, there are gaps when examining the context for how youth engagement is happening, particularly in light of cultural and societal biases related to youth ability (or disability) (Neill, 2005; Swank & Shin, 2015; Swank, Shin, Cabrita, Cheung, & Rivers, 2015), previous engagement with nature, the specific impact of nature (Collado & Staats, 2016), racial or ethnic diversity, socio-economic differences (Wells, 2000; Donnell & Rinkoff, 2015; Lawson, et al., 2016), family's support of nature experiences (Wells, 2000; Collado & Staats, 2016), gender differences (Caldas, et al., 2016; Neill, 2005; Sobel, 2014; Donnell & Rinkoff, 2015), and learning style differences (Dillon, Rickson, Teamey, Morris, Choi, Sandres, & Benefield, 2004). If the objective is increased opportunities for ecological place-based experiences, the goal should be looking to increase "settings where young people will want to belong" (Williams & Chawla, 2015, p. 993) and the processes that engage them in those places while considering these differences. According to Chawla (2015), adults (researchers among them) are deciding upon the variables when conducting the research in these areas, rather than allowing the youth to dictate the dependent variables. Instead of viewing youth as "passive recipients of treatment [or educational experiences] that adults provide," (Chawla, 2015, p. 445), youth should be involved in deciding this direction.

Sobel (2008) focuses on giving youth permission to connect with nature as the focus of place-based education while critical pedagogy of EPBL asserts that a call to action regarding environmental social justice issues must be intertwined with the connection (Gruenewald, 2003). Therefore, those facilitating these experiences must be prepared to do both in their engagement

with youth. Allison and Von Wald (2015) articulate this struggle well in identifying the values promoted in environmental education. Often such values are limited by the personal views of the facilitator; facilitators may focus on the learning experience itself, neglecting youth development of self and values through these nature experiences. Following this more limited approach, EPBL programs may train facilitators in the rote steps of a set program or specific curriculum for teachers to follow rather than a participatory approach that emphasizes the values inherent in EPBL. In essence, it is the difference between a truly experiential learning approach and a term Freire (1972) coined in his criticism of traditional education, a "banking approach" (p. 244), where students are seen as vessels to be filled by the facilitator of the educational experience (Fox, 2013). As Thorburn and Marshall (2014) identify, the focus is often on an identified set of values that might be more prevalent in traditional education. These authors suggest that there should not necessarily be a set approach to exploring alternative (i.e., EPBL) learning experience. Instead, the emphasis should be that those engaged with youth in ecological place-based learning experiences could benefit from being open to the different ways in which youth may engage in natural world. This can be seen as an opportunity to depart from traditional school and assessment approaches (Gruenewald, 2003a), a potential challenge for traditional educators who step into the facilitator role.

Finally, those facilitating these experiences must also have an awareness of factors that discourage youth from heading outside such as time, weather, danger or safety concerns, and barriers within the environment (such as traffic, community violence, supervision, etc.) (Collado & Staats, 2016). These potentially negative influences can also deter families and communities from engaging in the natural world and thus, serve as barriers that must be addressed as part of the place-based learning process.

Youth Outcomes as a Variable

Ecological place-based experiences are outdoor environment-focused educational

processes that often involve experiential, hands on learning activities (Gustaffson, et al., 2011;

Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000). The research provides a multitude of examples of benefits derived

from outdoor learning experiences. Research has shown that nature-based interventions for

children contribute positively to mental well-being (McCurdy, et al., 2010). Elementary-age

children engaged in nature-based learning experiences show increases in self-control, capacity

for social interactions, conflict management, self-confidence (Maynard, et al., 2013), and

improvement in self-efficacy (Robinson & Zajicek, 2005). Research shows nature-based

experiences enhance cooperation among individual children, giving children opportunities to

build essential skills (Weinstein, et al., 2009; Chawla, et al., 2014). Additionally, green space and

interactions in nature promote both social interactions and independent time (Louv, 2008). Wells

(2000) reports an increased ability to focus and therefore a longer-term increase in cognitive

abilities after daily exposure to the natural world, while a strong relationship between time spent

in green space and increased emotional well-being is also reported (Ward Thompson, et al,

2016). Research shows links between nature and attentional functioning, both among white

children living in a suburban environment and among mostly black children living in the inner

city (Taylor, et al., 2001; Faber Taylor, Kuo, & Sullivan, 2001). Green schoolyards have been

identified as a location where activities could result in stress relief for students (Chawla et al.,

2014). Meanwhile, Louv (2008) points to research from Finland that suggests that when

adolescents were upset and used natural environments to soothe, they were able to clear their

minds and "gain perspective" (p. 51). Students in classrooms with regular nature-based

experiences intertwined with their traditional day demonstrate better attendance and behavior

(Louv, 2008). A meta-analysis (McMahan & Estes, 2015) suggests that nature improves emotional well-being, specifically through increasing positive affect. Finally, closeness to green and outdoor spaces, without any specific interventions, has shown, particularly for children under twelve, a connection to decreased levels of depression (Maas, Verheij, de Vries, Spreeuwenberg, Schellevis, & Groenewegen, 2009).

Other relevant studies include those that focus on clinical applications of use of nature, often using ecotherapy techniques, and their relationship to positive outcomes for youth and adults. One study shows that contact with nature can enhance well-being (Pryor, Townsend, Maller, & Field, 2006). Another study indicates that stress reduction therapy, specifically that which uses nature as a tool, leads to a reduction in time it takes to recover from a stressful event (Sullivan & Kaplan, 2016). Researchers report correlations between decreased anxiety/mood disorder and proximity to green space (Nutsford, Pearson, & Kingham, 2013). Another study shows an increase in attention and decrease in total problems for school-aged children participating in nature-based child-centered therapy (Swank, Cheung, Prikhidko, & Su, 2017). Yet again, this research focuses on the outcomes rather than the processes with which the facilitator, or in these cases, the clinician, should engage youth in nature.

Generally, the outcomes for nature experiences for youth are positive and it seems clear, based on this evidence, that the nature place-based movement involving youth should continue moving forward. However, it seems relevant to include the voice and perspective of those most intimately involved in navigating these outcomes with the youth, those facilitating the nature place-based experiences.

Place as a Variable

Those examining the intersection of education and ethics caution separating education from the places and cultural experiences that contribute to individuals' lives, advice typically ignored by traditional schools (Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 625). A community-focused approach (embraced by EPBL) does the opposite by focusing on the *place* as the center. The place is both defined by the community and is part of that same community. Providing opportunities where community voice is heard is essential in building self-determination and ensuring individual participation. EPBL is often linked to community due to the logistics of planning and engaging in nature-based learning. It is important to note that many of the studies, while not specific to the U.S. or Finland only, do target high-income nations. Studying place in relationship to nature exposure in developing nations, particularly due to the increased urbanization in these counties, is a potential area for future research (Chawla, 2015).

An example of an ecological place-based approach was found in research that maps a place-based approach for "addressing the social, cultural, educational, and developmental needs of low-income, elementary school-aged children and their families" (Lawson, et al., 2016). Those involved in this research identify community target intervention areas and then determine how change could be implemented within the school community. This approach was specifically chosen because it is the type of educational intervention that is not supported by this country's current cultural and economic focus, particularly with vulnerable populations (Lawson et al., 2016). The success of such programs "suggests the need for a place-conscious education that is focused on political and economic relationship" (Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 630). The sustainability of the systems and of the world itself, particularly when the people most affected by these systems may also be left out of the conversation, must be addressed, as discourse about how place can be used is expanded. The focus in school-based adoption of place-based learning has

been on a "celebratory approach to place" (McInerney, et al., 2011), while the reality is that place-based learning naturally encourages a critical lens.

The ethical tenets outlined in the National Association of Social Worker's Code of Ethics (Workers, 2008), specifically those of social justice, dignity and worth of a person, importance of human relationships, and integrity, are interconnected with EPBL. These tenets also align with the recognition, in recent years, that including environment related social justice issues and sustainability as a part of addressing equity for clients and communities is necessary (Beltran et al., 2016; Besthorn, 2005). It is essential that the following is considered: how the outdoors will be used, what the social justice issues are in using a resource that does not have a say in how it is used, and the ethical responsibility involved in the use of natural elements (Besthorn, 2005). The social work profession should be pushed to consider "consciousness and corresponding practice behaviors" (Beltran, et al., 2016) related to the natural environment. Social workers should be concerned about any issues that involve the impact of cultural, economic, and social perspectives within a community. Therefore, the ethics of sustainable practices, locally and globally, in how *place* is used and simultaneously implemented into education, are a social justice issue, and therefore should be considered integral to the work social workers do.

The Role of the Facilitator as a Variable

There are extensive guides to the process and theory of facilitating group work both in indoor and outdoor classrooms, however, there is limited research around what actually is taking place during those facilitated sessions (Stan, 2009). The art of facilitating has been studied in other disciplines (i.e. business, corporate world, and group dynamics) yet there are concerns about how those facilitation skills are being used in the outdoor learning environment (Place-based Education Collaborative, 2001; Blenkinsop, Telford, & Morse, 2016). Blenkinsop,

Telford, and Morse (2016) have identified that "effective teachers in the outdoors need to be able to create a shape and rhythm for learning that works with the needs of the students, maximizes the affordances of the place… and is flexible enough to respond to unknown variables such as weather and serendipitous learning moments" (p. 350). A skilled facilitator has a responsibility to be engaged in perceiving ways in which youth can transfer the skills and emotions present in the nature-based learning experience to their own world (Thorburn & Marshall, 2014, p. 125). Similar to the role of researcher who works on "enabling problem-solving progress and paving the way for future performance" (Lawson & Caringi, 2015, p. 48), the facilitator in place-based engagement is strengths based. EPBL is in need of facilitators who can be engaged in an experiential approach that recognizes youth as creators of knowledge and recognizes educators as those who engage as "experience guides, co-learners, and brokers of community resources and learning possibilities" (Smith, 2002, p. 593). The focus is on those who can engage youth in a participatory approach to further EPBL experiences for youth.

The role of the facilitator of ecological place-based learning is to find a place in the curriculum where there is opportunity for connection to other (human and non-human) and find places that foster these relationships and allow them to be experienced organically (Gruenewald, 2003a). Facilitators of nature place-based experiences are primed to serve as a catalyst for this transformation in education. The exploration of places becomes the way in which educators address curriculum and, more importantly, engage youth. What might happen if teacher training, informal or formal, was prepared to address the differences between formal education and what may need to be happening in classrooms (traditional or ones without walls)? How can those facilitators currently engaged in these experiences guide this place-based movement towards a model that is more inclusive of these *alternative* approaches? If the facilitators are truly part of

the team, as is suggested in Stan's (2009) research in the level of engagement that is necessary in facilitation, the stage has been set for the facilitator's role in empowering youth to address cultural and societal differences. Facilitators and educators can "play a crucial role in connecting theory with practice and of drawing pupils' attention to the qualities of the natural world and to the stable values which can underpin and support their experiences" (Thorburn & Marshall, 2014, p. 130). However, the facilitator must be open to the role that youth themselves can play in both identifying and creating these experiences. The literature reflects an overwhelming focus on the youth experience and outcomes for youth based on these experiences, and limited information about those facilitating these experiences and how best to address the much-needed element of openness to allowing youth to guide the process.

Societal/Cultural/Community Influence(s) as Variables

Schools are adapting various place-based models intermittently and without a universal approach. A 1998 study chose 40 schools that have implemented the high standards of environmental education and found promising results: better performance on standardized measures of academic achievement, reduced discipline and classroom management problems, increased engagement and enthusiasm for learning, and greater pride and ownership in accomplishments (Lieberman & Hoody, 1998, p. 1). A place-based learning initiative has been created online, *Place-based Education Evaluation Collaborative*, which supports engagement of schools participating in individual classroom and whole school approaches to place-based learning (Place-based Education Evaluation Collaborative, 2001). Schools and classrooms that are involved in this initiative have provided research that indicates "place-based education fosters students' connection to place and creates vibrant partnerships between schools and communities. It boosts student achievement and improves environmental, social, and economic

vitality" (Place-based Education Evaluation Collaborative, 2001). The numbers of those involved, however, are staggering low- forty schools participating in place-based education in 2001, or even five years later, just over 100 schools participating in twelve states (Place-based Education Evaluation Collaborative, 2001). When considering the numbers of students, classrooms and schools across the United States, these are small numbers in the overall picture of place-based initiatives and suggest the existence of implementation barriers across the public education system in the United States.

Decisions about engaging in ecological placed-based learning must consider the history and cultural context in which the natural environment and human beings have interacted over time (Rogge, 2001). As Rogge (2001) points out, key perspectives of sustainable development include equally addressing "symbiotic relationships" (p. 34) in considering the most vulnerable populations. In essence, this dynamic of considering the big picture ecologically must involve the social, economic, and cultural realities of the community and their capacity for sustained change. As Gruenewald (2003a) identifies, "place-based pedagogies are needed so that the education of citizens might have some direct bearing on the well-being of the social and ecological places people actually inhabit" (p. 3). With education systems focused on demonstrating progress mainly through test scores and academic achievement measurements only, opportunities for research directly with those who are participating in nature-based experiences in school-based programs has been limited (James & Williams, 2017). Thus, these nature experiences in schools, while possibly present, are not the focus because educational goals are related to accountability as exemplified by high scores on high-stakes testing and nature experiences are not seen as benefitting the bottom line. If change requires a cultural shift to a

more ecologically-grounded paradigm, it would require a change in values "by means of a radically different educational approach" (Blenkinsop, 2012, p. 354).

The place-based learning approach can be at odds with the current K-12 education accountability movement (Gruenewald, 2003b). While there are compatible practices in both movements, place-based approaches, particularly ones that are ecologically focused, do require a "cultural responsiveness" (Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 643) that is not present in the accountability movement. In addition, the focus on traditional education, in Dewey's words, as a "one-way transmission" (Fox, 2013, p. 13) rather than a social experience, further delineates the differences. A community-based approach, like the one proposed in place-based education, involves a radical shift away from current evidence-based practice in schools that focuses on test outcomes as a measure of school success and towards a movement that does not yet have the widespread support that the accountability movement does. A community-based approach, the emphasis of the fifth theme in Smith's (2002) outline of the place-based phenomenon, is one that "soldif[ies] the relationship between children and the places where they grow up, establishing the bonds essential to both the care and the long-term sustainability of people's home communities" (Smith, 2002, p. 593). This would emphasize different values than the current educational system and would be challenging to measure using traditional measurement tools (i.e. high-stakes testing).

Place-based education is unique because it addresses problems that have been created in education as a result of its place in a capitalist society that continues to marginalize other. Place-based education emphasizes inclusion of cultural, economic, and social differences as essential elements in any education conversation, not allowing for place to exist as a separate, ignored entity but instead recognizing that *place* has a place (Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 630). Challenging

the inequities in these places, including school and the ecological world, allows students and facilitators to make meaning of their local places while considering global impacts and relationships, thus expanding the identified terminology to place-conscious learning (Gruenewald, 2003b). What resources should be present in schools? What resources are not present? How does place shape youth identity? Is that addressed or discussed in the educational curriculum? How does lack of access to nature impact the opportunities for these experiences? The hierarchy inherent in the current educational system does have an impact.

In place-conscious learning, it is essential to consider the issues of "environmental degradation, racism, sexism, and classism" (Dickinson, 2013, p. 9) that promoting a one-size-fits-all (i.e. one type of nature experience) approach may perpetuate. Facilitators of ecological place-based experiences should be engaged in the work of addressing the issues related to the environment and the way communities exist within that natural environment. Mainstream approaches fail to include "environmental concerns explicitly, intentionally and consistently in models and measures of social change" (Rogge, 2001, p. 38). Social justice and experiential, ecological place-based learning are linked but even organizations that promote social justice as a component of their outdoor learning still foster inequities in their program offerings (Warren, et al., 2014). With a history of environmental racism in this country as well as a standard approach to natural world interactions, an awareness of race, gender, socioeconomics, and ability differences must play a role in expanding these experiences with school-aged youth. It is not enough to integrate environmental programming into current educational practices. An ongoing commitment to sustainable development practices which lead to long-term and continual shifts in policy guided by the youth and facilitators is required.

Gaps in the Literature

Literature related to EPBL is replete with gaps and inconsistencies. A common study limitation is small sample size, particularly in school-based nature experiences (Flom, Johnson, Hubbard, and Reidt, 2011; Allison, et al., 2015; Dickinson, 2013; Berger, 2008; Fiskum & Jacobsen, 2012; Stan, 2009). While there were significant findings for wilderness therapy research (i.e. Bowen, Neill, & Crisp, 2016; Russell, 2005, 2007; Davis-Berman & Berman, 2001; National Association of Therapeutic Schools and Programs, 2018), which has been in existence longer than place-based learning and includes longitudinal studies as well as larger-scale studies, there were limitations in ecological place-based nature experiences originating from educational settings. One promising study examined the implementation of nature-based experiences at two very diverse schools. However, the study's sample size makes generalization difficult, and there were additional limitations related to the study's focus on gender but exclusion of other key variables (racial and social-economic diversity at the schools) (Gustafsson et al., 2011). Furthermore, the study identified the more diverse, urban school as the non-implementing school (Gustafsson et al., 2011).

Also of concern in the research is the lack of a common theoretical framework. This absence makes the thoughtful and consistent implementation of EPBL experiences challenging and provides little guidance for those facilitating the experiences (Neill, 2005; Harrison, 2011; Chawla, 2014; Allison et al., 2015; Collado & Staats, 2016). Frameworks that do exist fail to identify the cultural, social, and economic impacts of host communities on implementation and facilitation processes. As Harrison (2011) notes, there still very much exists a "paradigm of research 'on' rather than 'with' people" (p. 84).

A meta-analysis (McMahan & Estes, 2015) focuses on studies that used randomized control group designs and addressed limitations. The conclusion was that studies that examine

the benefits of contact with the natural environment include small sample numbers, single moment in time studies, and focus on developed countries (McMahan & Estes, 2015). The limitations of generalizability, questions about effect size, and lack of longitudinal studies all indicate there is more research needed even in considering the outcomes related to nature-based experiences for youth and adults.

There are gaps in the literature about nature experience, ecological place-based learning, and the facilitator's role in engaging youth in these experiences. In the literature that does exist, the concerns include use of time, confidence on the part of the educators to engage in these experiences, and the "removal of barriers that keep educators from going outside, including the need for specific qualifications, complex risk assessments, expensive equipment or travel costs" (Harrison, 2011, p. 92). Additional concerns for facilitators include the belief that, "Without a conscious practice of questioning the epistemological and even ontological assumptions that underpin mainstream education, environmental and sustainability education will continue to be hamstrung by the dominant culture" (Blenkinsop, Telford, & Morse, 2016, p. 358).

There are two studies that did show some promise in that the studies addressed facilitator qualities as aligned with place-based themes as well as reflexivity processes on the part of the facilitator. In one, a group of educators used EPBL strategies in their professional development while exploring EPBL themes to teach youth through using the same EPBL experiences (Blenkinsop, 2012). More research relevant to the role of the facilitators and their own personal growth in engaging ecological place-based experience is of value. Blenkinsop (2012) identified five principles and values, possibly providing a foundation for further exploration of the facilitation process, including place and community; nature, ecology and sustainability, inquiry and probability; interdependence and flourishing; and imagination and integration. These do

closely align with the five themes (cultural studies, nature studies, real world problem solving, internships and entrepreneurial opportunities, and induction into community processes that Smith (2002) outlined as essential for place-based learning experiences. In a way, the students' experience needs to mirror the facilitator's experience, identifying their own learning processes and outcomes, not just regurgitating what the facilitator learned from their own engagement. Harrison's (2011) work also provides a potential methodology for engaging facilitators through exploration of their techniques, including encouraging opportunities for "confidence, vision, and open possibilities" (p. 92). The self-reflection of the facilitators allowed for expanded opportunities for youth to engage in "experiential, in-context field-based learning" (James & Williams, 2017, p. 65), but the self-reflection was not structured by any specific framework.

Future Research Needs

Future research suggestions include studies with a larger number of subjects (Fiskum & Jacobsen, 2012; Feral, 1999; Swank & Shin, 2015), control and random assignments to nature-based experience groups (Swank & Shin, 2015), comparisons of two groups of students who engage in indoor versus outdoor experiences in learning (Berger, 2008; Swank & Shin, 2015), and studying the positive links between nature and the less cognitive aspects of self-discipline (Taylor et al., 2001). Chawla (2015) suggests that while there is compelling evidence of the connection between children spending time in nature and health, well-being and other benefits, there are still far more studies of adults in nature than youth. Though the effects of nature of nature on the adults *in* nature have been studied, adults *facilitating youth engagement* in nature has not. Despite a mention of five specific needs in future research including the dynamics between the child and their environment, under-stimulation in children, social context for children, pro-environmental and pro-social behaviors, and importance of place for children,

Collado and Staats (2016) do not mention the role of the adults in facilitating these elements in the place-based experience. Research on ecological place-based educational experiences, particularly approaches that consider the larger societal, economic, and cultural picture, is so limited that a meta-analysis in this area would be difficult to conduct. The argument can be made that more outcomes based research endeavors would be fruitless without the development of a theoretical framework and the accompanying research on processes, including the identification of assets and barriers of those processes in various *places*, for those facilitating these ecological place-based experiences.

In literature specifically examining the role of place-based education and its interaction with ecological experiences, action research "to investigate experiential processes, activities, and facilitation techniques" (Neill, 2008, p. 373) was identified as an area in need of future research. Other research points to the barrier of the unique elements of each *place* that renders the development of a central theoretical approach about ecological place-based learning experiences quite difficult (Harrison, 2011; Gruenewald, 2003a). Essentially, engagement with place-based learning must address an appreciation and understanding of each unique, specific place (Harrison, 2011) and of the community's cultural, economic, and social concerns and relationships with that place.

The reality is that the research on ecological place includes numerous studies of place-based experiences that neglect or minimize the role of the facilitator or educator. In fact, extant research is often focused on the outcomes for youth and fails to consider the impact a facilitator could have (Gray & Birrell, 2015; Chawla, 2014; Combs, Hoag, Javorski, & Roberts, 2016; Fiskum & Jacobsen, 2012; McArdle, et al., 2013; Ridgers, Knowles, & Sayers, 2012). Research that does explore the potential of the facilitator role does not propose investing in the growth of

ecological place-based experiences (Flom, et al., 2011). Related research also fails to consider

training for facilitators, and there is limited attention given to how the training influences and

benefits the place-based experience (Berger, 2008; Roe & Aspinall, 2011). Finally, research on

place-based facilitators themselves creating a framework for good practices and the sharing of

those practices (Allison et al., 2015) is largely missing from the literature.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Data Collection

Constructivist grounded theory brings people and their perspectives into the

foreground…We move back and forth between stories and analysis and thus create a

delicate balance between the evanescence of experience and the permanence of the

published word. (Charmaz, 2017, p. 41)

Specific background and information about grounded theory, detailed information about

constructivist grounded theory, and relevant research related information about this particular

approach and how it was used in this study will be addressed in this chapter. For the purposes of

this study on the facilitation of ecological place-based learning experiences, this researcher

engaged in a two-phase process. Phase I involved research in Finland and included walking

interviews and a photography elicitation process. Phase II was photography elicitation with

facilitators in the United States, followed by an interview using the PHOTO process. Phase II

involved a similar methodological approach as well as a similar data collection process. Using a

constructivist grounded theory methodology, this researcher engaged participants in Finland in

exploratory research investigating key elements of facilitating ecological place-based learning

and the assets and barriers facilitators face when implementing these experiences with youth.

Finland is a leader among developed countries in education (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

The Finnish education system has incorporated nature, environmental education, and using the

natural world as part of their required core curriculum since 2016 (Government Decree, 2012),

but has been using a general well-being approach of the benefits of exposure to nature and

natural world activities since much earlier in the country's history ("Celebrating Finland's,"

2017). As noted above, the initial research, phase I, was conducted in Finland. Upon return to the

United States, the second phase was initiated which involved those facilitators already working with youth in ecological place-based learning experiences.

Specifically, for this study, a qualitative approach was used. A qualitative approach is one which emphasizes collecting data in a setting natural to the phenomenon, has the researcher engage in an analysis that looks for patterns or themes (Creswell, 2012, p. 44), and specifically examines what is "below the surface" (Padgett, 2008, p. 41). Engaging in research in multiple ways with multiple data points is valuable and considered good practice in a qualitative study approach. The literature on this topic will benefit from a type of study that values "interpretive" (Creswell, 2012, p. 25) and "inductive" (Padgett, 2008, p. 48) research. This research focused on research questions rather than pre-supposing the end result or the data interpretation as there is limited research specifically about the process of facilitating EPBL for youth. In this research, a constructivist grounded theory approach was used.

Methodological Theoretical Framework

Given the limitations in relevant literature (summarized in Chapter 2: Literature Review) and the deficits of current frameworks which include said frameworks being derived from observations rather than insider's perspectives, the identification of a theoretical framework to guide the proposed research was problematic. To contribute more meaningfully to the relevant literature, this researcher adopted a constructivist grounded theory approach that embodies *both theoretical framework and methodological approach*. The nature of the methodological approach emerged as the data analysis evolved. To choose one theoretical framework and explain the research through coding and analysis with the lens of that framework ran counter to this researcher's intention of entering the process of research without preconceived expectations regarding findings. The ConGT approach aligns with a number of theoretical frameworks,

including ecological systems theory, eco-feminist theory, conflict theory, reflexivity and critical theory approaches, and a place-based approach as a pedagogy. However, in choosing any of these or a combination of these, this researcher would be "leading with theory," and interpreting data within the structures and boundaries the framework naturally imposes. In the end, this research endeavor would have replicated the flaws inherent to existing EPBL research. An overview of the *theoretical and methodological* framework that guided the research is presented in this chapter.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was initially outlined in Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss's book entitled *The Development of Grounded Theory* (1967). This original grounded theory approach is one that emphasizes an ontological position of critical realism, specifically detailing that reality for purposes of research can be found in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this approach, the theory is grounded in data, therefore, all of the credibility or verification of the categories is through the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Classic or Glaserian grounded theory pulls abstract meaning from ideas and thoughts but not the research participants' voice; there is an emphasis on the abstraction that is separate from time and place (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this classic grounded theory approach, the researcher is objectively detached and neutral towards the data and the data then lead to an emergent conceptual design. Grounded theorist researchers are passive researchers, beginning with a "tabula rasa" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 3) or an empty mind. This allows the researcher to enter the field without any predetermined research questions and therefore the researcher does not spend time with the literature before engaging in the research itself (Glaser, 1992). Initial coding is completed through comparing occurrences of the phenomenon to identify broad patterns and trends to emerge as categories. Then, concepts are

developed based on the collection of codes of similar content that allow the data to be grouped together (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A second phase of coding involves substantive coding which is also data dependent (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The researcher will review the data that are collected and identify repeated ideas. As more data are collected, and as data are re-reviewed, codes can be grouped into concepts, and then into categories (Howard-Payne, 2016). These categories may become the basis for new theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The researcher continues with comparisons to initial coding, becoming more abstract, refitting categories and emerging frameworks (Heath & Cowley, 2004, p. 146). Induction is seen as key in the classic grounded theory approach as the researcher can follow the trail from data to understanding to theory, recognizing that the data "develops theoretical sensitivity" (Heath & Cowley, 2004, p. 144).

In grounded theory, the process of identifying codes or anchors that allow the key points of the data to be gathered occurs continuously throughout data collection and analysis (Glaser, 2007). The researcher addresses: "theoretical sensitivity, theoretical sampling, treatment of the literature, constant comparative methods, coding, meaning of verification, identifying the core category, memoing and diagramming, and the measure of rigor" (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006, p. 3). In grounded theory, it is essential to ask questions that include: "What is central to the process (core phenomenon)? What influenced or caused this phenomenon to occur (causal conditions)? What strategies were employed during the process? What effect occurred (consequences)?" (Creswell, 2012, p. 88).

While Glaser and Strauss (1967) originally collaborated to develop grounded theory, there was a split in later development of this theory. Glaser's approach remained similar to the original approach, and is seen by Glaser as the one true grounded theory (Glaser, 2012). Strauss,

in collaboration with colleague Juliet Corbin, developed a parallel, grounded theory approach. Pragmatists, like John Dewey and George Herbert Mead, influenced Strauss's approach, and this pragmatist approach continues to be a driving force for researchers using Strauss' grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2017, p. 37). Glaser and Strauss' original GT approach (1967) involves less rigorous coding than the approach Strauss eventually proposes using axial coding as a second stage step (Cooney, 2010; Charmaz, 2014; Mills et al., 2006). Axial coding connects categories and subcategories in a procedural way that is seen as valuable (Charmaz, 2014). Glaser was in disagreement with later interpretations of grounded theory proposed by Strauss, and eventually Strauss and Corbin, as Glaser believed that the development of axial coding pushed the data too far into categories before the research led the researcher there (Higginbottom & Lauridson, 2014, p. 10).

Strauss's approach is an ontological position of pragmatism: fact is restricted in the established social reality of any given moment and can be found in multiple outlooks on a certain phenomenon (Howard-Payne, 2016; Charmaz, 2017). In essence, a researcher can generate multiple viewpoints on a phenomenon through data collection and analysis; can use contextualism which is constructed by inter-subjective understandings; and finally, can be personally engaged in an attempt to describe and understand the world as participants see it (Howard-Payne, 2016). It is essential in Strauss and Corbin's approach that the researcher engage in reflexivity to counterbalance bias (Howard-Payne, 2016). Relevant to and unique from the classic approach, the researcher remains open to novel theory development and committed to producing findings that are not just a regurgitation of preconceived ideas. The researcher begins data collection with possible research questions from having completed a literature review (Howard-Payne, 2016). In many ways, there are similarities between Glaser's and the Strauss

and Corbin approach but it is the differences that often are highlighted (Nagel, Burns, Tilley & Aubin, 2015; Howard-Payne, 2016; Charmaz, 2017).

The positives of the grounded approach generally include: simultaneous data collection and analysis; the research process and outcomes are guided by the collection and analysis of data rather than the prior theoretical frameworks; conceptual categories are identified through sampling; and the approach results in further conceptual levels of analysis and eventually a theoretical framework (Howard-Payne, 2016). Specifically, in the later developments of Strauss's approach, grounded theorists pay attention to "broader contextual factors that can affect a situation" (Cooney, 2010, p. 21). Constructivist grounded theory (ConGT) grew out of the roots of grounded theory, built upon this foundation and the strengths of this approach, but researchers using a constructivist approach departed from the original when clearly identifying the importance of considering the participants' viewpoint as well as that of the researcher.

Description of Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology

According to Breckenridge and Elliot (2012), the specific epistemological approach matters less than the researcher developing new, useful insights in their research. A constructivist approach grounds theoretical orientation in the perspectives of individuals (Creswell, 2012, p. 25), but simultaneously attempts to construct new paradigms for viewing the data and the inter-relationships among the categories. This approach is relevant to this researcher's area of interest in ecological place-based learning (EPBL). ConGT researchers see learning as contextualized, believing that learning cannot happen independent of place, time, or people (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, Charmaz, 2017, p. 36). Glaser is a GT purist. While some may interpret Charmaz's changes to GT as a step away from that purity, she (Charmaz, 2014; Charmaz, 2017), and others (Higginbottom, 2014; Mills, et al., 2006), have made the valid argument that GT's foundational

framework as a methodology has stayed the same while simultaneously recognizing the need to make room for the consideration of other necessary factors. This ConGT approach aligns with the pragmatism of the grounded theory approach for this social worker researcher but allows for the reality of considering the impact of place, time, and interactions with people.

In ecological place-based learning, the place where the learning is occurring is significant. The place, time, and interactions with those involved in these experiences (both the facilitators and the students), should be considered to see if and to what extent these variables influence the phenomenon. The phenomenon of facilitating EPBL cannot be viewed in isolation. Yet, simultaneously, there is an understanding that there are benefits to nature place-based learning experiences but the process by which these experiences are happening are not explored or explained in the literature. ConGT provides a methodology that honors place, time, and interactions while also addressing processes for facilitating this work.

ConGT "adopts the inductive, comparative, emergent, and open-ended approach of Glaser and Strauss's (1967) original statement" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 12). The approach continues to embrace the pragmatist leanings of Strauss but steps away from the original passive, neutral grounded theory researcher and replaces it with one who has the assumption that "social reality is multiple, procedural, and constructed…[and takes] the researcher's position, privileges, perspective, and interactions into account as an inherent part of the research reality" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13). ConGT "provides ways of showing and theorizing how meaning and action influence each other, albeit not always in predictable ways" (Charmaz, 2017, p. 38). It is an approach that starts with specifics then moves to generalities while considering the "context of the construction" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 232). As with other qualitative approaches, researchers can "add new pieces to the research puzzle …*while we gather data*, and that can even occur late in

the analysis" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 25), essentially studying "*how*- and sometimes *why*-
participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 239).

ConGT is seen as "guiding interpretive theoretical practice" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 233) that

encourages the researcher to "treat the research process itself as a social construction, scrutinize

research decisions and directions, improvise methodological and analytical strategies throughout

the research process, and collect sufficient data to discern and document how research

participants construct their lives and worlds" (Charmaz, 2008, p. 403). As co-producer of data

(Mills et al., 2006, p. 7), ConGT identifies the researcher as a "co-constructor of experience and

meaning" (Mills et al., 2006, p. 7). The goal of ConGT, or any grounded theory approach, is

advancing theoretical development through identifying categories to build context around the

phenomenon. Within the ever-evolving theoretical framework that is a potential result of

ConGT, the researcher's "assumptions, interactions- and interpretations- affect the social

processes constituting each stage of inquiry" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 238), and this must be

considered as part of the research and subsequent analysis process.

In ConGT, there is a focus on conceptual density, "the richness of concept development

and relationships" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 274). The notion of conceptual density adds to

the evolution of grounded theory. It does not alter the original intentions of constant

comparisons and the process, but adds to the original approach by including the context of the

researchers' and participants' knowledge and their influence on the conditions (Strauss &

Corbin, 1994, p. 276). Charmaz furthers this concept by adding, "[d]ata do not provide a window

on reality. Rather, the 'discovered' reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal,

cultural, and structural contexts" (Charmaz as cited in Mills et al., 2006 p. 6). A researcher

approaching methodology with a constructivist lens will not look for a single reality but instead

will see reality as a fluid process (Charmaz, 2017; Freeman, 2006), identifying the importance of multiple methods in the researcher's approach for "richness of analysis" (Freeman, 2006, p. 492).

Understanding how biophilia and nature theories inform outdoor learning and specifically experiential learning theory demonstrates an understanding of the EPBL phenomenon. However, using a methodological approach, which lends the researcher to an open, inductive process such as ConGT did, allowed for the flexibility and ingenuity that exploration of EPBL demands. A broader organizing framework provided a larger context that allowed further development and promoted sound models of EPBL and identified potential barriers to engaging in this work. Due to the nature of ConGT, which will be explored further in the following chapter, this researcher was open to all emergent concepts in an interpretive understanding of EPBL through the facilitator's lens.
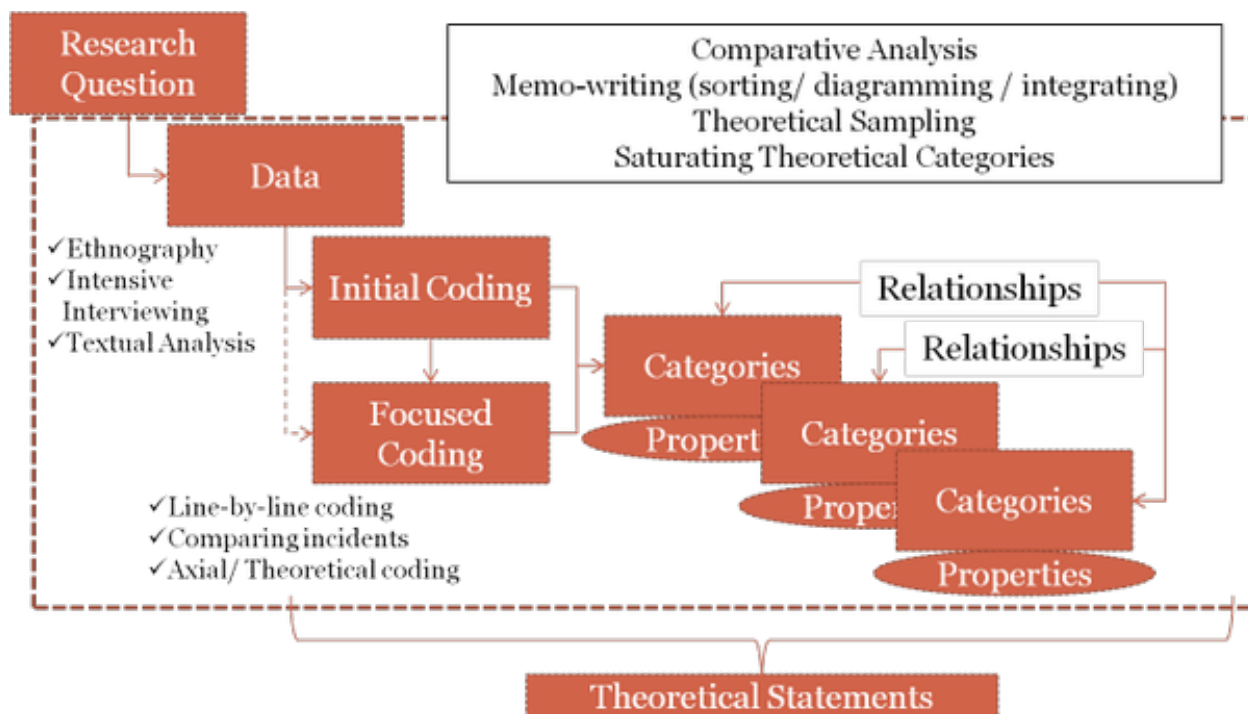
Figure 2.1. An outline of the ConGT approach (Charmaz, 2006).

Description of Methodology

  Grounded theory (GT), as an approach, helps the researcher to move from a description of what is happening to an understanding of the process by which it is happening (Cooney, 2010). When a theory is not available to explain or understand a problem, it is helpful to provide a framework for understanding how people are experiences a phenomenon and the grounded theory approach engages the researcher in a process to do this (Creswell, 2012, p. 88). Grounded theory is a systematic methodology involving the construction of theory through the analysis of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory is a qualitative methodology where the researcher "systemize[s] the collection, coding and analysis of qualitative data for the purpose of generating theory" (Cooney, 2010, p. 19). This theoretical approach is inductive in nature with the researcher moving from the data to generalizing about the categories and concepts from the data to theory development (Heath & Cowley, 2002).

  In a grounded theory approach, the researcher starts with the research question and then begins to collect the data. As Glaser and Strauss (1967) outline, "From the study of similar groups (or subgroups within the first group), a few more categories and their properties are yielded. But this is only the beginning of a theory. Then the [researcher] should try to saturate his categories by maximizing differences among groups. In the process, he generates his theory" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 74). Researchers engaging in this approach use observations and/or interviews as well as literature, field notes, and other data driven relevant information. The approach emphasizes the "explanatory power" (Mills, et al., 2006, p. 7) of data as a foundation for developing a theoretical framework. Specifically, grounded theory addresses how and why questions, in a method of collection of data and subsequent analysis that is "interrelated and iterative" (Rose, Spinks, & Canhoto, 2015, p. not identified). It is an approach that includes "a

focus on social process, social structure and social interactions" (Cooney, 2010, p. 25) but researchers focus on inter-relationships across multiple data sources for the purpose of generating a substantive theory. The foundation of the grounded theory approach is that "knowledge can be increased by generating new theories rather than analyzing data within existing ones" (Heath & Cowley, 2004, p. 142).

Grounded theory is routed in an inductive and emergent approach and from the original approach the constructivist grounded theory approach (ConGT) that will be the methodology foundation of this study has emerged. ConGT builds on classic grounded theory and recognizes the significance of context in the research process as well as the strategies that allow the researcher to make discoveries as they are engaged in the research process (Charmaz, 2017).

Additionally, the naturalistic inquiry approach provides a parallel lens for why considering a qualitative approach is of value in this research. There are times when naturalistic inquiry and grounded theory overlap with great effect in research. For the purposes of the present research, there should be consideration of the benefits of an approach where the researcher "observes, describes, and interprets the experiences and actions of specific people and groups in societal and cultural context" (Armstrong, 2010, p. 880). The naturalistic approach aligns with one where nature is the key element as this approach seeks "involvement and engagement" (Armstrong, 2010, p. 883). Essentially this "entity-in-context" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 39) approach aligns with the ConGT lens that sees the researcher as part of the process, the research influences what they observe, just by being present.

In the following sections, how constructivist grounded theory will be used, and specifically, how this methodological approach was used in this study will be outlined.

Participants and Recruitment: Theoretical Sampling

In this research, there were two different components within the research design. These included individual or small group interviews and an accompanying photo elicitation component in Finland as well as a second phase with interviews and an accompanying photo elicitation component in the United States. In phase I, the individual interviews, this researcher reached out to individuals engaged with various nature and nature education programs in Finland and explained the research agenda. Some of the initial contacts indicated willingness to participate. They, and others who did not wish to participate, simultaneously directed this researcher to others who may also be interested, including specific social media sites from which to recruit potential participants. The facilitators were selected based on willingness to participate in a semi-structured individual or small group interviews (of up to two individuals) where they answered questions about their facilitation of ecological place-based learning experiences with youth. Contact was made with the participants by this researcher and consent was given prior to travel to Finland and reviewed in person before beginning the interview process in Finland. The anticipated sample size was four to six interviews involving up to eight individual facilitators.

In phase II, participants were recruited in the United States, initially focusing on the central and eastern part of Pennsylvania. Due to the constructivist grounded theory nature of this work, participants were not identified until post-phase I data collection and analysis had commenced. Initially, the anticipated sample size was eight to twelve individuals in one focus group, however, this changed as the research process developed.

During the data collection timeframe, this researcher continually analyzed the data and simultaneously began the coding process. The need for identifying sampling emerged from the coding process, specifically from comparisons of the data with memos, and emerged organically as the analysis unfolded (Sbaraini, Carter, Evans, & Blinkhorn, 2011). This process served to

inform the developing theory. "Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 57). While this researcher was aware of the importance of theoretical sampling, due to the nature of the institutional review process and the planning necessary in engaging in international research for the first time, this approach was used in a limited way. There was room to add relevant individuals while in Finland based on locations where this researcher is already traveling to. Additionally, specific literature for comparative analysis and intentionality around the interview participants in the United States was determined during the analysis process and was not pre-determined before beginning the research process. Glaser (2007) emphasizes that theoretical sampling is used to compare phenomenon for developing a conceptual theory (p. 54). Sampling is therefore for theory construction, not for population representation (Charmaz, 2001).

The emergent focus of theoretical sampling is key in the process of this researcher identifying their research participants. Saturating the theoretical categories means that no new data is emerging from increased data collection (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014). It was not anticipated that this data will be saturated at the close of the dissertation research but instead would serve as an initial process which may result in an emergent theoretical framework but one that would require additional interviews and/or focus groups, review of the literature, and analysis to be closer to the point of a substantive theory. It is clear in constructivist grounded theory that data collection is intended to be developed along the way. However, this researcher did, for the purposes of this study, both for the purpose of a dissertation and for research involving international work that requires Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, identify

the sample in Finland before traveling was essential. Yet, there was room to allow the phase II interview participants to be identified based on needs that emerged in the coding and analysis process.

Data Collection Procedures: Phase I (Walking Interviews and Photo Elicitation)

Due to the innovative nature of the ecological place-based learning approach, a theoretical methodology approach which emphasizes constructing the methodology simultaneous to the analysis will ground this researcher in sound methodology. This approach will allow the pragmatist, interpretive epistemology to emerge as it is an approach that prioritizes problem-solving, fluidity, and the joining of facts and values over a positivist approach emphasizing the scientific method, external reality only, and the separation of facts and values (Charmaz, 2014, p. 232). In this study, the central phenomenon that was being studied was the facilitation of ecological place-based learning (EPBL) experiences. This was studied through interviews with adults who were facilitating EPBL experiences with youth. "Researchers must choose a research paradigm that is congruent with their beliefs about the reality of nature" (Mills et al., 2006, p. 2). ConGT allows for flexibility in the research approach, as Charmaz (2014) outlines, researchers can "create or adopt methods that promise to advance [their] emerging ideas," (Charmaz, 2014, p. 29). This flexibility aligned well with this researcher's plan to use a walking interview approach in phase I of the study.

Walking Interviews

In phase I, through walking interviews, this researcher spent one and a half to two hours interviewing each facilitator in the place where they typically meet with youth. These places include a variety of outdoor settings in Finland. During the walking interviews, participants had the opportunity to capture images through photography of the place where these experiences

occur. The technique of a walking interview allows facilitators to demonstrate the skills needed

in these ecological place-based experiences, specifically in "noticing our participation in places,

including how we come to know through them" (Lynch & Mannion, 2016, p. 341). The

interviews were semi-structured. The questions were designed to identify what and how

facilitators do what they do when guiding and engaging youth in EPBL experiences (See

Appendix A). Consent, study procedures, and expectations were sent in advance and were

reviewed in person with the participating individuals on the day of the visit/interviews. Each

interview began with specific questions but also followed where the conversation was led by the

participant. Interviews were conducted with no more than two individuals. It was essential, in

using a constructivist grounded theory approach, that this researcher asked exploratory questions

and was open to adjusting the questions as the interviews proceed (Charmaz, 2014). Essentially,

because the data analysis began upon the first interview, this allowed for changes to occur in the

data collection process, including interview questions, as it proceeded.

Each interview was audio-recorded. Due to the exposure to the elements that were

unpredictable, two microphones were used in each interview. The interviews were transcribed by

this researcher. This researcher used a written pen and paper coding and analysis process.

Photo Elicitation

There was also a photography element in this research. Photograph elicitation is

described as using photography as an element of the research interview process (Harper, 2002;

Shaw, 2013). While it is not necessarily beneficial because it elicits *more* information, it is

beneficial because it can introduce different information in the research process (Harper, 2002)

and can assist communication in the research process (Shaw, 2013). Auto-driven photograph

elicitation is when the research participant provides the photographs, thus setting the tone for the

interview (Shaw, 2013). Photographs can be used in two ways in research: "as a tool to expand on questions and simultaneously, participants can use photographs to provide a unique way to communicate dimensions of their lives" (Clark-Ibanez, 2004, p. 1512).

It was anticipated that because of the role of place in ecological place-based learning experiences, the photograph elicitation would capture this from the participant's perspective. Each participant participated in a brief photograph ethics training prior to the research commencing in Finland. While on the walking interview, the participant was asked to take photographs using a camera supplied by this researcher. Later that same day, this researcher downloaded/organized the photographs and shortly after, asked participants to engage in a reflection on the photographs as a follow-up component for the photography portion of this research (Appendix B). The PHOTO response method (Hussey, 2001) was chosen because it allowed the participant to guide how and why they decided to include that photograph as well as why they took the photograph during the walking interview. These responses were audio-recorded following a review of the photographs after the walking interview. Each participant took five to seven photographs. After reviewing, the participant was asked to choose two to three photographs that they saw as significant and relevant to the work they do. For each photograph included, the participant was asked the five related PHOTO questions.

Each photography elicitation response was audio-recorded. The audio of these responses was then transcribed. As photo elicitation can lead to "full, data-rich interviews" (Shaw, 2013, p. 787), this process added to the data and consequential analysis from this researcher.

Data Collection Procedures: Phase II

Once this researcher believed the data collection and analysis has been completed in phase I, this researcher began the preparation for phase II. Completion of phase I did not involve

saturation due to the nature of this study. Phase II involved facilitators of EPBL experiences with youth in the United States (U.S.). Once the original data was analyzed and a theoretical framework had begun to be developed based on the grounded data, this phase began. Initially, the plan was that this phase would include a focus group, made up of 6-10 facilitators who have engaged youth in EPBL experiences in the U.S. within the last twelve months. However, due to limited responses from the various potential recruitment entities, this researcher had to regroup and revise the phase II plans. Possible recruitment for the focus group included contact with the Mid-Atlantic Region alumni of Trails to Every Classroom (TTEC), a professional development program for K-12 teachers that provides educators with the tools and training for place-based service learning on the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) (Appalachian Trail Conservancy, 2017). Additional possibilities, based on theoretical sampling and an openness to allowing the categories to guide the process, included recruitment from local green charter schools in Pennsylvania, that engages students in nature place-based learning experiences, and naturalists from a local conservancy, who engage youth in nature-based programming in local eastern Pennsylvania schools. All of these entities employ educators engaged in facilitating these ecological place-based experiences. The response from most of these entities was non-existent after the initial contact was identified, meaning that while there was willingness on the part of the organization, participants did not come forward to be involved. A few responses indicated that they would not meet the research requirement to have been active within the most recent twelve months engaged in EPBL with youth as their schools were not supportive of regular place-based learning experiences.

Therefore, due to the rich, thick descriptions discovered in the Finland phase of this research, this researcher decided to replicate the valuable photography elicitation and interview

component of this study in the U.S., rather than pursue a focus group. Eventual participants were from one charter school in Pennsylvania and one charter school in California, totaling three participants for phase II. All participants were actively engaged in EPBL and willing to take photographs of their EPBL experiences, forward the photographs to this researcher and then engage in a PHOTO interview process (Appendix B), much like that of phase I. Each participant was asked to take five to seven photographs. After reviewing, the participant was asked to choose three to four photographs that they saw as significant and relevant to the work they do. For each photograph included, the participant was asked the five related PHOTO questions. Each photography elicitation response was audio-recorded. The audio of these responses was transcribed.

Phase II data collection and analysis mirrored phase 1 in that while it was happening, this researcher engaged in a coding process and then identified categories and properties and their inter-relationships. The interviews were audio-recorded. A separate, yet similar, consent was developed for this phase.

Consents

Participants received a consent form, including information outlining what the interview was about. This helped ensure participants could make an informed judgement about disclosure of personal information. Each participant was asked to sign this consent form for their participation in the study before commencing with the walking interview. Everyday language was used to explain what a walking interview is, and what an individual might reasonably be expected to talk about. The participants were provided with a copy of the consent form prior to the camera ethics electronic training (Appendix C) and the walking interviews being conducted. Participants were notified that the data collected, including the photographs, may be used in

future research, in publications, in presentations, and in other relevant dissertation related

opportunities. Participants had the opportunity in the consent form to approve or decline

involvement in all of these activities. In the ethics training, consent to photograph people was

also addressed although due to the nature of the photographs being taken during the walking

interview, it was not anticipated that there will be any photographs of people. This researcher did

also allow sufficient time for participants to read through the guidelines on the consent and make

a decision about whether they wished to participate. This researcher hosted the interviews in a

place identified by the participant. Follow-up interview discussions occurred in a location

identified by the participant. A copy of the consent form is attached (Appendix D). The same

process for the interviews in phase I were used for the interviews in the United States, including

the photo elicitation details and camera ethics training prior to beginning. A copy of the consent

form is attached (Appendix E).

There are no potential risks associated with this study as the questions refer specifically

to the facilitator's work and does not solicit personal information. Some participants shared

information regarding their personal experiences with facilitating/teaching, nature or place, as

relevant to their teaching experience related to reflexivity within their role. There were minimal

risks regarding safety in walking or hiking in the place where the interviews were conducted.

Those participating in the interviews chose the place where the interviews occurred and were

aware of and understood the potential risks of that place.

The names, initials only will be used, and specific place of the study will be withheld in

both phase I and phase II of the study. In order to protect the environmental impact of the place

identified by the participant, it is important to not disclose the location of the site used. Sites will

be identified generically, for example, as a nature preserve near Helsinki, Finland, to protect the

places where the interviews will occur. If the participant would prefer alias initials to be used, that was an option.

Data was recorded using an audio recording device both in the individual interviews in Finland and in interviews in the United States. When downloaded onto a storage device (i.e. computer), this information was password protected and the original audio was deleted from the device. The principal investigator and research advisors are the only persons who have access to this raw data. When presented or published, this researcher used only initials of the participants and no other identifying information was used. Demographics of the group as a whole, not specifically by individuals involved in the study, are reported as part of this dissertation or presentation but this is in the aggregate form with no one single participant identified by full name. As raw data was collected while in Finland, pre-cautions such as traveling with carry-on luggage containing the audio storage, computer, and other accompanying documents such as consents, were taken to ensure the data was not lost or stolen. All data was maintained throughout the study with original consents and written documents stored in a locked filing cabinet upon return to the United States. Audio recordings are maintained on a password protected computer. All data will be retained for at least three years in compliance with federal regulations.

Data Coding and Analysis

Essential in the grounded theory methodological approach are the steps of comparative analysis, memo-writing, theoretical sampling, and finally, saturating theoretical categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014). This researcher needed to have an awareness of the role of theoretical sensitivity. While theoretical sampling was addressed earlier when describing

sample participants and recruitment, the other areas and their relevancy in this study are addressed in this chapter.

Analysis in GT is constant which grounds this researcher to theorizing on the participants' experiences (Mills et. al, 2006, p. 3). Once the initial data was collected, this researcher began the coding process. In the initial coding, this researcher looked at the general context, the participants and their specific roles, as well as the time and structure and what the participants emphasized (Charmaz, 1983). Throughout data collection, this researcher compared the data for similarities and differences (Charmaz, 1983). This constant comparative method is one which involves "generating and plausibly suggesting many categories, properties, and hypotheses about general problems" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 104). During the coding process, once categories have been identified, a cyclical loop of identifying categories, their properties, and their interrelationships continued. Once this researcher identified that they reached saturation with categories during the initial coding, this researcher moved into focused coding. Bowen's (2008) work on saturation in naturalistic inquiry provides a lens for considering "quality rather than quantity" in qualitative research (2008, p. 142). During the focused coding phase, this researcher built and clarified categories, breaking up categories (by creating subcategories), identifying properties, and finally, developing a framework by having engaged in the previous steps (Charmaz, 1983). Charmaz (2014) emphasizes using gerunds focusing this researcher on the actions found within the data and comparisons rather than descriptors (p. 245). As Glaser and Strauss (1967) identify, "one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence; then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept" (p. 35). This researcher reached a point where the coding categories and properties continued to be refined

and eventually exhausted, thus, indicating conceptual categories may be developing to where this researcher can generate theoretical statements from the data analysis.

During the process of data analysis, this research anticipated analyzing data line by line using a line as the unit of analysis for the interviews and the photography elicitation responses in both phases. As Charmaz (2014) outlines, "line-by-line grounded theory coding goes deeper into the studied phenomenon and attempts to explicate it" (p. 121). It was anticipated that the research participants' statements would provide valuable information about the phenomenon but looking at these statements in that intimate line by line way would strengthen the study and the analysis as the process of line-by-line coding "helps [the researcher] to separate data into categories and to see processes" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 127). This researcher's focus in looking at the facilitation of ecological place-based learning and coding in this way allowed this researcher to specifically look at actions and identify what was significant. Simultaneous to the line-by-line coding in the interview and photograph elicitation analysis, this researcher engaged in incident with incident coding with the memos, field notes and literature. With observational data and memos, making comparisons while engaging in incident to incident coding "may work better…in part because field notes already contain a logic and point of view that [the researcher has] given them" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 128). It was anticipated that this researcher would transcribe the interviews and the photograph elicitation responses. The intention was that the additional layer of coding, by gathering the photograph elicitation responses, would provide a secondary source directly from the facilitators. Each interview and photograph elicitation response was coded line by line through lining up the transcribed interviews/photograph elicitation on the right-hand side of the paper while leaving a column for a paper and pencil coding process. Each line was coded and categories were identified via a color coding system.

These color-coded categories then were used to compare incident by incident, perhaps bringing new categories in as seems fit in the analysis process. The purpose of this study is to specify, in context, the assets present in EPBL experiences for youth as identified by the facilitators of these experiences and the barriers the facilitators may face in implementing these experiences for youth. The focus of coding was to look at the data to see what this specific data about facilitation tells this researcher. Additionally, the photographs served as a visual placeholder for the importance of place in this research.

In this study, in using a ConGT approach, this researcher anticipated using in vivo codes, for "grist for analysis" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 134). Additionally, in this study, line by line coding with gerunds were valuable as this approach is a "heuristic device to bring the researcher into the data, interact with them, and study each fragment of them" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 121). The line by line coding as outlined above assisted this researcher in working towards the two specific criteria for a ConGT approach, fit and relevance (Charmaz, 2014, p. 133), while engaging in an approach where this researcher's own agenda was able to be put aside. Analysis is situated in time, place, culture and situation. In GT, while there is this emphasis on using *in vivo* codes across grounded theory approaches, Charmaz cautions that relying too heavily on in vivo codes may result in a description rather than a grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014, p. 190). This researcher maintained an awareness of the use of this type of coding and recognition that heavy reliance could be detrimental to the ConGT process.

In addition to not considering literature prior to engaging in the data collection during grounded theory, the original classic approach did not believe that research questions should be formulated prior to the interviews themselves. While it is not believed that Glaser and Strauss's original, or even later, intention was to ignore the literature, it did not have a place in the process

prior to beginning the research process, specifically there was no place for selecting a theoretical framework prior to the start of research (Elliott & Higgins, 2012, p. 7). There was an evolution in this process as it was recognized that by beginning with the literature, researchers can both incorporate the literature as a resource but also use the literature to "stimulate our thinking about properties or dimensions that we can then use to examine the data" (Strauss & Corbin as cited in Mills et al., 2006, p. 5). Glaser did not change his original thinking on this front (Glaser, 2012). During the development of a grounded theoretical framework, these original theorists identified that the literature could serve as a resource in a constant comparative process (Elliott & Higgins, 2012, p. 5). However, in a constructivist approach, there is the awareness that researchers may a). need to review the literature, including existing theoretical frameworks, prior to the commencement of the research as per a dissertation or other research agenda requirement (Elliott & Higgins, 2012; Nagel, et al., 2015) and b). researchers come to research with their own background, expertise, and knowledge which cannot be undone because they are using a GT approach. Finally, classic GT does not necessarily employ tape-recording the data during interviews, instead relying on this researcher's field notes (Glaser, 2007, p. 53). Charmaz (2014) identify this as problematic in their own research as it resulted in missing valuable data from the interviews and caused potential for missed categories in early research experiences. This researcher planned to and did audio-record all interviews.

One of the essential tools in grounded theory for doing analysis is memoing, a process that encourages this researcher to "stop, focus, take your codes and data apart, compare them, and define links between them" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 164). This is done by writing notes which encourage this researcher to analyze the data and the emerging categories from an early point in the analysis process. Using a memoing process, this researcher engaged in capturing

observations and reflections from the interview experiences as well as observations about

categories and relationships that arise during analysis. A memo both captures the theoretical

notes about the data and the conceptual connections between categories" (Glaser, 2007, p. 63).

The memo process stimulates and records this researcher's thinking for continued analysis with

the other data that is being gathered during the research process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser,

2007; Charmaz, 2014). The eventual sorting of the memoing allows for outline of an emergent

theory, showing relationship among concepts. Using the memos, this researcher created elaborate

categories, specified their properties, defined relationships between categories and identified

gaps (Charmaz, 2014). "Lower level categories emerge rather quickly during the early phases of

data collection. Higher level, overriding and integrating, conceptualizations and the properties

that elaborate them-tend to come later during the joint collection, coding and analysis of the

data" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 48). The process of coding, or breaking down the data to

components and then comparing those components to eventually combine them into categories

or concepts is a multi-stage process that allows analysis to go deeper in each stage or cycle

(Charmaz, 2014).

In this study, the memoing process commenced as the research began and "as ideas

occur[red] to [this researcher]" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 168). In memoing, this researcher captured

ideas and identified what this researcher saw occurring in the data as it occurred. It was

important to "look for processes" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 169) and this researcher focused on making

constant comparisons between the participant's statements in with interviews/photograph

elicitation responses, the literature on EPBL, and their own field notes and memos. The ConGT

researcher memos about their "own assumptions and implicit meanings" (Charmaz, 2001, p.

6398) but also included those of the research participants. There is a more interpretive stance for a ConGT researcher (Charmaz, 2001).

It was anticipated, that in this study, while engaging in the first phase of data collection and beginning analysis, this researcher would revisit literature that specifically addressed the role of the facilitator. Much of this literature is written in narrative form and could be used in a constant comparative manner to the interviews/photograph elicitation responses, memos, and analysis that this researcher was engaged in. Examples of such literature include David Sobel (1996) *Beyond Ecophobia: Reclaiming heart in nature education* and (2004) *Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms & Communities*, Richard Louv (2005) *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder* and David A. Gruenewald and Gregory A. Smith (2010) *Place-Based Education in the Global Age*.

Engaging in a process of focused coding, or re-focused coding, as Charmaz refers to it (Kenny & Fourie, 2015, p. 1278) is a valuable part of the coding process. This re-focused coding serves as a checks and balances coding process which allowed this researcher to check the "most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through and analyze large amounts of data" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 138). This researcher did, at this point in the analysis, use the initial codes to focus on the big, analytical picture. Then this researcher tried to determine if what it was that this researcher saw as initially happening within the data was what was actually happening. This was done by looking at the extensive data that has been gathered on EPBL through interviews, memoing, literature, and analysis (Kenny & Fourie, 2015, p. 1279).

Finally, in ConGT, the data analysis raises questions which suggests relationships, highlight gaps, and reveal what researchers do not yet know (Sbaraini et al., 2011, p. 3). By modifying the questions asked in the interviews as the analysis continues, researchers are able to

fill in gaps, address any unknown areas and work to build the emerging theory. The end result in a grounded theory approach is a substantive theory, known as a set of concepts that relate to each other to make up a "cohesive whole" (Sbaraini et al., 2011, p. 3). Developing a substantive theory does not result from descriptions, rather from constant comparative methods (Glaser, 2007). The cyclical nature of the grounded theory process lends itself to a constant comparative analysis of the phenomenon and the contexts in which the phenomenon occur to make the substantive theory strong. Charmaz (2014) cautions this researcher to avoid using a forced approach to a theoretical framework when applying grounded theory (p. 155); therefore, in this research, this researcher attempted to be clear that in the early stages of this work and for the purposes of this dissertation, the goal was not a formal theory related to this topic of facilitating EPBL experiences.

This researcher planned to review literature, field notes, and memo in addition to conducting interviews and eliciting photograph responses with the facilitators of EPBL experiences. This researcher attempted to explain the process of facilitating EPBL experiences and what assets need to be present, and what barriers one might face, in working as a facilitator in the EPBL world. It was anticipated that while this researcher was working towards a substantive theory, the data and process may only result in an emergent substantive theory where the theoretical ideas have begun to be delineated but more research will be needed to fully develop "a theoretical interpretation or explanation of a delimited problem in a particular area," (Charmaz, 2014, p. 344) otherwise known as a substantive theory. Due to the timeline and the nature of this designed study, it did become clear that in order to clearly outline a substantive theory, more research and analysis beyond what was planned would be needed. It was clear from the outset that a formal theory was not the goal in this research as this would require several

substantive areas of study and the research, this researcher's specific agenda as well as the

research of others, is not there yet. As the "concepts in a formal theory are abstract and general"

(Charmaz, 2014, p. 343), the ability to link concepts as is needed in a formal theory will not yet

be present in the research about the facilitation of EPBL.

The nature of constructivist grounded theory pushes the researcher to continue to go back

to the literature and theoretical information available to check the researcher's new knowledge

while simultaneously looking for themes/categories in the data. While engaging in re-focused

coding, it will be essential that this researcher "compare[s her] major categories with those

relevant in scholarly literatures" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 342). Specifically, this, as mentioned above,

was a time where this researcher reengaged with the literature, specifically the place-based

literature, to continue competitive analysis, not just interview to interview but also with the

existing literature. Throughout this process, the categories and properties identified in the coding

process were continually analyzed for relationships. This comparative analysis process is

essential in the methodological approach as it should end in a developmental theory identified

through continual data collection and analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This was the specific

reason why this methodological approach was not solely a classic grounded theory approach but

had a constructivist lens. Charmaz (2014) sees theory as "a practice" (p. 233). Engaging in the

world and making an effort to understand it is at the root of constructivist grounded theory which

emphasizes creating a theoretical framework rather than providing a specific criterion for how to arrive at a theory.
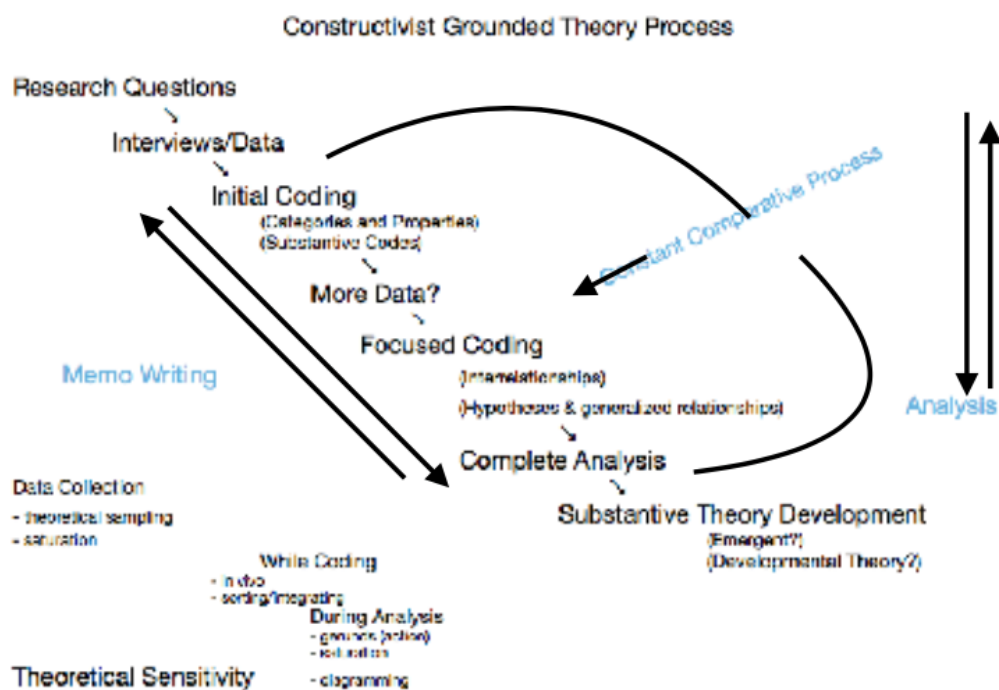
Figure 3.1 An outline of this researcher's proposed ConGT approach.

Criticisms of Grounded Theory

Some important criticisms of grounded theory and constructivist grounded theory were essential for the researcher to keep in mind as they proceeded with their research. One of the appeals, but also perhaps the greatest criticism within the research world, is that grounded theory has processes that are not specifically defined (Howard-Payne, 2016, p. 58). This can lead to a lack of clarity in determining a clear grounded theory approach, grounded in a specific method. Some researchers have addressed this confusion around the differing approach within grounded

theory by "opting simply for an ambiguous medley of aspects of each version without regard for their inherent incompatibilities" (Breckenridge, 2016, p. 1). Later attempts to further delineate the process of grounded theory have both provided a foundation (Charmaz, 2014) and been criticized for being too specific and not allowing for the process to guide the direction of the research (Glaser, 2007; Glaser, 2012). Others criticize grounded theory, specifically the constructivist approach, for the researcher being embedded in the process and therefore it being difficult to distinguish from engagement with and the interpretation of data. Grounded theory, due to the nature of the process, can produce large amounts of data and also be difficult for novice researchers (Elliott & Higgins, 2012).

Perhaps most prominent are the internal debate amongst grounded theorists and how this methodological approach intersects with Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA). Criticisms of evolved versions of GT from Glaser emphasize those approaches are not true GT and in fact, should just be called QDA (Glaser, 2007; Glaser, 2012). For the purposes of this researcher, it does not feel as important that the approach is called a certain thing rather than that it allows for the consideration of some of the abstract concepts that Glaser saw as having no place in GT. Glaser rejected the idea of ConGT. Strauss and Corbin did have a broader approach to GT and in that approach, they identified that "not every study is aimed at building theory and acknowledge[d] that some researchers will use the techniques of grounded theory to produce useful descriptions" (Cooney, 2010, p. 23) or a framework for the phenomenon. The ConGT approach acknowledges that the researcher and the participants are a team in creating the theory or framework together and there may be "macrosocial" (Cooney, 2010, p. 24) implications. Influences in this interrelationship must be considered as part of the analysis process as "reality cannot be fully known but it is interpreted and is linked to time and place" (Cooney, 2010, p. 24). An approach

that allows for meaning to include the ways the researcher "assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and viewed, and aims toward an interpretive understanding of subjects' meanings" (Charmaz, 2003, p. 250) is a good fit for research on EPBL.

Glaser's (2012) criticisms of ConGT include his belief that it is a quantitative data analysis approach but not grounded theory because GT should be "an abstraction from time, place, and people that frees the researcher from the tyranny of normal distortion by humans trying to get an accurate *description* to solve the worrisome accuracy problem" (p. 28, *my emphasis*). Glaser's focus on description seems to be at the foreground of his critique of ConGT as "describing what is going on, does not explain conceptually what is going on" (Glaser, 2012, p. 36). Further, Glaser (2012) emphasizes GT's focus on constant comparative analysis, an approach also presented in ConGT where the researcher engages in focused coding to step further into the *comparative* process, not, as Glaser suggests ConGT does, into the descriptive process. And perhaps most important for this researcher's argument, Classic GT has the goal of a "conceptual theory abstract of time, place and people" (Glaser, 2007, p. 56). This is potentially problematic for a social work researcher studying ecological place-based learning experiences as the place, in particular, is relevant, not necessarily as a descriptor but for the richness of the location and its positions in determining the relevant factors that influence facilitation of EPBL.

Possible Limitations of this Study

For the purposes of this study, there are criticisms of the specific approach. Due to the nature of the study, there was not an opportunity for inter-rater coding, a process which greatly benefits the qualitative research approach (Padgett, 2008, p. 153). Additionally, as mentioned throughout the methodological section, while a qualitative approach emphasizes depth rather

than breadth (Padgett, 2008, p. 172), this research was limited by time constraints and resources. Ideally, the data collection and simultaneous analysis would continue until this researcher felt that saturation had been reached, specifically theoretical sampling would continue as needed and identified by this researcher. As the cost of international travel is prohibitive, in this research, the interviews did need to be established and set prior to travel.

Additionally, the "role of the researcher" needs to be specifically considered, especially how this researcher selected and justified the sampling and data collection decisions (Gentles, Jack, Nicholas, & McKibbon, 2014, p. 6). Participants perceptions initially were formed by email or social media contact. This researcher tried to present a professional approach in all contacts but some were lengthier from the initial contact while others required multiple follow-ups. It is important for this researcher to consider all aspects of reflexivity but it is known that researchers may be influenced by their audience (Gentles et al., 2014, p. 5). Specific awareness of this during this research as part of the dissertation process is necessary as there are specific audiences in a defense process (i.e. writing to defend, writing for dissertation purpose) that could influence the collection, analysis and coding processes.

Reflexivity is a part of grounded theory due to the nature of including theoretical sensitivity in the development of research questions and in the analysis (Gentles et al. cited in Hall & Callery, 2001). Built in comparison through memoing, which compares this researcher's own experiences and reactions to other incidents in the data, was valuable. It was essential that this researcher engaged in a memoing process which is transparent. Due to the nature of being fully immersed in phase I of the research in a short amount of time, this immersion could have led to a focus on certain areas or a lack of clarity, or being stuck, that could result in a detriment to the ConGT process. Additionally, there is the factor of this researcher's own clinical skills and

previous engagement in ecological place-based learning experiences with youth. This researcher is currently engaged in clinical practice with youth, although not currently using nature place-based experiences in practice. However, this researcher is aware of their own biases in supporting this type of educational experiences for the benefit of youth education and their personal growth. While there is an awareness that a qualitative researcher should engage with the epistemological approach that their values should be known within a study (Creswell, 2012, p. 20), it is still valuable to recognize that others may not hold the same values regarding education, social emotional growth for youth, and a facilitator's role and impact in EPBL experiences. It was important to be open-minded in regards to the individual facilitator's own goals and agendas around this area of work.

The Research Process: Phase I

In phase I of this research, there were six facilitators of EPBL experiences with youth who were interviewed. These facilitators were selected as they met the criteria (as outlined in Chapter 3: Theoretical Sampling) and were able to engage in walking interviews in Finland during the week of August 4-11, 2017. Participants were a mix of female and male, ranged in age from mid-20's to mid-50's, and were all engaged in facilitating EPBL within the past twelve months. Five of the six participants were not employed by individual schools but rather were a part of the large nature school movement in Finland. Each of these five participants was an employee of a Nature School in Finland. Nature schools provide nature place-based opportunities for students and educators facilitated by trained nature school educators in designated areas in Finland. Participants each signed a consent form, which was forwarded to the participants in advance of the interview and reviewed at the time of the interview. Each

participant gave consent for the interview and acknowledged they had reviewed the photograph elicitation training prior to the day of the interview.

Each participant engaged in a walking interview individually, with the exception of the final interview where two participants were interviewed at the same time (logistical choice by participants). The average interview took about 80 minutes. Each interview was recorded by both an audio recorder connected to the participant and one connected to this researcher. In the case of the double participant interview, both participants wore an audio-recorder. Each participant was asked approximately ten foundational questions. This researcher did vary these questions slightly. Additionally, other questions were asked. The variations and the other questions were dependent upon the nature of the conversation, the elements encountered during the walking interview process, and the engagement of the participant.

While the walking interview was being conducted, each participant took between three to seven photographs of self-identified significant places along the walk. At the conclusion of the walking interview, each participant had the opportunity to review the photographs they had taken, self-select two to three photographs, and then engage in a PHOTO response to the photographs they had taken. In the case of the double participant walking interview, the participants were interviewed separately regarding their individual photographs. Each response was audio-recorded and lasted about seven to twelve minutes.

The Research Process: Phase II

In phase II, rather than focusing on the already identified components and asking specific questions about these variables, the researcher chose to be true to the ConGT process by asking more general questions that allowed the participants to identify their own foci areas. Therefore,

this researcher created an environment where the participants described their intentions as

facilitators of EPBL through a photography elicitation process.

In phase II of this research, there were three facilitators of EPBL experiences with youth

who were interviewed between January 1-11, 2018. These facilitators were selected as they met

the criteria (as outlined in Chapter 3: Theoretical Sampling) and were able to participate in a

photography elicitation process and then engage in a follow-up interview with this researcher.

Participants were a mix of female and male, ranged in age from mid-20's to early-40's, and were

all engaged in facilitating EPBL within the past twelve months. All three participants are

employed by charter schools in the United States, located either in Pennsylvania or California.

Participants each signed a consent form, which was forwarded to the participants in advance of

the interview and reviewed at the time of the interview. Each participant consented to the

interview and acknowledged they had reviewed the photograph elicitation training prior to the

day of the interview.

Prior to the interview, each participant was asked to take between four to seven

photographs of self-identified significant places used in their facilitation experiences with youth.

Each participant forwarded those photographs to this researcher prior to the interview. The

interview process then included a PHOTO response to the photographs they had taken. Each

response was audio-recorded and lasted about six to ten minutes.

Data Analysis

This researcher engaged in memoing to record thoughts, information, and observations

following each interview. Memoing continued throughout the data analysis process as well. Each

interview was also backed up on this researcher's personal computer and back-ups were

password protected.

Upon this researcher's return from Finland, this researcher engaged in a transcribing process. They used a trial version of InqScribe to transcribe the audio-recordings individually. Each interview was then transferred to an individual Word document where the dialogue was situated on the left side of the page of the Word document and the right side was blank. This system allowed for in-depth line by line coding (Chapter 3: Data Coding and Analysis). Once the line-by-line coding was complete, this researcher then reviewed the line-by-line coding and began to organize the data into categories (Appendix H). As this happened, specific categories began to emerge based on the data. Simultaneously, this researcher continued to memo as a way to check their own assumptions and the emerging understandings of what was being discovered.

After each individual walking interview and photography elicitation interview had been transcribed, this researcher then created a visual outline of each interview. This process resulted in a visual outline of seven components to facilitation and their accompanying sub-categories (see Chapter 4: Data Collection, Analysis and Findings, Table 4.1).

With these components of the emerging organizing framework in mind, this researcher then turned to phase II of the research study. Following each interview in phase II, this researcher engaged in memoing to record thoughts, information, and observations from each interview. This memoing process continued throughout the data analysis process as well. Each interview was also backed up on this researcher's personal computer and back-ups were password protected.

After the phase II interviews, this researcher again engaged in a transcribing process. The same process that was used in phase I was repeated in phase II. This researcher used a trial version of InqScribe to transcribe the audio-recordings individually. Each interview was then transferred to an individual Word document where the dialogue was situated on the left side of

the page of the Word document and the right side was blank. This researcher then compared these new data to the original data gathered in phase I. This researcher also continued to memo as a way to check their own assumptions and the emerging understandings of what was being discovered.

The final step in analyzing phase II was for this researcher to create a visual outline of each interview. This process served as a cross-check for the original visual outline of the seven components to facilitation and the accompanying sub-categories.

Researcher Comments on Data Collection and Analysis

As is common in a ConGT approach, the interview questions needed to be altered as the interviews progressed. In phase I, one particular question was difficult in translation and the initial two interviewees who were asked the question asked for clarification. This researcher was aware of the potential language translation challenges and did change the question in subsequent interviews. This change occurred with the intention of not biasing the participant towards specific issues that this researcher felt may need to be present in work with youth.

The final interview in phase I had two participants. While this was not the original intention, it was what the participants asked for upon this researcher's arrival in the designated location. It was clear that the language barrier may have been more of an issue in this interview as there were several times that the participants spoke to themselves in Finnish rather than initially asking for clarification from this researcher. This translation issue may have resulted in the loss of some data earlier in the interview but was corrected by this researcher asking for translation assistance from the participants.

Researcher Transparency

A misstep related to this being the first intensive research project this researcher was engaged in, and specifically the first international research, was challenges related to traveling early in the research process. A later travel time, may have not been as convenient for the participants who were all in the early days returning to work after summer vacation but not working directly with students yet, but may have left this researcher with more preparation time. A later travel time could have allowed for additional educator facilitators to be included in the research.

Another key issue related to this researcher's "firsts" was the use of photography in the research process. This researcher did not anticipate the richness of the photography components of the process. While the PHOTO process was valuable, the set questions led to the participants repeating themselves with two of the questions. This researcher believes that the richness of the data gathered here could be even more valuable with a revised photography elicitation question process.

Upon return to the U.S., phase II of the research was to begin almost immediately. Unfortunately, due to the length of time in transcribing and analysis of phase I, the start of recruitment for phase II was delayed. Then, further delay occurred when a lack of interest in participation from various entities ensued.

Positionality and Reflexivity

Theoretical sensitivity is the way in which researchers engage in the comparative and analysis process based on their previous knowledge and experiences with the phenomenon being addressed (Higginbottom, 2014, p. 10, Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 280). It is also, as Strauss and Corbin (1994) note, a factor in the grounded theory process. Those researchers who are more attuned to cultural sensitivities are more likely to include a diverse population, for example, in

their sampling, thus broadening the theoretical analysis and potentially eventual framework development. Increasing the generalizability and the rigor within the study due to the researcher's attention to theoretical sensitivity is beneficial to the research process as this researcher needs to "foster *seeing* possibilities, *establishing* connections, and *asking* questions" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 244, author's emphasis). It is beneficial for a researcher using this approach to have both the ability to be open to confusion and uncertainty while trusting the process and the ability to conceptualize and organize to create a substantive theory (Glaser, 2007, p. 57). However, a constructivist grounded theorist would take another step. They would identify there is a level of insight essential in ConGT on the part of the researcher in both how attuned they are to the participants' worlds and their ability to reconstruct or conceptualize the meaning of the data gathered from the participants (Mills et. al., 2006, p. 4). In ConGT, "reflexivity and relativity…fosters taking researchers several steps further through critically examining their construction of the research process as they seek to analyze how their research participants construct their lives" (Charmaz, 2008).

As a social work researcher, this researcher is trained to consider the diverse offerings and uniqueness that each individual perspective can offer. The intentionality around seeking an international component and expertise in approaching this material demonstrates an openness to new exploration while simultaneously putting this researcher out of their comfort zone, in another country, to truly tune in to the nature of the EPBL facilitation experience and what the research participants are noting is of significance in this experience. ConGT researchers "view their conceptual categories as constructed through their interpretations *of* the data rather than emanating *from* them" (Charmaz, 2001, p. 6397). Due to the goal to "increase transparency and trustworthiness" (Gentles et al., 2014, p. 3), this researcher will not only memo as part of the

ConGT process but will also maintain a personal journal to track observations related to culture and comfort (discomfort).

One of the more explicit areas that Charmaz has grown in her writings about ConGT is in the area of reflexivity, giving more attention to the specific nature of how a researcher should examine how her own positions and assumptions influence her analysis and inquiry (Charmaz, 2008, 2014; Gentles et al., 2014). ConGT "facilitates defining and developing emergent critical questions systematically" (Charmaz, 2017, p. 35). Systematic reflection is a cornerstone of the ConGT approach. This constructivist grounded theory approach proposes researchers engage in a process of "methodological self-consciousness" (Charmaz, 2017, p. 36), identifying self-doubt and the steps or missteps this researcher takes along the way. While GT focuses on the conceptualization of a pattern of behavior, ConGT focuses on how participants construct their realities and attend to multiple perspectives (Breckinridge, 2012). However, the constructivist grounded theorist would make the point that she is able to do both- use "concepts [to] provide abstract understanding of the studied phenomenon and are situated in the conditions of their production in time, place, people and the circumstances of the research project" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 342). Essentially, this researcher is both attending to the how participants and this researcher herself constructs their own realities but in the context of conceptualizing a pattern of behavior. Armstrong (2010), in articulating the role of reflexivity in naturalistic inquiry, describes a form of reflexivity which examines how social order is created through "goal-oriented actions and discourse" (p. 882). In qualitative research, reflexivity is looked at more generally and can be used to assist researchers in becoming "aware of what allows them to see, as well as what may inhibit their seeing" (Watt, 2007, p. 82).

For the purposes of this study, this researcher intended to focus on three specific characteristics of reflexivity (Gentles, et al., 2014): to account for the range of possible researcher interactions, to consider the phases of the research process where this researcher and their interactions can have influence, and to acknowledge where researcher interactions have influenced research processes (p. 5). This researcher was sensitive to the initial data collection that will be occurring in Finland and the nuances of working with facilitators of EPBL experiences who conduct these experiences in a different language and different culture across the world from where this researcher exists. Simultaneously, while this researcher has engaged youth in EPBL experiences, the experiences were not academic in nature and were more social emotional focused. The awareness of purpose and outcomes differences maybe be present as the facilitators being interviewed may have different priorities in their facilitation of these experiences.

The "delicate balance" (Watt, 2007, p. 88) that is described in researchers co-creating knowledge with participants is one of the defining characteristics of ConGT but also one of the biggest criticism of qualitative data as a research method that has validity. Instead of a focus on validity, this is better described in qualitative research as a need for trustworthiness. One of the key areas of attention in qualitative research findings because of the nature of its "interpretive paradigm" (Bowen, 2008, p. 148) is creating a confidence for those reading the research. Credibility is necessary to address in qualitative research as it "relates to the trustworthiness of the findings" (Chiovetti & Piran, 2003, p. 430). Chiovett and Piran (2003) go on to identify four characteristics of standards of rigor related to credibility. As these characteristics are closely aligned with ConGT, they are relevant to include in a discussion of the value of qualitative research. These include: letting participants guide the inquiry process, checking the theoretical

construction against the participants' meaning of the phenomenon, using the participants' actual words in the theory, and articulating this researcher's personal views and insights by using post comment interview sheets as a tool, a personal journal, and monitoring how the literature is used (Chiovitti and Piran, 2003, p. 430). Techniques within ConGT lend itself to aligning with this approach and therefore provide an opportunity for rigor within this study. As the interviews were conducted, this researcher intended to code based on the participants' language to guide the coding and analysis, allowing for the participants to guide the process. This researcher planned to change or alter the research questions based on insights from previous interviews, allowing for checking the theoretical construction against the meaning of the phenomenon. The participants' words will be used in the i*n vivo* approach proposed as part of ConGT. Finally, as a constant comparative method of using memoing and literature comparison, this researcher's personal views will be explored. In addition, as suggested through this literature, this researcher had developed a post interview comment sheet (Appendix F) that was used following each interview. Due to the nature of travel to interview sites and the challenges within travel in a foreign country, this researcher decided to develop a quick reflection tool to assist in the possibility that there was not time post interview to engage in a lengthier reflection process immediately.

Watt (2007) describes the personal value to a qualitative researcher about being in touch with their own credibility through a reflective process of writing and reflecting to recognize one's own experiences within the research process as having value. The authenticity inherent in the ConGT approach allows for flexibility and a way for researchers to "scrutinize their research experience, ways of knowing, and products of knowing" (Charmaz, 2001, p. 6397). In considering the photo elicitation element of the phase I research, the auto-driven photo elicitation allowed this researcher to triangulate the research and "ensure the trustworthiness of [the] data"

(Shaw, 2013, p. 788). Images were analyzed by the participants themselves and the data collected from their comments were analyzed just as the transcription of the walking interviews were.

Finally, because of the consideration of context as valuable in the grounded theorist approach, a constructivist lens connects "micro and macro levels of analysis and thus link the subjective and the social" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 241). As Higginbottom (2014) identified, it is important for researchers to look for theoretical approaches that align with the theoretical principles present in their respective fields (p. 12). ConGT is an approach that includes the participants' voice and emphasizes an awareness of pre-existing structural conditions while requiring the researcher to engage in reflexivity regarding their own biases and positions (Charmaz, 2014, p. 240). These concepts are particularly relevant in a field such as social work that emphasizes dignity and worth of the person and the importance of human relationships (Workers, 2008).

Theories are "embedded in history" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 280). The historical relevance in this specific research is the heightened reliance on the accountability movement in public K-12 U.S. education and its critics, which opens the door slightly to allow for the questioning of the status quo through progressive ideas in education. Simultaneously, the Finnish educational system and their emphasis on nature place-based learning, and the research with facilitators there, will contrast this U.S. system as the Finnish system has a learner centered focus using a core curriculum which provides both administrative oversight and room for educator growth in pedagogy and practice (Vitikka, Krokfors, & Hurmerinta, 2012). The current time is ripe for new theoretical frameworks which further explore this progressive approach in a grounded way.

A classic or objectivist approach, emphasizes data while not considering "the historical, social and situated processes of their production" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 237). It was this essential element that lead this researcher to a constructivist grounded theory approach which needs to consider the social context as this context and the place, time and people in it, are potentially one of the barriers (i.e. EPBL's lack of presence in the US educational system). Additionally, the specific choice of including Finland facilitators of EPBL experiences is relevant in considering why a ConGT approach was decided upon. By first interviewing facilitators of these experiences in Finland, a worldwide leader in education as well as a county whose education systems sees value in the incorporation of nature place-based education, and then inviting facilitators of EPBL experiences in the United States to examine the assets and barriers present, this researcher will "aim for abstract understanding of studied life and view [her analysis] as located in time, place and the situation of inquiry" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 342). The end result intending to be an "interpretive understanding (rather than explanation) of the studied social process" (Kenny & Fourie, 2015, p. 1279).

As Sobel (2004) outlines, "[p]lace based education provides a well-provisioned chest of tools that can be used to address a wide range of educational challenges" (p. 88). The next step is to provide tools to have it be an accessible, realistic opportunity that diverse facilitators can engage in with youth. The reality is that there are facilitators of EPBL experiences in the United States and across the world and there are gaps in the literature about what and how those facilitators are doing what they do. As the ConGT process emphasizes, there is value to "in-depth, intensive interviewing to purposefully yield an intimate exploration of the meanings that participants attributed to their experiences (Kenny & Fourie, 2015, p. 1279). This research serves to address how facilitating EPBL can be both individualized and possibly routed in a general

approach identifying a framework in which to engage in this approach. The benefit of using both

Finnish facilitators and U.S. facilitators allows for the potential transferability to larger

populations, not specific to place but yet place-based.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Findings

Even though I might not have known it when I came there, but to be able to sort of pick it

up. And also to give space to the children's observations and…if they get enthusiastic

about something, well maybe you might want to give that some time instead and leave

something else that you had planned undone. So I think those are the most… that's the

ground…that you have to build on. (P.B., Figure 4.2)

This chapter will provide an overview of the data analysis, the result of phases I and II of

the research process. The systematic and careful application of the research methods and the

findings, including the overview of the themes that emerged, will be shared, along with the

knowledge gleaned from the data and finally, the documentation of how the data provides

evidence for this researcher's findings.

The foundation for this research came in this researcher asking an initial question about

the role of the facilitator in EPBL experiences. Why, if there is vast knowledge outlining the

benefits of EPBL for youth, is there a universal lack of nature-based experience implementation

in school settings? However, it was discovered through a review of the literature that before the

implementation could be addressed, information from those already doing the work was

required. What do facilitators of EPBL experiences with youth need in order to facilitate these

experiences? The purpose of the study was to begin to outline the components of an organizing

framework for facilitators engaging in EPBL experiences with youth. Specific attention to the

assets and qualities needed for successful facilitation of these experiences from an insider's

perspective (i.e. the facilitator) would be necessary as well as the identification of barriers in

facilitating these experiences. A final objective of the study was to analyze the relationship between place and facilitator.

Seven components of facilitation of EPBL emerged in the data analysis. These components include learn by doing; appreciation for place/nature; knowledge; awareness of barriers; be present; engagement; and reflection. All of these components had several subcategories as will be outlined in the findings section of this chapter. The components together because an organizing framework for facilitating ecological place-based learning experiences (see Figure 4.1).

Facilitating EPBL Organizing Framework by Pia Houseal-Allport

Philosophy of learn by doing	Appreciation for place/nature	Knowledge	Awareness of barriers	Be present	Engagement	Reflection
Plan experience using curriculum and knowledge of place.	Easier to learn in natural place.	Of a plan. Foundation for how you do things (i.e. rules).	Unpredictability.	Spontaneous.	With youth (facilitator equal with youth, to promote love for nature).	Of present (evaluation, with peers, self reflection).
Do it.	Have a love for nature.	Of nature.	Fear (of place, on behalf of youth, of facilitator- of inexperience or lack of knowledge.)	Fun.	With place (as if in relationship with, in the here and now).	To grow...
And adjust it if necessary.	Inspire a love for nature.	Of curriculum (inter-disciplinary)/core experiences (i.e. fire, sauna, ability to repeat on own).	Administrator/school/family/parents (relationship, communication with).	Notice small details.	With self.	
Live it.	Promote a sustainable lifestyle.	Of place (give meaning to, of inspiration, use what you have, convenience/accessibility).	Resources/finances.	Creative.	Through exploration.	
Reflect.		Of facilitating (Prepare. Do. Reflect. With adjustments as necessary)		Foster independence.		
		Of youth (no prejudices, be open).		Empower.		
		Of training necessary.		Inspire.		
				Adaptable.		
Pre	Pre	Pre	Pre			
		During	During	During	During	During
					Post	Post

Table 4.1. Facilitating Ecological Place-Based Learning organizing framework.

Findings in the Data: The Framework

As the data were analyzed in phase I, it became clear that seven distinct components were present in facilitating EPBL experiences. Each component will be addressed with the supporting data to accompany the component. Through the organic process created by the walking interview process, the assets and qualities as well as the barriers emerged. All of these are included in the seven components. A separate analysis of the data relevant to the relationship between facilitator and place will also be addressed as this emerged as a relevant, necessary relationship that was separate from the organizing framework yet connected to the facilitation process. In phase II, this researcher completed a separate coding and analysis process. It was clear that the components of the organizing framework initially outlined in phase I were supported by the data gathered in phase II. Therefore, the organizing framework contains data from both phases of research even though it was initially developed during phase I. The phase II interviews helped to further flush out the themes and serve as a checks and balances for the initial organizing framework that was developed.

Learn by Doing

The first component in the organizing framework is the philosophy of "learn by doing" (M.S., E.M., & E.P.[1]). There were several pieces that were identified as essential in this component. These include plan the experience, do it (and adjust as needed) and live it, and reflect. This first component was the most descriptive of the process but also the essential first component as it was clearly part of the pre-facilitation process. It was not only about completing an experience in a place but a larger consideration of living in that experience. In the final phase I interview, for example, the facilitators emphasized engaging in the work through use of multiple senses, a capacity that is present in nature place-based work that may not be present

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[1] For clarity, attributional citations are included throughout.

elsewhere in the classrooms for youth (M.S. & E.M., p. 2). This component includes a solid plan, according to many of the participants (E.P., M.A., U.M., P.B., M.S., E.M., & L.B.). There needs to be thought to the inside and outside possibilities (M.A.), the exercises/tasks/activities that will be done with the youth (E.P., M.A., & U.M.), collaboration with others (U.M. & P.B.), an appropriate schedule (M.A., P.B.), and the ability to manage time (E.P., M.A., P.B., U.M., M.S., & E.M.). Participants emphasized the importance of developing curriculum and updating that curriculum so that the ecological place-based experience could be optimal (E.P., M.A., P.B., & L.B.). Some thought, another participant noted, should be given to the suitability of the experiences for youth. Learning experiences that are optimal for learning by doing did not happen spontaneously (L.B.). One participant shared specific examples of skills they might teach youth when engaged in an EPBL experience. For example, there might be an opportunity to learn snow-shoeing or to build and hang a birdhouse (Figure 4.1).

As one participant identified, "learn by doing" is the key part of the nature-based work (E.P., 2017, p. 25). But in that experience, youth can "learn by doing- from different people, from different humans, from different approaches" (M.S. & E.M., 2017, p. 19). While several participants in phase I emphasized the importance of hands-on learning as part of the EPBL experience, participants (M.S. & E.M.) emphasized that many of the important skills for life are not taught in traditional schooling. This component is a pre-experience component, as it includes thoughtful intent on the part of the facilitators.

"Everything about the context in which learning takes place communicates messages of learning and teaching" (Blenkinsop, et al., 2016, p. 6). When these experiences are happening in a natural place and are supported by a facilitator who has an understanding of the complexity of the learning that can happen in nature, this learning experience communicates a message of the

importance of learning by doing. Simultaneously, it provides opportunities for youth to engage in nature while they have these experiences.

Figure 4.1 M.A. Photograph demonstrating learn by doing

Figure 4.1. Youth may have the opportunity to build birdhouses and hang them on the property.

Appreciation for Place/Nature

Another part of the pre-facilitation process was an appreciation for place and nature. Some of the essentials in this component included the belief that it is easier to learn in natural places (U.M.) and to learn from the simple, nature-based way of life (M.S. & E.M.). One participant discussed the adaptations they[2] make in the outdoor experiences for all students, but particularly with the lens to the special education population (U.M.). They relayed a specific example of identifying mushrooms, seeing them in their natural place, and then discussing whether they could or should be picked and eaten (U.M., 2017, p. 7). They emphasized this way

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[2] For clarity, in alignment with APA style, the pronoun "they" will be used, rather than individual gender specific pronouns. This will also protect the identity of the smaller number of males who were participants.

of learning that is not just "I see the picture in the book and it's supposed to be in the forest" (U.M., 2017).

> Participants pointed to the importance of having a love of nature as well as an ability or desire to inspire a love of nature. This component includes promoting a sustainable lifestyle (E.M. & L.B.). E.M. expanded that it is valuable to introduce concepts around: how the society is constructed, something that… brings with it the lifestyle, so that the school would be a place where you learn a sustainability lifestyle, that this … community lifestyle, this nature based lifestyle, these kinds of things…[are important] and then nature would be like an everyday teaching subject, in every discipline. (E.M.)

Giving voice to a place with the purpose of sustained involvement with that place, or a similar place, was a key component in the research (P.B., U.M., M.S., E.M., L.B., & B.G.). Essentially, the facilitators identified that through this type of nature place-based experience youth will have an interdisciplinary understanding of how the world is constructed. In two of the interviews, the links between the interdisciplinary approach and good pedagogical knowledge were essential. A theme throughout the interviews was one that emphasized that nature is not only one way, and therefore is unpredictable, and this unpredictability is a positive in education (M.S., E.M., P.B. & L.B.).

One of the overriding themes present in this component is the engagement with the natural world. As E.P. indicated, "even that we have this curriculum for nature school, for example, there are many things that people could learn… but we always say to our trainees, that all of these topics are not as important as the feeling these children [have when] enjoying nature" (E.P., 2017). If a facilitator can help invoke a feeling when working with youth in nature, youth

will continue experiences where the opportunity to feel that way again is present and will know that an experience in nature can elicit that feeling.

When the question was asked about what specific skills a facilitator might need, P.B. focused on the ability to read nature and identify what is special in that place that day (Figure 4.2). An important skill that is part of this component is "[l]earning to listen to what the environment has to offer" (Blenkinsop, et al., 2016, p. 12). In this component, is it important to note the participants use of the word *nature*. When asked about their work and experiences, the participants overwhelmingly used the term nature-based learning when describing their place-based work rather than ecological place-based learning. Some literature emphasized the language of ecological, tying the appreciation for culture with that of ecosystems (Gruenewald, 2003a), while those using the term nature link experiences in places where the natural world is being used as a tool for experiences beyond the classroom (Sobel, 1996; Louv, 2008).

This passion for nature and a daily life that is connected to nature was present in all of the participants. It may be what drew them to this type of work, or it is, perhaps, what engaged them in this research. It is certainly one of the factors that keeps them engaged as a facilitator. The emphasis on wanting to share and instill a love for nature is a key *sustainable concept* for the participants. Sustainability comes out in two ways in the data. In the first, the participants refer to wanting to live a sustainable lifestyle, one that considers the impact of the environment in the way they live and work. The second is the more relevant way for EPBL in that it introduces or reinforces a way of life for youth that prioritizes sustainability, recognizing the benefits of an individual's relationship with the natural world.

Figure 4.2 P.B. Photograph demonstrating appreciate for place/nature

Figure 4.2. P.B. took a photograph of a common resting spot in the place where they hike with youth to demonstrate finding special places with the youth.

Knowledge

The knowledge component is considered a pre-facilitation component. However, this is also the first component to be present as a during-facilitation component. The knowledge component had several important subcategories that were identified by the participants. First, it is important for the facilitator have a plan (M.A., E.P., & U.M.). Participants identified that often they depend on their foundational knowledge of having rules that are introduced to the youth (P.B., M.S. & E.M.). Participants also identified knowledge of nature as important (E.P., U.M., P.B., E.M. & L.B.). Knowledge of curriculum and core natural world experiences was also key (M.A. & B.G.). In Finland, for example, these experiences included gathering around a fire or participating in a sauna experience. Another participant also pointed to opportunities to teach core curriculum subjects in a creative way that engages youth, specifically providing examples of coding (Figure 4.3). Some participants noted that their nature place-based curriculum was inter-

disciplinary, including the arts (U.M., L.B., B.F. & B.G.). Knowledge of facilitating was also important. Facilitators, according to the research gathered, need to be able to prepare, do, and reflect- with adjustments as needed.

Knowledge of place was also important in this component (M.A., M.S., E.M. & B.F.). Participants identified this as important in giving meaning to place to inspire youth but also using what they have available. Some thought it helpful to have a place or specific destination that was the purpose of the experience (M.A., E.P., U.M. & B.F.) while others found that being in a place was valuable and was purpose enough (P.B., M.S., E.M., L.B. & B.G.). Finally, knowledge of youth was emphasized. Participants focused on entering the relationship with youth with no prejudices and emphasized the ability to be open (M.S., E.M. & L.B.). Participants focused on the ability for some youth to shine in the natural environment when they do not necessarily do so in the classroom environment (U.M., L.B., B.F. & B.G.). Participants identified knowledge of nature and creating curriculum that included inter-disciplinary work and information about necessary core experiences to engage in nature (P.B., U.M., E.M., & B.F.).

One facilitator spoke about competence in various areas being a key component (E.P., 2017). They identified that it is important that "they [the youth] have the feeling that you know what you are doing, that they can rely on you" (E.P., 2017). Another participant identified that the facilitator does not need to know everything but it is helpful if they have some knowledge of the place, the curriculum, and working with youth (P.B.). This freedom from being the expert allowed the participants to be explorers with the youth with whom they were engaged, thus becoming learners themselves. Often the "sage on the stage" style of teaching is embraced in traditional education, while a "guide on the side" approach is more relevant in EPBL. This means that the facilitator must have some knowledge but not all of the knowledge. In working

with youth, knowledge of how to work with youth in a way that presents as non-prejudicial and open is helpful (M.S., E.M. & L.B.). One facilitator pointed out that not all youth are comfortable working in nature in this way (U.M.).

Unique to the interviews in phase II was discussion about students who had alternative learning styles. All three U.S. participants talked about the benefits for diverse learners when they get the opportunity to engage in ecological place-based learning (L.B., B.F. & B.G.). For these students, learning experiences outside of the classroom give them an opportunity to shine in a way they are not able to do in the traditional classroom. Additionally, one participant shared that seeing youth successful in nature learning experiences is beneficial to them as a facilitator.

> [These experiences offer] me multiple perspectives of these students that shows the students have capabilities in other ways, and it's a reminder, both as a teacher and as a human being, that we should not be categorizing people by what we see in one contained environment (B.G.).

Another facilitator discussed the challenge that would be present if the facilitator did not know the place where they were engaging the youth. (M.A.,p. 11). That ability "to read nature and see what is special here" (P.B., p. 9). Facilitators can then help youth identify places in nature where they feel comfortable and places where they can impact the environment in a positive way (P.B.). This idea of creating a relationship with a place was a factor for all of the facilitators in their work but also one that they all wished to demonstrate and share with the youth and other educators. Facilitators outlined that they must have knowledge of first aid and safety, of youth development, of what to expect in nature-based work, and of phenomenology-based learning experiences.

This component focuses on the overall theme of facilitating EPBL as seen by the facilitators and is the spirit of facilitating EPBL. "[E]ducators… have been embracing a constructivist stance towards education because inherent in a constructivist pedagogy are processes that are social, democratic, and inclusive of critical inquiry" (Theobald & Siskar in Gruenewald & Smith, 2010, p. 213). Participants emphasized a hands-on approach that allowed for questions and exploration. This idea of having a new educational experience and thus learning the skills or knowledge inherent in the experience is key to EPBL.

Knowledge of place is critical in EPBL experiences, "recognising place as both co-educator and curricular source" (Blenkinsop, et al., 2016, p. 12). A major tool for facilitators is familiarity with the place where the experience is occurring. This comfort in their own knowledge of place then allows the facilitator to use the tools present in that place in the moment (Blenkinsop, et al., 2016). The knowledge of place was not the sub-category most emphasized by the participants, but it was clear that each participant valued the place where the learning experiences were happening. Participants knew that they could not do the work they were doing without having special knowledge of that place. This special knowledge includes how to access place, how to introduce place to youth, and how to honor place as they engaged in these experiences.

Mannion, Fenwick, and Lynch (2013) suggest that creating opportunities for facilitator and youth interactions that are "flexible, contingent, open-ended, yet [provide] purposeful tasks… for the aim of understanding and improving human-environment relations" (p. 803). This research emphasized knowledge in how to create a plan for EPBL, how to outline a foundation for how things are done in place-based learning (Sobel, 2004; Place-Based Learning Collaborative, 2001, 2016; Lieberman, 2013). Participants also needed to have knowledge about

facilitating (Blenkinsop, et al., 2016): how to prepare, how to do activities in nature, and how to

reflect on the experiences, including adjustments to any of those steps during the experience.

Figure 4.3 U.M. photograph demonstrating knowledge

Figure 4.3. Youth have the opportunity to explore core subjects, such as coding, in a nature place-based setting.

Awareness of Barriers

There were several elements present in this component of the organizing framework of

facilitating EPBL. This was considered a pre-facilitation and during-facilitation component. Two

subcategories in this component are convenience and accessibility as well as training. These

subcategories presented in many different ways through the data collection process as

participants identified these subcategories generally as well as specific to their own locations or

place. Two major barriers that facilitators face were also outlined in this component-

unpredictability (E.P., P.B. & L.B.) and fear (U.M., M.S., E.M., & B.G.). While unpredictability

was not as well detailed by the participants, the participants clearly outlined several potential fear

factors. These include fear of place, fear of youth (or lack of knowledge about youth and youth

development), and fear from the facilitator - due to inexperience or lack of knowledge either in

the curriculum or of place (M.S., E.P., U.M., M.S., E.M., & B.G.). Safety concerns could be

related to lack of hiking or trail experience, lack of proper outdoor gear, wildlife interactions, or

weather events (M.A., E.P., M.S., & E.M.). Weather events played a factor during the interview

process as a major rainstorm developed in the first interview. The path had to be adjusted to

include a longer stop by the fire pit where there was a small shelter that could serve as protection

in the rain (Figure 4.4). Additional subcategories that might lead to barriers to implementation

include that of others involved in this process- administrators, school personnel, family, and

parents (M.A., E.P., P.B., U.M., & L.B.). Many of the participants identified the importance of

relationships with and communication with the others involved in the youth lives. Finally, there

are potential barriers around resources and finances (M.A.). For example, even though there are

no shortages of outdoor space in Finland, there were barriers around access to certain places or

forests due to lack of knowledge of that area. There were additional barriers related to costs

associated with hiring the facilitators and their agencies for facilitation of EPBL. In phase II,

participants talked about fighting the culture of the school if it is not one that understands

ecological place-based learning. The time this fight can take (L.B.) or an administration's

increasing desire to meet the standards (B.G.) can impact time allotted for outdoor activities.

When these nature-based experiences are seen as an "add-ons" or something that any educator

can do, it can limit the youth experience due to the facilitator not having relevant knowledge

(L.B.). Yet, it is still important to advocate for and permit space and time for these opportunities

(B.F. & B.G.).

Findings suggest that awareness of barriers is as important to facilitators as knowledge of

place and planning. Facilitators need to be clear about the possibilities that could arise when

engaged in this work but this is not a prohibitive component; is not a component that prevents

facilitators from engaging in this work. For participants interviewed in this research, there seemed to be a balance between barriers and knowledge that was protective. For example, participants identified unpredictability of learning in the natural world as a barrier, but also reported that being comfortable with that uncertainty is an essential component of facilitating EPBL. This idea of being comfortable with not knowing was also supported in the literature (Blenkinsop, et al., 2016, p. 13). In many ways, the participants identified heightened awareness of what could go awry or become a barrier. However, these participants did not dwell on those things so that they became paralyzing in the work they were doing. There are potentially many additional barriers in EPBL work but all of the participants saw these potential barriers as learning opportunities and not reasons to stop working with youth in EPBL experiences.

Figure 4.4 E.P. photograph demonstrating awareness of barriers

Figure 4.4. Fire pit during severe rain storm that occurred during the walking interview.

Many of the facilitators spoke about establishing the rules, being clear with youth, and other educators, about what the expectations are as well as what needs to be in place for safety (E.P., P.B., U.M., M.S., E.M. & L.B.). U.M. (2017), for example, talked about knowing the rules, introducing the safety factors, and then being open to kids climbing trees if that is what

they wanted to be doing, within the boundaries of the rules that were created within the class environment (p. 23). Facilitators felt that they needed to be aware of the potential barriers to participating in nature-based experiences with youth but not allow those barriers to paralyze their engagement (E.P., M.S. & E.M.).

Be Present

This component also had several subcategories identified by the participants. They emphasized important subcategories such as spontaneous, fun, noticing small details, creativity, empowerment, fostering independence, inspiring, and adaptability as essential characteristics. When asked about the most important element for facilitators, one participant discussed "the ability to be present in yourself, in the day, and within the group" (P.B., 2017, p. 8). The emphasis amongst all of the facilitators was on connecting with the place where you are, in the here and now, rather than theoretically. According to P.B., being present means the facilitator is then ready to read the group and make appropriate changes as needed. Other participants mentioned that the facilitator does not have to know everything (E.P.) as "nature elements always offer that thing you could not have planned" (B.F., 2018, p. 2). This "what can we find, what do we see (B.G., 2018, p. 1)" approach can be beneficial in the natural world. There is no specific background necessary to observe nature. This observation could be perceived as in conflict with the importance of knowledge, but the facilitators explain that it is not contradictory. As one participant stated, "true discovery" (L.B.) happens when you are in the real world; things happen in nature. For example, one participant identified the joy and excitement of finding a California treefrog when exploring the outdoors (Figure 4.5).

Another participant mentioned the need to reflect, that it is important to be in the moment but reflection helps the facilitator to do this when working with youth. As one participant

outlined, "Breath, laugh, have fun" (U.M., 2017) and have the flexibility to leave things undone when engaging in these nature-based experiences with youth. There is value in knowing there will be unknowns on the part of the facilitator as that experience is valuable in the learning process also (P.B., L.B., B.F., & B.G.).

Being present, or being in the moment (E.P.), means the facilitator does not always have to have the answers and the process should not be overcomplicated (M.A.). Participants noted it is important to be curious and instill curiosity in others (E.P.). They also emphasized the ability to change the plan or be spontaneous in response to current group needs while having fun (P.B.). As the research suggests, "spontaneity was also important" (Mannion, et al., 2013, p. 802). Participants noted that their role includes empowering youth through teaching skills and not taking the easy path in the classroom. Encouraging students to ask questions and explore interests (U.M.) while also encouraging creativity through outside-the-box thinking (U.M., L.B. & B.G.) and time for exploration (U.M. & L.B.) are important. Several participants commented on the importance of flexibility (M.S., E.M., & B.F.).

If the learn by doing component is the spirit of facilitating EPBL, then the ability to be present component is the heart. Multiple participants cited specific examples of how being present (i.e. witnessing team work and collaboration among peers, finding a frog, exploring the seashells, having others wave to you from the school campus, witnessing a nature event, etc.) changed the scope of the plan for the day. Being present goes hand in hand with flexibility when it comes to facilitation.

Figure 4.5 L.B. photograph demonstrating the component be present

Figure 4.5. Photograph of youth holding California Treefrog (Pseudacris cadaverina).

Engagement

It is in this category that the transition from during-facilitation process to post-process begins to happen. The participants identified needing to engage in several different ways as part of the process. There is the need to engage with youth, specifically engaging as co-learner (P.B., p. 16). The should be done in a way where the facilitator is equal with the youth (P.B., M.S. & E.M., 2017) and for the promotion of a love for nature (E.P., M.A. & L.B.).

Engagement with place is important, in considering that the facilitator is in a relationship with place and in assisting the facilitator to be in the here and now when engaging in facilitation (M.A., E.P., P.B., M.S. & E.M.). The participants emphasized engagement through exploration, as opposed to a sedentary approach that is often used in traditional education. There are different observations and insights that can be made while being active and outside in the real world versus sitting in a classroom (B.F. & B.G.). This engagement can lead to deeper involvement with the material and excitement about the learning process (L.B. & B.G.). One participant described a student who was "…walking, talking, and found something, there was a lot of engagement that was happening" (B.G.). Youth should have ownership of their own learning and

that leads to motivation in the learning experience furthering engagement (B.F. & B.G.).

Additionally, students can practice social skills and engagement in the real world in a way that is

different from engaging in social skills activities in the classroom (B.F.).

Overall, the goal of facilitation in the ecological place-based learning experience is

creating opportunities for self-actualization. Self-actualization is the goal because the youth

experience is one that "inspires them, gives them something that lives in their memory" (M.S. &

E.M., p. 8), and create opportunities for a-ha moments. Another participant specifically pointed

to an activity they engage in with their students where the students learn about Maslow's

hierarchy and the need for self-actualization (Figure 4.6). They use this lesson throughout the

year as an opportunity to revisit the inspiration the youth had while engaging in this nature place-

based experience at times when it may be more challenging to engage in the prosocial behaviors

explored in the initial lesson (B.G.).

In education, student engagement refers to the "degree of attention, curiosity,

interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught,

which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education"

(Student Engagement, no author, 2016, p. 1). Generally speaking, the concept of student

engagement is predicated on the belief that learning improves when students are inquisitive,

interested, or inspired, and that learning tends to suffer when students are bored, dispassionate,

disaffected, or otherwise "disengaged." (Student Engagement, no author, 2016, p. 1)

If there is no engagement, it does not matter if all of the other components are in place.

This is why this component both exists during-facilitation as well as post-facilitation. The youth

may learn something from their experience in this natural place but they will not retain the

experience, the feeling, or the energy they felt if they are not *engaged* in this experience. The

main purpose of this engagement in EPBL is to connect youth with the experience and to connect youth with the natural world through addressing that increase in attention, curiosity, passion and interest. This partially comes from knowing the place and how to use place with the youth but also comes from understanding the youth and the variety of things that may be needed in the natural environment to create that experience. Both will further the initial experience in nature and hopefully begin to instill an interest and passion for experiences in nature but also in learning.

Figure 4.6 B.G. photograph demonstrating engagement

Figure 4.6. Photograph of youth engaged in Maslow's hierarchy activity.

Reflection

The final category that emerged in the data was that of reflection. Participants emphasized the ability to reflect in the present so that changes in the process or plan could be changed in the moment (M.A., P.B. & U.M.) while also reflecting for the purposes of growth as a facilitator (P.B., M.S. & E.M.). Participants identified a few different ways of reflecting that were beneficial to them, including formal and informal evaluation with educators and youth, reflection with peers who were also facilitators of EPBL, and self-reflection (M.A., E.P. & P.B.). One participant identified that while it can be a challenge to get youth to open themselves up, it

is helpful if the facilitator has been involved in a reflexivity process themselves (M.S.). In essence, is it important that the facilitator is personally engaged in what they are asking the youth to engage in. The participants identified that nature place-based experiences can also mean that one learns from bad ideas, from trying new things, and from those new things not going well (M.S. & E.M.).

"[R]eflection is a necessary part of the educational and, by extension, personal process" (Blenkinsop, et al., 2016, p. 24). Three areas of reflection were identified by participants. All three were identified as part of the "being present mindset" facilitators should adopt- reflection for evaluation (with other educators present and youth), reflection with peers, and self-reflection. Blenkinsop et al. (2016) identifies five areas of reflection for facilitators to engage in that could add to the reflection component in the organizing framework as they expand upon those identified in the data. These five include self-reflection related to oneself; self-reflection related to the youth and/or group; co-reflection with other teachers, parents, and/or the group of youth; eco-reflection ("being able to actually hear from the non-human (Blenkinsop, et al., 2016, p. 16)"); and meta-reflection (focused on the larger community and the goals of that community) (Blenkinsop, et al., 2016). While not specifically identified by name by the participants in this research, they did emphasis the theme of eco-reflection. "Place-based education is not something you can teach well unless it is developed through a program of personal learning" (Greenwood, In press, p. 12). This idea of knowing a place as a facilitator, of taking the time to explore personally, and then share professionally, was common among those engaged in this work both in Finland and the U.S. As part of the knowledge component, participants identified the importance of place--giving meaning to place, asking place to inspire youth, and studying place to identify what resources are usable and which are being depleted. While not always identified

as such, this requires reflection on the part of the facilitators too as they reflect upon how each of these areas are present (or not present) in the EPBL experience they have created each day.

In relation to direct practice, there is potential for facilitators of EPBL to be leaders in the field, particularly when it comes to "reflects-in-action" (Schön, 1983, p. 68). This concept, exhibited in EPBL, focuses on the connection between knowledge of the subject or material previously known and an awareness of the current situation and nuances that come from "knowing-in-action" (Schön, 1983, p. 59). Having a knowledge base entering the work does not mean that the facilitator will be all set for the day but rather that they can feel comfortable entering the learning experience. The facilitator must remain engaged in the present and in reflection while engaged in these learning experiences.

Relationship between Facilitator and Place

One additional category is outside the organizing framework, as developed at this point. This category addresses the specific analysis between place and facilitating EPBL. However, this relationship does reveal itself in several of the organizing framework categories, specifically awareness and knowledge. A relationship often includes elements such as respect, reciprocity, nurturing, and communication. There is also typically a context for how the relationship was formed and how it continues to grow or extinguish. The relationships between facilitators and place contain similar elements. It is through the photograph elicitation that these elements were best seen, as that process provides a valuable lens to analyze the relationship between facilitator and place.

During the interviews, participants discussed the reciprocity of the relationship with nature. For example, one participant identified that you can call on nature to participate and it keeps showing up. Participants pointed to the unique combination of present moment and

historical context that defines place and the value of sharing that with youth. For example, E.M. pointed to the historical context of Finland in the industrial world because of their location near the sea (Figure 4.7). Another participant emphasized the importance of learning outside of the school space; engaging in learning in other places can stretch the youth learning as there is "value in offering our diverse learners, diverse places to learn" (E.M., 2017, p. 1). Other participants focused on the adaptability learned in using nature in learning. One participant compared their adaptability with the youth to the place's ability to adapt to human interactions (E.P.). There are "unexpected discoveries when you are in an element or space that is not controlled" (B.F., p. 2). Another participant talked about the nurturing dynamic that place allows facilitators to engage in- facilitators learn to appreciate the unknown elements and the unpredictable. They emphasized choosing places where little moments in nature could be shared with youth. The photograph of a spider created pause for them in describing how they reflect on the importance of being present (Figure 4.8) and "try to let the place speak for itself, and give opportunities for that" (P.B., p. 3).

Figure 4.7 M.S. photograph demonstrating the relationship between facilitator and place

Figure 4.5. Photograph of island and sea.

Figure 4.8 P.B. photograph demonstrating the relationship between facilitator and place

Figure 4.8. Photograph of a spider web.

For the question about what they would share with other facilitators or potential facilitators of this work, L.B. stated:

It's literally in our backyard but we had to work really hard to get there and it's also really far away. And then we spend a lot of time on the field too and when we're on the field, we can look up and say, that's that place we went to. Remember when we were waving, it's right there where that little tree is. So you have this connection to this place and it's related to your experience there year after year. And it's all right there. (L.B., Figure 4.9)

Figure 4.9 L.B. Photograph

Figure 4.9. L.B. took a photograph of one of the youth waving to youth on campus while on a hike, illustrating their connection to place.

As one participant identified, "[n]ature is busy, we have to adapt to it" (M.A., 2017, p. 15). This adaptability is key in the facilitator's role but also in their recognition of the importance of their relationship with place. A familiarity allows the facilitator to be able to keep up with the ever-changing presentation of nature but also the busy aspect of working with youth in nature.

It was not until personal reflection and memoing that this researcher was able to identify this key relationship between facilitator and place. Adding the photo elicitation component allowed this researcher to bring each individual place to life. Lynch and Mannion (2016) "suggest that the walking interview is a very legitimate method to research these relations and the method produces one viable way of noticing our participation in places, including how we come to know through them" (p. 341). Through these EPBL experiences, youth know the world through experience rather than through second-hand description that requires their imagination. While the participants demonstrated this partially through their walking interviews and reflection on the subject, the added element of photographs and personal reflection on the participants' photographs gave voice to place. The photo elicitation process allowed participants to return to the moment when they were taking photographs (see Figures 4.10-4.15); it essentially mirrored

the in-the-moment process that the facilitators are striving for in their nature place-based

engagement with youth.

Figure 4.10 M.A. photograph

Figure 4.10. Photograph demonstrating the relationship between facilitator and place.

Figure 4.11 M.A. photograph demonstrating the relationship between facilitator and place

Figure 4.11. Photograph demonstrating the relationship between facilitator and place.

Figure 4.12 M.S..photograph

Figure 4.12. Photograph demonstrating the relationship between facilitator and place.

Figure 4.13 P.B. photograph

Figure 4.13. Photograph demonstrating the relationship between facilitator and place.

Figure 4.14 E.M. photograph

Figure 4.14. Photograph demonstrating the relationship between facilitator and place.

Figure 4.15 B.G. photograph

Figure 4.15. Photograph demonstrating the relationship between facilitator and place.

These participants engage youth in a way that the facilitators see as beneficial and sustaining for themselves and for the youth. None of the participants, in either phase, saw this as work. As participant P.B. identified, "that's why I prefer the type of themes that are more strongly connected to the place." These participants saw the facilitation as the necessary way to engage youth, to invigorate the youth and themselves, and to connect youth to the places around them. This relationship between facilitator and place enhances the ability to engage the youth involved in these experiences.

Summary of Findings

The framework's components were identified through data analysis and were then developed into an organizing framework for use in facilitating EPBL. The participants' insider perspective helped to clarify the assets and barriers that those engaging in this field encounter. The analysis of these data provided this researcher with key information about the passion and energy facilitators bring to the work they do. This analysis also provided information about the special relationship the facilitators have with the places they work. Photograph elicitation data reflect the immeasurable value that place plays in the facilitators' work.

Comparison between Finland and the U.S.

While there were many similarities in the data gathered from the two different phases, and countries, as indicated by the framework, there were also some differences. The biggest difference was that of the focus on community. While this issue of community was addressed in Finland, (see focus on community lifestyle from E.M., page 88, Chapter 4), there was a much bigger emphasis on community by the U.S. participants. This researcher thought she would find more connections to community but because of the nature of the participants in phase I in the

research study, there were gaps here in the emphasis on community with more focus on place. In phase I of the research, the facilitators create communities for the day. Many of the participants in this phase did discuss how they work towards creating a small community within one day. While these participants note that they do not expect youth to create community around that place where they are that day, the participants anticipate opening a door for youth to create an experience that the youth will want to replicate in their own places (P.B. & E.P.). In contrast, the U.S. participants, all three of whom were classroom educators and had the same group of students all year, emphasized community as part of the experience. These facilitators worked towards having youth create specific relationships with a specific place over time (L.B., B.F., & B.G.). As Grunewald and Smith (2010) emphasize, "place-based education can be understood as a community-based effort to reconnect the process of education, enculturation, and human development to the well-being of community life" (p. xvi). There is room for exploration of other comparisons between countries in the research as well as in the differences between pedagogy from trained educators and those in other fields. Other differences were found in the interview participants, while the Finnish participants were mostly nature school employees, with one exception, the U.S. participants were all classroom educators. The Finnish participants had high demand for their programs, and specifically for their knowledge base, although not always the funding streams for everyone to participate. Meanwhile the U.S. participants were challenged to continue to advocate for the importance of continuing this type of work and their role, as knowledgeable facilitators, in doing the work and training others.

Evidence of Quality of Research

This research intentionally engaged in a ConGT process using a detailed, pre-determined process with room for flexibility would allow for the trustworthiness of the process to be clearly

outlined and discussed. "To ensure reliability in qualitative research, examination of trustworthiness is crucial" (Golafshani, 2003, p. 601).

The intentionality around having two phases of research, one in Finland and one in the U.S., allows for the member check process to be built into the research process. While this researcher used both phases of research for data gathering, this researcher did not change the questions or the process in phase II so as to not influence the phase II participants based on this researcher's knowledge of the emerging organizing framework. Phase II participants were, in essence, confirming the components of the organizing framework without knowledge of the framework itself. The process of member checking, "which involves the researcher showing the findings and/or interpretations to the participants for assessment of accuracy, can increase the rigor and trustworthiness" (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007, p. 576), could have added a level of bias in this early research (i.e. guiding towards confirmation of the framework rather than checking its relevancy and generalizability in phase II). However, as this research further develops, this process of checking the findings for accuracy directly with other facilitators will have value.

The data gathered in phase II mirrored those from phase I, further supporting the credibility of the data gathered. In qualitative research, the "emphasis should be on creating 'thick' descriptions, including accounts of the context, the research methods, and examples of raw data so that readers can consider their interpretations" (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013, p. 16). Phase II enhanced the transferability of the data as this phase, supported by rich descriptions, identified the components present in the initial organizing framework.

This two-phase study also adds to the transferability of the research. "Rich, thick descriptions allow readers to make decisions regarding transferability" (Creswell, 2013, p. 252).

Researchers have enough information to make decisions about how and when to transfer the

methodology and approach in this research to other research settings. Additionally, in order to

"acquire valid and reliable multiple and diverse realities, multiple methods of searching and

gathering data are in order" (Golafshani, 2003, p. 604). As demonstrated by the data in both

phases, similar descriptions and ways of approaching the work as a facilitator of EPBL

experiences are transferable from country to country. While there may be differences in the

universality of the approach and its application, once these experiences are happening, the

components present on the part of the individual facilitating the experiences for youth are

similar. The thick descriptions outlined earlier in this chapter are applicable across populations

and circumstances within EPBL experiences.

In an attempt to bolster the confirmability of the research, this researcher remained

neutral in their own personal biases and opinions about the benefits of ecological place-based

learning for youth. This neutrality meant that there was a consistency in this researcher's emails

and personal interactions with the participants. This researcher did not share any of their own

personal biases or supports for the benefits of this type of experience with youth, although it may

have been clear that a researcher who engages in research on this subject is supportive of the

work.

In following a ConGT methodology, line-by-line coding and the follow-up coding

process, detailed transcription coding notes, memos, and visual maps provide a trail of the

process used by this researcher, supporting the confirmability of the data gathered and the

analysis of the data. "Using more than one type of analysis can strengthen the rigor and

trustworthiness of the findings via methodological triangulation" (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007,

p. 575). This step by step process demonstrates a direct link between the findings accurately

representing the participants' responses, rather than this researcher's thoughts. The multi-step analysis strengthened the analysis process rather than just depending on one type to draw conclusions from the data. The "use of multiple and different sources, methods…to provide corroborating evidence" (Creswell, 2013, p. 251) meant this researcher was triangulating information and thus, confirming the validity of the findings.

While an inquiry audit or outside reviewer was not used in this research, a clear process is detailed, so that if another researcher wanted to replicate this study or expand the work, that would be possible and recommended. This process led to an emerging organizing framework while the intention of a ConGT process would be to develop an eventual theoretical framework, a framework that is much needed in this area. Additional interviews and data analysis would be needed to achieve saturation in this discipline. There would be benefit to continuing to engage facilitators of EPBL in the walking interview process as well as capturing the essence of these experiences by including a photography elicitation process as part of the interview procedures. It is believed by this researcher that based on the two phases of this study, similar results would be found in countries engaging youth in this field.

Chapter 5
Discussions and Implications

Perhaps the most significant discovery for us as researchers is that there is no

coherent discussion across the fields of outdoor, environmental or experiential education

which points to our epistemological commitments and the possibility that our practices

are themselves a radical departure from the assumed concepts of knowledge and meaning

making that has buttressed modern western public education for more than 150 years.

(Blenkinsop, et al., 2016, p 11)

This study explores the role of the facilitator in ecological place-based learning

experiences, specifically the assets and barriers that enhance or prevent the facilitator from

engaging in this work. Additionally, this research examines the relationship between facilitator

and place as it plays out in the facilitator's role in engaging youth in these experiences. The

findings constitute an initial organizing framework for facilitators that includes seven key

components for facilitating EPBL. These components are: learn by doing, appreciation of

place/nature, knowledge, awareness of barriers, be present, engagement, and reflection.

Data collected via walking interviews and photography elicitation in Finland and

photography elicitation and mini-interviews in the United States—and the resulting framework—

were driven by a constructivist grounded theory approach to research. This chapter reviews the

research study questions and hypotheses, provides a summary of the findings and their relevancy

within the field of EPBL and social work, and discusses the implications of the findings.

Research Study Questions and Hypotheses

This qualitative research focused on gathering information from participants who are

working in nature. Participants had been engaged in ecological place-based experiences with

youth in the past twelve months. In phase I, the focus was on meeting facilitators where they are, in the work that they do. This researcher went to various locations in the greater Helsinki, Finland area where facilitators of EPBL meet with students. The majority of participants were part of the nature school system in Finland, while one participant was a classroom teacher who frequently uses EPBL experiences as part of her teaching pedagogy. This researcher asked participants to participate in walking interviews, meeting in the place where the participants most often conduct their learning experiences for youth. As the walking interviews were conducted, participants were asked to take three to seven pictures along the way that they believed best represented the work they do with youth. The research questions during this phase included: What do facilitators of EPBL with youth need in order to facilitate these experiences? What components need to be present in an organizing framework for facilitators engaging in EPBL with youth? Specific research objectives included identifying the assets and barriers needed to facilitate these EPBL experiences (from an insider's perspective) and an analysis of the relationship between place and facilitation in EPBL.

In phase II, there were three participants. After encountering difficulty finding participants in the U.S., this researcher was able to locate two participants in California and one in Pennsylvania who were willing to participate in photography elicitation and an interview. All three participants are elementary school (Kindergarten through 8th grade) teachers in charter schools. Each participant took pictures and then forwarded pictures to this researcher. During the interview, they chose four pictures to engage in the PHOTO process, discussing each photo's relevance to the work they do with youth in nature place-based experiences.

A place-based organizing framework for facilitators of EPBL emerged from the data. This framework includes a timeline beginning with the components that occur pre-learning

experience, then focusing on the in-the-moment components, and then addressing the post-learning experience components. There was a clear identification of the assets that should be present in these facilitation experiences as well as the potential barriers that facilitators face. Finally, the data, particularly data garnered from the photograph elicitation, demonstrated the importance of the facilitator's relationship with place.

Implications of Findings: Importance to the Discipline of Social Work

As was outlined in the literature review (Chapter 2: Literature Review), one of the roles of the facilitator is to identify places where connection can be fostered between the youth and the place through experience (Gruenewald, 2003a). Facilitators should be familiar with the nuances of engaging in this type of work but, unfortunately, conversations in the literature about engagement in EPBL have not included a strong focus on the role of the facilitator. This essential role of the facilitator can be a crucial component in the effort to connect theory and practice in promoting expansion of these types of EPBL experiences for youth. Social workers can be an integral part of this dynamic due to their already existing knowledge base of connecting theory and practice.

The NASW Code of Ethics (Workers, 2017) outlines the responsibility that social workers have to the broader society. The newest iteration of the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE)'s Education Policy and Accreditation Standards has included environmental justice as one of the competencies (CSWE Committee on Accreditation, 2017, p. 7). It appears that those engaged in facilitating nature place-based experiences also believe that individuals have a responsibility to the broader society, including the natural world. Social workers are in a unique position to add to this dialogue as they are trained to consider all of the possible implications within a population and to promote an approach that "supports the profession's

historic commitment to promote well-being for all and help create just and democratic societies"
(Midgley & Conley, 2010, p. 204).

The Australian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics "promotes the protection of
the natural environment as inherent to social well-being" (Heinsch, 2012, p. 309). While it is not
yet articulated in the current NASW Code of Ethics (Workers, 2017), it is part of the social work
curricular requirements as per CSWE. This continued alignment of practice and purpose in
professional work could add an element to the ecological place-based learning conversation as it
aligns well with application of the profession's larger vision and ethical standards.

Social work's commitment to a "person-in-environment" approach, where all elements or
systems are valued in considering how to work with a person or a population, is relevant in
nature-based approaches. In a way, the nature of an ecological place-based learning approach is
one that is aligned with the basic tenets that social work clinicians should adhere to, the
foundation of starting where the client is, emotionally *and* physically. EPBL literally reminds
clinicians to "be where the client is" and therefore puts social workers back to the basics of
focusing on insight, openness, and reflectiveness when working with clients in *their* place.

As a social worker, this researcher believes their training assisted with the awareness of
theoretical sensitivity essential in the ConGT process. This researcher was helped by an
awareness of potential bias areas while also being sensitive to the need for self-regulation
regarding an unbiased coding process. As part of the ConGT process, this researcher was
comfortable with uncertainty regarding where the process might end up. This researcher's
clinical skills were helpful in the data-coding process; just as a clinician would not pre-determine
outcomes or a treatment plan prior to meeting with a client, this researcher tried hard not to
anticipate the emergence of specific themes. The ConGT process was followed as outlined to

increase generalizability. The ability to trust the process is an essential one for both a clinical social worker and a ConGT researcher.

As was originally outlined in Chapter 3: Methodology, this researcher did consider three specific characteristics related to reflexivity. In accounting for the range of possible researcher interactions and considering where the researcher and their interactions may have influenced the research process, this researcher engaged in memoing and journaling throughout the data gathering and coding process. Additionally, this researcher engaged in a second phase of research. In the third characteristic of acknowledging where the researcher may have influenced the research process, this researcher engaged in a multiple step coding process that used line-by-line-coding, including in vivo codes, to minimize researcher influence on language or description.

As the facilitators outlined engaging in reflection-in-action as defined by Schön (1983), a researcher also can engage in "the 'art' by which [they] sometimes deal with situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict" (Schön, 1983, p. 50). As a ConGT researcher, much like a social work practitioner, if the individual relies too much on fitting the situation to match their knowledge, they could miss opportunities (Schön, 1983, p. 44). This researcher needed time for reflection and uncertainty in their own place for the magnitude of what was shared in the research to develop into the framework.

This research has resulted in the emergence of an organizing framework for facilitation of EPBL experiences. Consistent with the gaps in the literature (as outlined in Chapter 2: Literature Review), there is a need to identify and share good practices in facilitating nature-based learning experiences (Alison et al., 2015). It is important to continue to build a framework for facilitators of these experiences. The framework empowers social workers/facilitators in using the

complexity of the multiple components needed in an approach to engaging youth in learning (i.e. in the facilitation of ecological place-based learning). Adding the multiple levels of conceptualization of how this framework may be introduced and applied from a social work perspective adds a significant contribution, as well.

Henisch (2012) provides examples of practical things that social workers can do to integrate nature into social work practice from assessments to interventions, including community education (p. 313). Continued exposure to the benefits of nature place-based experiences can further expand the potential in the U.S. Despite the outline of all of the benefits to youth (and adults) when engaging in these experiences, there is limited mention of social workers using nature in their work. There is also limited mention of these benefits for social workers and clients working in direct practice with either individuals or groups. Nature's impact on society and community must have a place in effective social work practice (Besthorn & Saleebey, 2003, p.16). The alignment of social work and nature place-based experiences while a natural fit, remains an underdeveloped one. Even in this study, one embarked on by a clinical social work researcher, the focus was on facilitation but did not include any social work trained facilitators. This lack of social worker participants was related to an initial focus on the varied and diverse backgrounds of those facilitating these experiences and a lack of sampling focused on social work involvement on the part of this researcher.

In order for social workers to embark on this journey into EPBL, however, they need to identify their role, rather than sit back and watch the field develop around them. Social workers can advocate for more opportunities in ecological place-based settings for youth. They can offer youth these experiences demonstrating the benefits to youth and others. Social workers can raise awareness of these issues by becoming engaged in discourse, emerging research and

field/practice work where these experiences, and the role of the facilitator in these experiences, are emphasized. Locally, social workers can plug into their local schools, youth centers, and agencies, to find out what experiences are happening for youth in nature place-based environments. Globally, social workers can become part of the international conversation and research agenda for promoting this field.

Social workers already have the experience of working from micro, mezzo, and macro levels of conceptualization. Those facilitating within the field of EPBL and advocating for its universal acceptance must be able to do the same- understand the components needed for engagement, the changes in policies and procedures that need to accompany change, and the advocacy required to foster implementation on national, international, and global levels. The framework developed as part of this research can serve as a tool to be used on multiple levels by those engaged in this type of work. Not only can this framework serve as a tool for those on the ground level facilitating EPBL experiences directly with youth, but it can draw attention to the intersection of an evidence-based and place-based foundational tool that can be used as a mechanism to advocate for continued changes within existing processes in the educational systems in the U.S. and elsewhere.

Blenkinsop, et al. (2016) identified environmental educators serving the role of teaching safety and crisis management for schools that engage students in EPBL experiences. "The leaders' ability to act as a gatekeeper to define contextually appropriate knowledge has important implications for practice" (Brown, 2007, p. 102). This researcher would extend this to social workers who often have a context for crisis management in their local communities, including assessments and response planning, as well as in education. Crisis management training for social workers connects to the idea facilitators use of starting where the youth is and building a

plan from there. Simultaneously, both social workers and facilitators have training and expertise that help guide experiences. Social workers are trained to address setbacks or barriers, and facilitators of these experiences need to have a skillset that is adaptable in this way.

In Finland, the rich, outdoor-focused nature of the country's history means that outdoor education and experiential learning have been a part of their formal education since 1866 (Karppinen, 2012, p. 30). In the United States, EPBL experiences have appeared in many different forms (i.e. place-based, environmental education, outdoor adventure learning, etc.), but never in a universal approach linked with the public education system. The barriers that exist in the educational system in the U.S. challenge the implementation of EPBL.

In the U.S., for social workers or counselors, particularly those working in school-based settings that are not adventure-based, these EPBL experiences seem so few and far between, that it is difficult to engage in research in this field. While outdoor education has not been officially accepted in Finland as a means of therapeutic intervention, it has been recognized as valuable within therapy and social work. This value is linked to the identification of the benefits for youth including inclusion as a strategy (i.e. including youth with diverse backgrounds and abilities in various ways in therapeutic and education settings) and improving self-image as an outcome (Karppinen, 2012, p. 31). There is, therefore, recognition that the therapeutic benefits of EPBL experience should be implemented beyond the classroom. Additionally, consistent with the literature as outlined in Chapter 1: Introduction, Specific Aims and Relevance for Social Work, many of the youth outcomes are focused on youth capacity for growth, specifically in non-cognitive skill areas. Often, these are the same areas that school social workers or counselors are addressing in their work in school settings. This emphasis on skills related to character building,

social and emotional learning, and relationship building were emphasized throughout this research and are aligned with the field of school social work.

Often, social workers working with youth and in schools are focused on integrating youth social and emotional growth with their academic growth. Participants in this research emphasized the need for "more integration" (M.S. & E.M., p. 13) with other school disciplines and the opportunities for students with unique learning styles to benefit from varied teaching approaches (U.M., P.B., L.B., & B.F.). This integration would be a unique opportunity for school social workers in the field of EPBL.

Implications of Findings: Reconsidering Education

There is so much overlap in the world of social work and that of education, in approach, pedagogy, and the importance of understanding systems, that the work of ecological place-based learning and the research involved must continue to honor this relationship and the interactions between these systems. "Places, and our relationship to them, are worthy of our attention because places are powerfully pedagogical" (Gruenewald in Gruenewald & Smith, 2010, p. 143). The findings of this study suggest alternative emphases and curricular innovations for our educational institutions. Contemporary discourse related to education emphasizes didactic classroom learning and easily measured outcomes. "In a school culture obsessed with accountability, it is ironic that few people are carefully paying attention to, and keeping track of, the alarming *quantities* of educational experiences, theories, and practices that are being excluded from this conversation" (Greenwood, in press, p. 3). If our educational systems can allow for a more inclusive conversation, nature place-based experiences have much to offer our youth. Despite the demonstrated outcomes associated with EPBL, these practices have not reached mainstream educational settings—neither here in the U.S. nor in Finland. Administrators with the right

resources and knowledge, and facilitators who are empowered with a thoughtful framework for successful facilitation, may be able to implement EPBL curricula and processes that enhance student engagement with learning.

The newest legislation related to education on the national level, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), was signed in 2015 (United States Department of Education, 2018). Part of ESSA's highlights includes a focus on supporting local innovations, including evidence-based and place-based interventions (United States Department of Education, 2018). Those working in education who are looking for opportunities to go beyond the traditional educational approach can find support in federal legislation. These opportunities can be expanded ecological place-based learning experiences from schools where educators, including social workers, offer innovative, creative learning experiences. And now, those facilitating these experiences can also find a framework for how they might begin to implement such experiences on a local level in their educational settings.

Advocacy and promotion of this work in education needs to be supported by data. Public education in the U.S. is driven by evidence-based approaches. Research regarding the role of facilitation in nature place-based learning and the benefit to youth for learning experiences beyond the traditional classroom must be supported by evidence that demonstrates the benefits to youth academic outcomes as well as social-emotional outcomes. However, it must also provide a framework for how to engage youth in this work. It is not enough to provide the data related to the outcomes, there must be a path for how to engage in the process. The framework developed through this research can help provide facilitators with a path for how to engage youth in ecological place-based learning experiences.

Implication of Findings: Research and Methodological

In ConGT, as distinct from grounded theory, a priori knowledge and awareness of researcher role are valued. This researcher's prior experience facilitating nature place-based learning in schools influenced this work; it sparked this researcher's initial interest in the topic and shaped this researcher's review of the literature. Previous exposure to researchers in this field provided valuable resources and information. This researcher was transparent with the participants regarding these experiences and demonstrated enthusiasm for the topic by traveling to conduct interviews. Participants' awareness of this may have applied subtle pressure for them to respond in ways that highlighted the most positive aspects of their experiences (i.e., a version of social desirability bias).

As outlined in Chapter 2 (Literature Review), the absence of a theoretical framework for a universal approach to EPBL facilitation was alarming to this researcher. It was clear from the data that participants engaged in this work view it as occurring in *collaboration* with the youth, not *for* the youth. While this is not a new concept in the literature, this role for the facilitators has not yet been outlined. Therefore, while this concept existed, it was not necessarily clear that facilitators had some value in the collaborative work, both in the learning experience and the engagement process.

This researcher reviewed the literature repeatedly, going back to the same writings on the subject of nature place-based learning. How can this information be viewed from the facilitator's perspective? If someone were venturing into this world, would the existing literature give them enough information to get started? Are these research participants pointing to things that are absent from the existent literature? In this literature, theoretical frameworks are constructed in a messy way, specifically in place-based learning (Smith, 2002; Sobel, 2004), place-based education (Sobel, 2004), or place-conscious learning (Gruenewald, 2003b). The frameworks

have been pieced together based on previous information related to outcomes but not recreated from a new foundation. In the case of school-related place-based work, a neater framework that is focused on academic curriculum has been created but it focuses on the academic content rather than the learning experiences. Facilitators need more than a curriculum or knowledge of positive outcomes. Facilitators identify which assets can benefit the work and support them when they are faced with challenges. Sobel (2004) writes about the importance of a "pedagogy of place" (Sobel, 2004, p. 11) where community, education and environment overlap. And, in this overlap, the role of the facilitator, previously largely ignored in the literature, is essential.

It is interesting to note that the five principles and values that Blenkinsop (2012) identified as foundational for in the facilitation process did align with some of the themes that emerged from the data in this research."[T]he educator must accept the risk of sometimes changing their pedagogy, of enduring the skepticism of fellow professionals, as well as to recognize that even the changes and possibilities…are incomplete and likely in need of changing themselves" (Blenkinsop, et al., 2016, p. 13). Engaging in the practice of self-reflection as a facilitator is a valuable tool for work that is already messy with no agreed upon framework.

As a licensed social worker working in schools, this researcher engaged youth in nature-based learning experiences in individual and group sessions. Prior the present study, this researcher read many academic journals as well as contemporary writing in the areas of nature-based experiences, particularly literature on schools that incorporated environment-in-context practices (Leiberman & Hoody, 1998). However, this researcher chose a methodological approach that would push this knowledge further and address data outside the comfort of what the literature had already explored. It was essential that the "[r]esearcher perspective, in her terms, includes substantive interests which guide the questions asked, a philosophical stance or

school of thought which provides a store of sensitizing concepts, and one's personal experiences, priorities, and values" (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994, p. 233). This researcher began with specific questions, but was open to these questions shifting based on the initial participants' responses. Prior knowledge of the literature and predesigned but flexible questions are key components in the ConGT process (Evans, 2013). The walking interview method provided a context for what and how the facilitation work was happening but also for the unexpected elements (Lynch & Mannion, 2016, p. 333) that potentially arise in an EPBL experiences that are mirrored in the walking interview.

Photo elicitation proved to be an invaluable methodological strategy. It was particularly powerful in relation to the final research question about the relationship between facilitator and place. As Lynch and Mannion (2016) point out, "using multiple forms of audio-visual equipment whilst on the move provided for an enriching data collection process" (p. 335). The photographs allowed the participants to step back into their places in a way that memory does not always permit. These visuals, in phase I, sparked connections and reflection that the participants had not considered or pointed to during the walking interviews. In phase II, it was the only resource for connecting to place but provided rich data about the varied, individual experiences of the facilitators and their relationships with place.

Additionally, the element of photography as a source of data in the research provided evidence to further the development of the framework as well as, and perhaps more importantly, a tool for the participants to actively engage in reflexivity during the interview process. This engagement led to further rich dialogue about the opportunities for youth in EPBL as well as the value of place. The process of using photographs to elicit this reflection was a valuable tool in the research process.

Researchers do need to pay attention to the power relationships between interviewer and participants (Jones, Bunce, Evans, Gibbs, & Hein, 2008, p. 2). During this process, the benefits of the walking interview perhaps lessened some of that potential power dynamic. The interviews were completed internationally in the participants' country of origin. The participants were experts in the content area, and the participants were experts on the place, both in the context of the EPBL experiences but also as the location where the interview was occurring. This researcher was a novice in two of these areas although has some experience as a facilitator of EPBL.

The walking interview was a beneficial methodological strategy in this research. Consistent with the literature review in Chapter 2, experiential place-based learning experiences are ones that are youth-centered and collaboratively constructed by youth and facilitators. The voice and perspective of those engaged in EPBL are essential in the process of creating a framework to outline this type of work. The walking interview was chosen as "[t]his method is clearly mobile, and [is] a way to attend to how the ongoing processes of the assembled elements continued to produce differences" (Lynch & Mannion, 2016, p. 333). The walking interview allowed this researcher and the participant to mirror the co-construction that is exhibited by the facilitator and youth in an EPBL experience.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths of this Research

The participants' experiences were coded using a line-by-line coding approach, followed by paragraph coding. During analysis, this researcher followed the ConGT approach by not influencing or forcing the data toward a preconceived theoretical framework. Rather, this

researcher identified an organizing framework that emerged from participant-reported data. After the initial data analysis, this researcher used a constant comparative method to examine the literature, this researcher's own memos, and the participants' insights to check the themes against the initial organizing framework that emerged from the coding process. Ultimately, this researcher remained true to the ConGT process despite previous knowledge and experience in the field.

Several variables emerge consistently in the literature; they were this researcher's *starting point.* Much of the literature adopts these variables as a point of consensus and pursues strategic questions related to them. This research adopts a different approach. To protect the fidelity and validity of the ConGT methodology, this researcher chose very general questions. Using general questions allowed the participants to identify their own foci areas and therefore their own essential components and necessary considerations in facilitating these experiences.

The process of memoing, essentially of "making the research process accountable…as moving towards a stronger form of 'objectivity'" (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994, p. 236), is a part of the reflexivity necessary in the ConGT process. Like other ConGT researchers (Charmaz, 2014, 2017; Mitchell, 2014), this researcher made every effort to distinguish between their beliefs and biases in gathering the data and the analysis process. Through triangulating the data via a two-step process (walking interview and photography elicitation), a review of the relevant literature post-coding, and the memoing, this researcher addressed the trustworthiness of the process.

This ConGT method is recognized as "seeking to deal with the conflict of potential bias of this researcher and not a direct attack on the philosophy of grounded theory" (Evans, 2013, p. 9). ConGT researchers "seek to clarify and problematize their assumptions and make those

assumptions clear to others" (Edwards & Jones in Mitchell, 2014, p. 4). This methodological process mirrors the nature place-based learning approach in that facilitators have opportunities to clarify the facilitator's role and identify what is needed to engage in this work.

Strengths Related to Methodology

The value of the walking interview in phase I of this study cannot be overstated. Lynch and Mannion (2016) state the benefits of walking interviews, including a leveling of the power dynamics between interviewer and participant, increased participation on the part of the participant, unknown "sensory and affective elements" (Lynch & Mannion, 2016, p. 334) to add richness to the data, and an opportunity to integrate people and place. This researcher found participants who were willing to engage; they seemed to embrace their "expert status" in their homeland, in their *place* in that country. An unknown researcher traveled across the world to come to their place and so participants experienced a pride and increased opportunity for self-reflection (U.M., P.B., M.S., & E.M.). Additionally, the opportunity to take photographs but also experience the place varied the experiences of the interviews. One interview was primarily conducted during a severe rainstorm while another had extreme winds that limited the ability to hear on certain parts of the trail. The participants each shared *their* place. The participants designated where the meetings would happen, what trail the walking interview would take, and where this researcher and the participant would stop along the way. The co-creation of this experience increased the opportunities to level the power dynamics in the interview process.

Many of the participants in phase I pointed to the personal benefits of being able to engage in conversation about their practice and its place just prior to the start of the academic year. Related to this comfort would be the benefits of using a relatively new methodology in the walking interviews approach itself. The ability to explore place in a way that has been under-

explored with an insider's view of how that place was valuable. Since this research was specifically focused on the relationship between facilitator and place, the walking interview technique allowed for this researcher to explore knowing through the eyes of the facilitator.

This methodology was effective. It allowed this researcher to engage all participants in self-reflective consideration of their work and to focus on the priorities of this research. An EPBL framework emerged from data analysis. Participants were clear about what supports needed to be in place and the themes that emerged from the data gathered in those interviews were rich and contained a unified message. Finally, the PHOTO responses, focused on the photographs that each participant took and shared, added specific information about the relationship between place and facilitation in EPBL.

The photography element of this methodology was valuable as it allowed for a further exploration of place. Through memos and journaling about their own experience, this researcher could have captured some sense of that exploration. However, there was a benefit in identifying the significance of this relationship directly from the facilitator's experiences. This insider's perspective is valuable in that it allows place to have its own life in the data. Simultaneously, the photography elicitation in both phases of the research allowed different information to be introduced into the data. Participants were able to identify what the photograph was about while also putting themselves back into that moment to talk specifically about their EPBL experiences.

Another benefit of the walking interview is that it allows participants to be more open to sharing. "Mobile interviewing is still somewhat at the experimental stage…it has great potential to shed light on how participants use and understand different spaces" (Jones, et al., 2008, p. 7). There is not a clear way to determine if the walking interview itself allowed for more openness among the Finnish participants or if their interest and passion for the topic was correlated to their

high level of engagement and sharing in the interview process. In a unique way, the walking interview experience mirrors the ConGT methodological process. In the walking interview, "both interviewer and interviewee are apprehending the world as it unfolds and co-responding to/with it" (Lynch & Mannion, 2016, p. 335). In ConGT, this researcher needed to experience the process as it unfolded but also respond to the data and engage in reflection opportunities.

Limitations

While, ConGT has many strengths as a methodological approach, there is a challenge in using any grounded theory methodological approach as "[a] person's way of thinking, and explanation of analysis, may seem crystal clear to someone with a similar cognitive style and very confusing to another person whose approach is different" (Heath & Cowley in Evans, 2013, p. 10). This researcher has been immersed in the world of EPBL for eight years, as a practitioner and, more recently, as a researcher. This researcher comes to this research with a school social work lens learned from experience in the field of education. This potential bias of exposure through this specific lens may influence the perception of EPBL within the educational field.

The small sample size of six in phase I and three in phase II is a study limitation. The majority of the participants were female, with the exception of one male in each phase. All were Caucasian, either of Finnish or Swedish descent (in Finland), or a variety of Caucasian participants in the U.S.

The initial intent of this research was to complete the transcriptions and analyses of phase I data and then to determine the most relevant group or individuals to invite to participate in phase II. However, sample recruitment proved challenging. There were multiple failed attempts to engage facilitators of EPBL in the U.S. Several respondents indicated that they were no longer engaged in EPBL or that their experiences with EPBL were now limited to weekend club

activities. Outreach to a variety of organizations and individuals went unanswered or potential participants indicated lack of interest in participating.

Another limitation of the methodology was related to the theoretical sampling. While this researcher knew there would be limitations due to not being able to achieve saturation with the data while developing the framework, this researcher did not anticipate the challenges with recruitment in the U.S. The eventual targeted recruitment of only charter school participants further limited the second phase of the study. Additionally, this researcher did not anticipate the duration of time that transcribing the walking interviews and the photograph elicitation interviews from Finland would take in addition to the coding process. This significantly slowed the start of phase II, which compounded the difficulty in recruiting participants.

Finally, this researcher could have missed opportunities for social workers/therapists engaging in this type of work in Finland because the focus of this researcher's outreach was school settings. As previously outlined, there are benefits to including social workers, with their unique training and expertise, in this field. There may be social workers and therapists engaged in this work globally and this population was not included in this study, which is certainly an area for further expansion. This research did not focus on how social workers who do use nature place-based strategies (even in limited ways) may serve as facilitators in EPBL experiences but there would be value to conducting research in these realms.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

I would rather give teachers the freedom to teach from their hearts and give parents the

freedom to choose the teaching approach they want for their children…help develop and

demonstrate that an education that studies the world around us is superior to a

standardized, generic education. (Smith & Williams from Sobel, 2004, p. 23)

The identification of specific practices that could be carried out by facilitators of EPBL

experiences may foster the development of innovative pedagogical strategies. Asking the

facilitators to suggest such practices incorporates insider knowledge into the growth of

curriculum and pedagogy and illuminates the uniqueness of the EPBL approach. This research is

a starting point. "Place-based education is not practiced widely, but its advocates' and

practitioners' efforts to encourage a convergence of the social and environmental are attracting

growing attention from both formal and non-formal educators" (Smith, 2007, p. 190). Additional

growth has happened in the past ten years since Sobel's work was released but a comprehensive,

universal approach to the facilitation process was still needed.

In an article outlining suggestions for educators engaged in EPBL work, a clear process

for identifying the role of place in this type of educational experience is needed (Mannion, et al.,

2013, p. 795). Additionally, these same authors identify that "another gap in the literature is an

understanding of how, in practice, teachers plan for excursions and develop their ability to work

in natural settings to meet the aims of environmental education" (Mannion, et al., 2013, p. 795).

This researcher would take that idea further and identify this need is there for all educators, not

just those focused on environmental education.

"Place-based education is a broad term that not only refers to a method of teaching, but a growing movement to redefine schooling, and a theory about how we should ultimately view education" (Knapp in Grunewald & Smith, 2010, p. 7). This research points to the importance of thinking of the role of those facilitating these experiences as separate and distinct from that of educators teaching in traditional classrooms. As the discussion of school and educational approaches for engagement continues, the role of those leading the experiences in education and how they must do this also requires discussion. It is not enough to consider how education should be viewed if consideration is not also given to the skills/assets and barriers of those engaging in this movement to integrate place-based education, specifically ecological place-based learning, into traditional schooling.

This research and discourse on EPBL must find a place in the educational conversation in the U.S. and other developed countries. A radical shift in education, and eventual overhaul of our educational system, is necessary. This researcher, however, would make the argument that an incremental shift in educational entities demonstrating the benefits of EPBL, starting with facilitators who are willing and able to learn to engage youth in this way, and thus leading by example, could start to shift the approach away from traditional classrooms and outcomes and toward place-based learning and student engagement. "As Dewey and others have always known, when learning is connected to direct experience with the world, learners become more engaged" (Greenwood, in press, p. 5). It is not worth putting this work and the benefits for engagement for youth on hold until the leaders and administrators in the educational system and the policymakers can figure out all of the nuances that would be needed to fully adapt or fully integrate this approach in the current educational system. This work should continue, with proponents implementing place-based strategies that capitalize on opportunities for innovation

and that are informed by this and other research. This study outlines needs (assets) and concerns (barriers) of the facilitators, thereby offering a platform from which administrators could begin to offer support to EPBL facilitators.

Social workers in education settings are primed for being at the forefront of this work, potentially working hand-in-hand with others trained in education pedagogy. The flexibility and adaptability required by EPBL facilitators are hallmarks of social work practice. Social workers are trained to have adaptive responses and to be prepared to meet individuals and places "where they are." The components outlined in this researcher's emerging framework provide a foundation for EPBL facilitators, orienting them to potential needs and barriers related to facilitation work. There is a continued role that social workers can play in this work.

Research in this area must continue. In this research, the strategies of the methodological approach of ConGT aligned with that of the walking interviews/photograph elicitation. The unique nature of walking in a place allowed for the participants voice to be heard. This researcher included mechanisms for systematic reflection throughout the data collection and analysis process, much like the facilitators do when they are working with youth. Further defining the role of the facilitator in this work can assist with a more universal implementation. Additional research in this field can benefit youth, expanding the understanding of what needs to be present to engage youth in these experiences and how facilitators of these experiences can do that well.

This research shows that facilitators of this work are engaged in the philosophy of learning by doing. They plan experiences in nature and carry them out in various places, adjusting curriculum, place, and experience, as needed. These facilitators have an appreciation for nature and place, believing that the role of place in learning is invaluable. They have

knowledge but do not necessarily need to be experts as they too are always learning. This knowledge manifests itself in various areas relevant to learning in ecological place-based ways, from nature expertise to teaching pedagogy to facilitating to youth development. Yet, facilitators also need to be aware that they may face challenges in EPBL work, as others may not understand the value of engaging youth in this way. Facilitators must be present in the EPBL experiences. Those facilitating these experiences can be spontaneous, fun, creative and observant. It is also important to foster independence, empower, and inspire. Youth benefit from adaptable facilitators. Facilitators' engagement is another key component in EPBL experiences. Facilitators engage with youth, with the place, with themselves, and through exploration. The final component of reflection happens in the present, based on events that happened during that EPBL experience, and allow for growth on the part of the facilitator. These components combine to create the emerging Facilitating EPBL (Ecological Place-Based Learning) organizing framework, providing a starting point for those facilitators engaged in this work.

The accessibility of this framework will determine its usefulness, and its accessibility is determined by the clarity of its components. The present study is a start. Recommendations for future research include: 1). A focus on youth age as a variable. Does the facilitator use different components based on the population or can these components be applied generally? 2). Expanding the research to include additional sites in the U.S. as well as other countries globally. This research begins to explore whether the components span more than one country but this research just touches the surface of cultural and national influence. 3). The role of facilitator in contributing to youth knowledge and potential outcomes. Brown (2007) notes that facilitative leaders can often influence supposed student-led discussions, indicating the need for critical reflection on the part of facilitators continuing to engage in this type of work (p. 111). How is

this concept relevant and valuable in considering the role of the facilitator of EPBL? 4). Does

facilitator training matter? This researcher has made the case that various types of trained

professionals could become facilitators. How do teachers differ from school counselors or

school social workers? Do they differ at all in terms of the components needed to engage youth?

Do they face the same barriers?

Additional research is warranted to further develop this organizing framework. This

research places the EPBL dialogue in a new light because it includes the important role of the

facilitator. As this researcher reflected in a memo just after completing interviews in Finland:

> The participants' connection to nature, to place, was an essential part of their work but
>
> also important were the people they connected to the work (students/pupils and teachers)
>
> and the Finnish principle of respect for nature…Each participant faced challenges and
>
> opportunities in their work and their own goals' were related to not letting the challenges
>
> get in the way of the nature experience for the youth.

The study can be replicated by engaging other facilitators of this work in walking

interviews and the photography elicitation process, in the U.S. and in other countries and

cultures.

This study explored the role of the facilitator in ecological place-based learning

experiences with youth. The participants described their personal experiences facilitating this

engagement. All participants explored their relationship with place as an essential component of

this work while sharing insights about their work and the need for the continued development of

EPBL education. The components outlined in this organizing framework begin to provide a

structure for what facilitators need to be aware of to engage youth in this work.

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Appendix A

Research Questions

Finland Research Interview Questions

1. Describe the main focus of your place based learning experiences.

2. What knowledge do you need to facilitate these experiences for youth?

3. What characteristics of place based education are essential in your experiences?

4. What are the assets found in the specific nature place based experiences for youth that you design?

5. What role does your teaching/educating play in highlighting these assets?

6. What barriers exist for implementing these experiences?

7. What knowledge of a place/community is needed when facilitating this experience for youth?

8. How, if at all, does the relationship between the facilitator and student/child affect their mutual growth?

9. How do you incorporate this place into youth/student learning experiences?

10. What are the most important factors for facilitators to consider when engaging youth in these experiences?

11. What are your perceptions about how a youth's identity should be incorporated into EPBL?

12. What are your perceptions about how social position should be incorporated into EPBL?

A. Organizational Context
1) What services does your school or agency offer youth?

2) What percentage of your day/week is spent working in nature with youth?

3) What theoretical framework do you use when working with youth?
How do you find this framework (these frameworks) helpful in working with youth?

4) What influenced you to engage in nature place based learning with youth?

What supports, such as supervision and training, are available to you in engaging youth in this work? Have you ever used them? Can you give me some examples?

Do you think any of these supports increase the likelihood that you will have positive reactions with your students/youth? If so, which supports? In what ways?

B. The facilitation experience:

1) How long have you been working with youth?

2) In what capacity?

3) How long have you been working with youth in EBPL?

4) What type, if any, of formal training in working with youth in nature have you had?

5) What was your knowledge about EBPL before starting this work?

6) What is your preparation process for starting EPBL?

7) Are there are other steps you need to take before embarking on a nature-based experience?

C. Debriefing Questions-
1) Is there anything else about your reactions to EPBL that you would like to add?

2) Is there anything you talked about earlier that you would like to clarify?

3) Is there anything else that I didn't ask about that would be helpful to understand this experience?

4) What would you tell new facilitators of EPBL entering this work?

5) What advice do you wish someone gave you?

Appendix B

Photography Elicitation Questions

PHOTO
P- Describe your photo
H- What is happening in your photo?
O- Why did you take a picture of this?
T- What does this picture tell us about you as a facilitator?
O- How can this picture provide opportunities to improve nature-based learning?

Appendix C

Camera Ethics Training
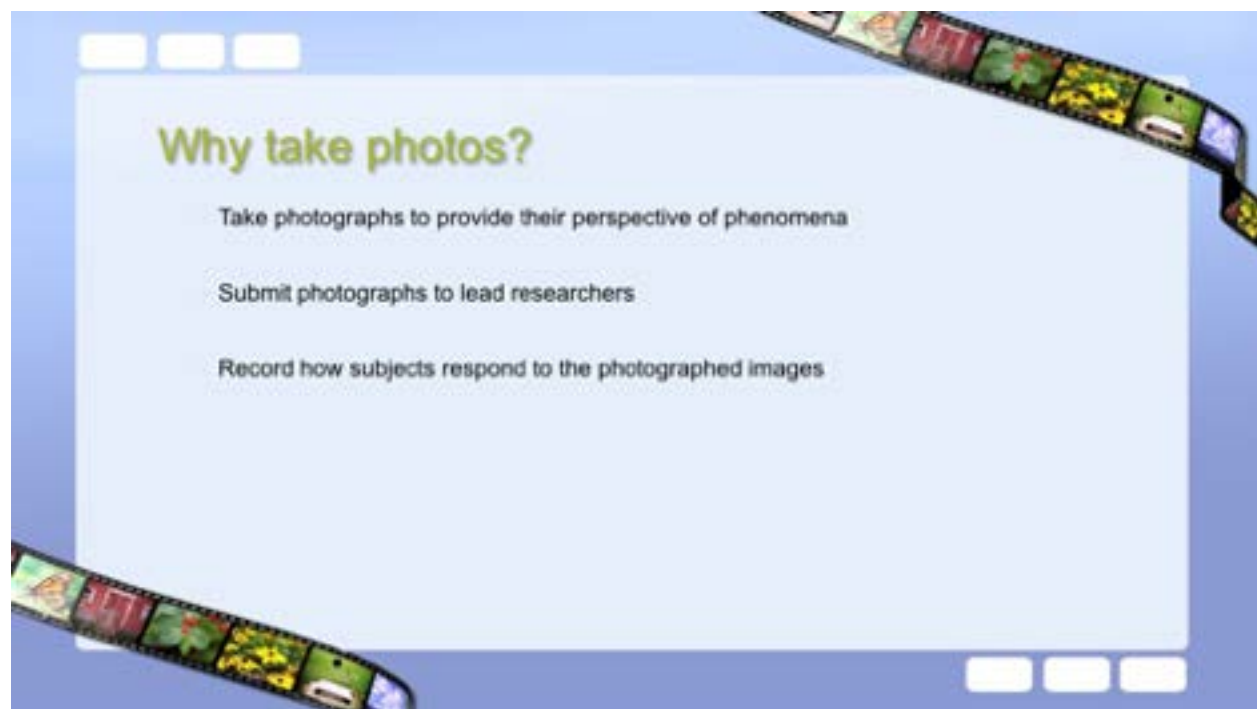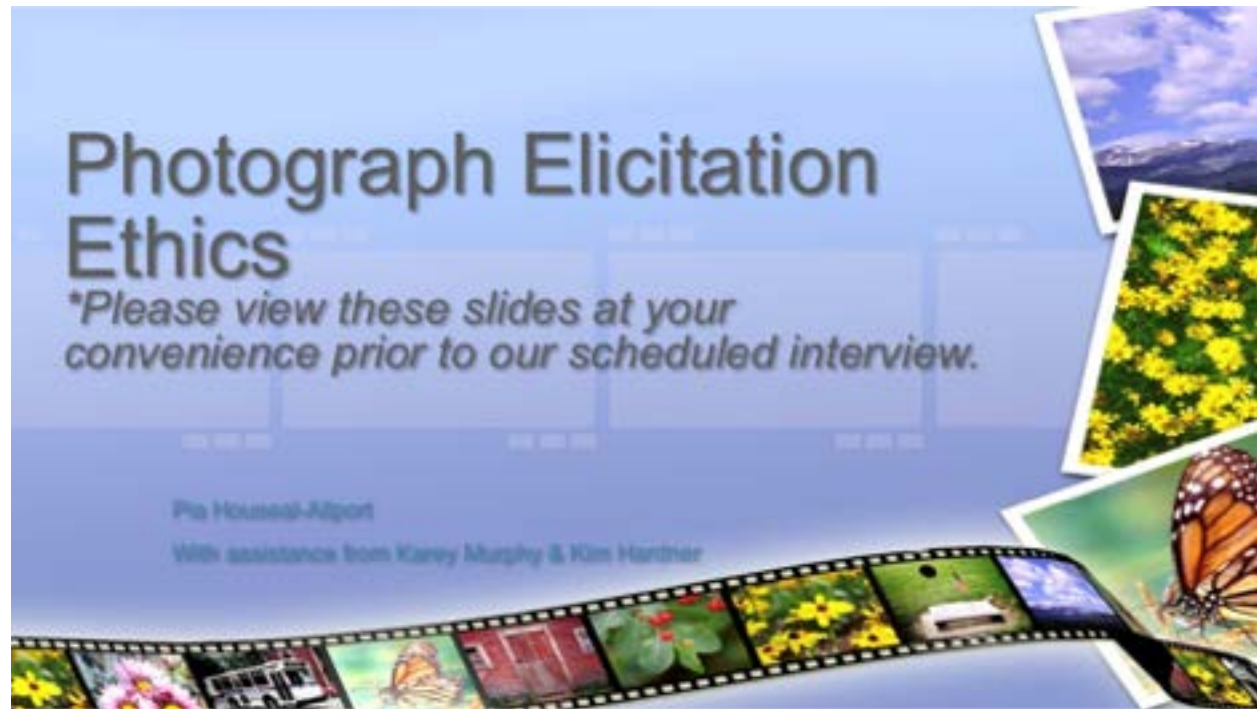
Helpful Photography Hints

- Can be extremely helpful to provide participants with some basic training in photography, whether using a camera or a smartphone

- Tips that may be helpful:

  - Use flash outdoors

  - Move in close

  - Move focus from the middle

  - Lock the focus

  - Watch the light

  - Take some vertical/horizontal photos

Informed Consent for Participants

- Researcher will provide all participants with all relevant and appropriate information so you understand what you are agreeing to, and you formally agree to participate (see informed consent form that you will be asked to sign at beginning of interview).

- Consent from you, the participant, will be collected at the start of the interview and before any photographs are taken.

- You, as a participant, can withdraw from project at any point in time- withdrawing means that photographs and their accompanying narratives/discussions will not be used. This will not impact the walking interview.

Do I need consent from others not participating in interview?

Consent needed

- Taking a picture of someone who is recognizable (faces, tattoos, or markings)

- Taking a picture minors (under 18 years) *No minors will be photographed for this research.*

- Taking a picture of personal belongings and/or personal property

Consent Not Needed

- Taking a picture of public figures

- Taking a picture of the environment or public settings

- Taking a picture of people who cannot be specifically identified

Ethics for Participating in Photo Elicitation

- You will be fully informed about the project you are participating in so that you can freely give your consent to do so.

- The photographs they take are yours to keep- you get to decide how your photographs are used after they are taken.

- You have the right to remove any of the photos you contribute at any point during the project and in the future.

- These photographs are meant for dissemination (for educational and non-commercial purposes). Photos cannot be shown without a subject's release.

Participant (& Environment) Safety

- Be safe! You know the terrain and the environment, use best judgement.
- Please do not take any pictures of people doing something that is private or activities that could get someone into trouble with law enforcement.
- Participants can chose to be anonymous when it comes time to display/exhibit the photographs in a public space. Protecting your identity and that of the space where the photographs are taken may mean altering the project.

Expectations of the Photo Elicitation

- Prior to the interview, participants will be asked to take photographs.
- Each participant takes 5-7 photographs that she feels portray an aspect of facilitating nature place based learning with youth.
- Participant will be asked to chose 2-3 pictures to further discuss at end of the walk.
- The photograph discussion/interview will be audio-recorded.

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Appendix D

Consent for Research Participants

Informed Consent to Participate in Research
Making sense of place: Facilitating nature place-based experiences

Thank you for participating in the study, your contribution is highly valued and appreciated.

Description of Experiment: You will be participating in a research study about facilitating nature place-based learning experiences. Participation in this research is voluntary. I am asking you take part because you indicated a). that you engage youth in nature place-based experiences and b). an interest in participating in this study after contact via social media and electronic communication.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to learn more about assets and barriers to ecological place-based learning experiences. You must have participated in facilitating a place-based learning experience within the past year (12 months) to take part in this study.

What we will ask you to do: If you agree to be in this study, I will conduct a walking interview with you. The interview will include questions about your work, facilitating nature-based experiences with youth. The interview will take about 90-120 minutes to complete. With your permission, I would also like to tape-record the interview.

Photo Elicitation: During the interview, I will ask you to take photographs which we will discuss post-walking interview. If you agree to take photographs, you understand that your consent is for these photographs to be reproduced for educational and/or non- commercial purposes, in reports, presentations, publications, websites and exhibitions connected to this nature place-based learning research. All photographs will be securely stored by the research team. Real names will NOT be used with the photographs and precautions will be taken to protect the specific location within the country of the photographs.

Please sign this form below indicating specific consent to agree to take photographs and share them in the way indicated above as part of this research.

Risks and benefits: There are no foreseen risks in the current research greater than that of a classroom setting. This is considered a minimal risk study. There are no benefits to you beyond participating in research that hopes to add to the growing field around nature place-based experiences with youth. Neither the researcher nor the university is responsible for any accidents that occur during the time of the study.

Compensation: There is no compensation for this research.

Your answers will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of research publication or presentation I make public I will not include any information that will

make it possible to identify you or the specific location where I conduct the research. We will tape-record the interview. In compliance with federal law, all documents will be saved for 3 years, at which time all documents containing any identifying information will be destroyed.

By signing this consent form, you are signifying that you understand the nature of the research and your agreement to participate in the study. Please consider the following points before signing:

I understand that I am participating in Social Work research.

I understand that my personal information and data will be kept confidential between the researcher and faculty advisors.

I understand that as part of the photo elicitation piece of this research, I am releasing my photographs to be included in educational and non-commercial purposes related to this research and possible publications/presentations.

I understand that my participation in the research voluntary, and that I may decide to terminate my participation any time after the study begins without penalty.

For more information, you may contact:

Pia Houseal-Allport
pihousea@millersville.edu
(610) 972-3228
PO Box 1002
(1 South George Street) Millersville, PA 17551

Heather Girvin
heather.girvin@millersville.edu
717-871-2157

❑By checking this box, I acknowledge that I participated in a Photograph Elicitation Ethics training prior to the interview.

❑ By checking this box, I am consenting to engaging in taking photographs as part of this research.

❑ By checking this box, I am consenting to allowing my photographs to be used in all research related and for subsequent educational and non-commercial purposes.

By signing this form I am stating that I understand the above information and consent to participate in this study. I acknowledge that I am 18 years or older.

_____   _____   _____

Participant Name (Printed)   **Signature**   **Date**

_____   _____   _____

Researcher Name (Printed)   **Signature**   **Date**

This research has been approved by the Millersville University Institutional Review Board.

Appendix E

<u>Informed Consent to Participate in Research</u>
Making sense of place: Facilitating nature place-based experiences

Thank you for participating in the study, your contribution is highly valued and appreciated.

Description of Experiment: You will be participating in a research study about facilitating nature place-based learning experiences. Participation in this research is voluntary. I am asking you take part because you indicated a). that you engage youth in nature place-based experiences and b). an interest in participating in this study after contact via social media and electronic communication.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to learn more about assets and barriers to ecological place-based learning experiences. You must have participated in facilitating a place-based learning experience within the past year (12 months) to take part in this study.

What we will ask you to do: If you agree to be in this study, I will conduct a short interview with you. The interview will include questions about the photographs you have taken and your work, facilitating nature-based experiences with youth. The interview will take about 30 minutes to complete. With your permission, I would also like to tape-record the interview.

Photo Elicitation: Prior to the interview, I will ask you to take photographs which we will discuss at the interview. If you agree to take photographs, you understand that your consent is for these photographs to be reproduced for educational and/or non- commercial purposes, in reports, presentations, publications, websites and exhibitions connected to this nature place-based learning research. All photographs will be securely stored by the research team. Real names will NOT be used with the photographs and precautions will be taken to protect the specific location within the country of the photographs.

Please sign this form below indicating specific consent to agree to take photographs and share them in the way indicated above as part of this research.

Risks and benefits: There are no foreseen risks in the current research greater than that of a classroom setting. This is considered a minimal risk study. There are no benefits to you beyond participating in research that hopes to add to the growing field around nature place-based experiences with youth. Neither the researcher nor the university is responsible for any accidents that occur during the time of the study.

Compensation: There is no compensation for this research.

Your answers will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of research publication or presentation I make public I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you or the specific location where I conduct the research. We will tape-record the interview. In compliance with federal law, all documents will be saved for 3 years, at which time all documents containing any identifying information will be destroyed.

By signing this consent form, you are signifying that you understand the nature of the research and your agreement to participate in the study. Please consider the following points before signing:

I understand that I am participating in Social Work research.

I understand that my personal information and data will be kept confidential between the researcher and faculty advisors.

I understand that as part of the photo elicitation piece of this research, I am releasing my photographs to be included in educational and non-commercial purposes related to this research and possible publications/presentations.

I understand that my participation in the research voluntary, and that I may decide to terminate my participation any time after the study begins without penalty.

For more information, you may contact:
Pia Houseal-Allport   Heather Girvin
pihousea@millersville.edu   heather.girvin@millersville.edu
(610) 972-3228   717-871-2157
PO Box 1002
(1 South George Street) Millersville, PA 17551

❏By checking this box, I acknowledge that I participated in a Photograph Elicitation Ethics training prior to the interview.

❏ By checking this box, I am consenting to engaging in taking photographs as part of this research.

❏ By checking this box, I am consenting to allowing my photographs to be used in all research related and for subsequent educational and non-commercial purposes.

By signing this form I am stating that I understand the above information and consent to participate in this study. I acknowledge that I am 18 years or older.

_____   _____   _____
Participant Name (Printed)   **Signature**   **Date**

_____   _____   _____
Researcher Name (Printed)   **Signature**   **Date**

This research has been approved by the Millersville University Institutional Review Board.

Appendix F

Post Interview Comment Sheet

Name/Date
Start/End Time

1. General thoughts/comments

2. What were initial impressions?

3. Content highlights

4. Any problems encountered in the interview?

5. New/different questions

6. Issues that were most prominent/interesting?

7. Final thoughts

Appendix G

IRB Approval

Millersville University
SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY

P.O. Box 1002
Millersville, PA 17551-0302
Institutional Research Board
www.millersville.edu/spra/irb
Phone: 717-871-4457

Dr. Karena Rush
221 Byerly

December 18, 2017

Dr. René Muñoz
McNairy 500

Ms. Pia Houseal-Allport
School of Social Work
Millersville University

Dear Ms. Houseal-Allport:

Members of the Millersville University Institutional Review Board (IRB) have reviewed your proposed research "Making sense of place: Facilitating ecological place based experiences with youth." The Committee agrees that this research qualifies as "minimal risk." Your protocol received expedited review and was approved.

Approval for use of human subjects in this research is given for a period of one year from the date of initial approval. If your study extends beyond 07/25/18, you must again contact the IRB for re-approval six weeks before the expiration date.

By accepting this decision, you agree to notify the Chair of (1) any additions or changes in procedures for your study that modify subjects' risk and (2) any events that affect the safety and well being of subjects.

Thank you for cooperating with our efforts to maintain compliance with federal regulations for the protection of human subjects.

Sincerely,

Dr. Karena Rush
Chair, Millersville Institutional Research Board

Dr. Rene Muñoz
Director, Sponsored Programs and Research Administration

Cc: Members of the Millersville University IRB

Appendix H
Coding Example A: Step 1

that as their favorite thing of the day. And sometimes they even ask "can we do it again on our way back?" And sometimes we do. So it's, yeah, they seldom get that chance to be alone in the woods. I mean, they're not alone but still that feeling... Normally there's a small stream here but it's dried out during the summer.

ask to do it again
seldom get a chance to be alone in woods
not alone, but get that feeling
small stream - dried out

OK, yeah it seems like you've had a lot of rain, at least the week that we've been here.

Yeah, it's still dry. Because we've had some heavily rainy days, but all-in-all it's been quite dry. Quite cold, but quite dry.

dry + cold

So is it more common to have students come here or have to go to their school?

[21:44] It's more common to go to their schools, but especially in springtime they usually want to have this sort of spring trip, excursion. So in springtime I go out to these natural areas that are further from the schools a whole lot more than the other times. And it's understandable, I guess. And also in wintertime it's practical to be close to the school because they're not always dressed properly and sometimes they get freezing toes and you just have to move indoors.

more common to go to school
but in spring - excursion

spring - go to natural areas further from schools

winter - closer to schools
practical
clothes
weather

When you think about the skills a facilitator should have, what do you think is important?

I think the ability to be present in yourself and in the day and within the group is, that's sort of the ground.... Sorry there are some huge blueberries here.... And also to read the group a bit, that you can see what kind of activities or needs they may have. You might have something planned but just realize that it's not

ability to be present in yourself ✱
in the day
within the group

read the group
for activities
or needs
may plan but realize it's not worthwhile

worthwhile, it's not going to work, it's not going to give what I want it to give the group. Or "hey, this group doesn't need this, they need something different." So to have that flexibility I think is important. And also of course to.... To read nature and see what is special here today or what is special in this place? Even though I might not have known it when I came there, but to be able to sort of pick it up. And also to give space to the children's observations and sort of if they get enthusiastic about something, well maybe you might want to give that some time instead and leave something else that you had planned undone. So I think those are like the most, that's the ground sort of that you have to build on.

What about for a place, what are the most important things or qualities of a place? Especially since you go to several different places.

[24:46] Well, for us to be able to go there, it has to be accessible, of course. Which is kind of a shame because there are great places that you'd love to take people to, but you can't get there by bus or the road is too small or the bus doesn't have space to turn around there. So that's of course the first thing. Then I like places that are versatile, so like this one, there are different types of nature in a smaller area. And I also, for some reason we often at our nature school we like to walk a bit, not just go to a nice place and then...

Plant for the day

Yeah. I know we have other nature schools that work under the same organization, I think you talked with Maria from [SCHOOL

not going to work, group has a different road

flexibility
to read nature + identify what is
   special in their place
even if you don't know in advance, pick it up

give space to children's observations
if they're enthusiastic, save that time
leave something you had planned undone.

ground you have to build on.

accessible
great places you'd love to go but can't
   get there by bus or small road, etc.

versatile places
different types of nature in small area

nature school - walk, not just go to
   one place.

NAME]. So if I've understood correctly, I haven't been with them many times, but they have a different approach, or they often go to a nice place where there is a fire place and that kind of thing and they leave their things there and then they have that from there around the area. So they might not walk around as much as we do.

Does that get impacted by weather? She's quite further north.

Yeah, it might be. Or then it might be just... I mean in wintertime of course it's quite nice to have a place where you can gather around, but also it might just be a habit. They just started to do that, or they have some really great places that work best that way. But then again, here i think if we went to go to... what do you call this, a camp? Campfire? You have to walk a long way anyway, it's on the beach, and then it would be just walking there and then back. So we like to walk a bit and then doing something, and then maybe walk a bit more and do something else. And of course there are some themes, such as if it's about life on the beach or life in a stream or whatever, then it's a lot more stationary of course. But it depends a lot on the theme and then on the place. So if the school wants a certain theme and somewhere nearby, then we'll produce the areas that there are available.

What gets in the way for a group leader or educator?

Do you mean during the day?

No, in terms of their own qualities or characters

Other nature schools
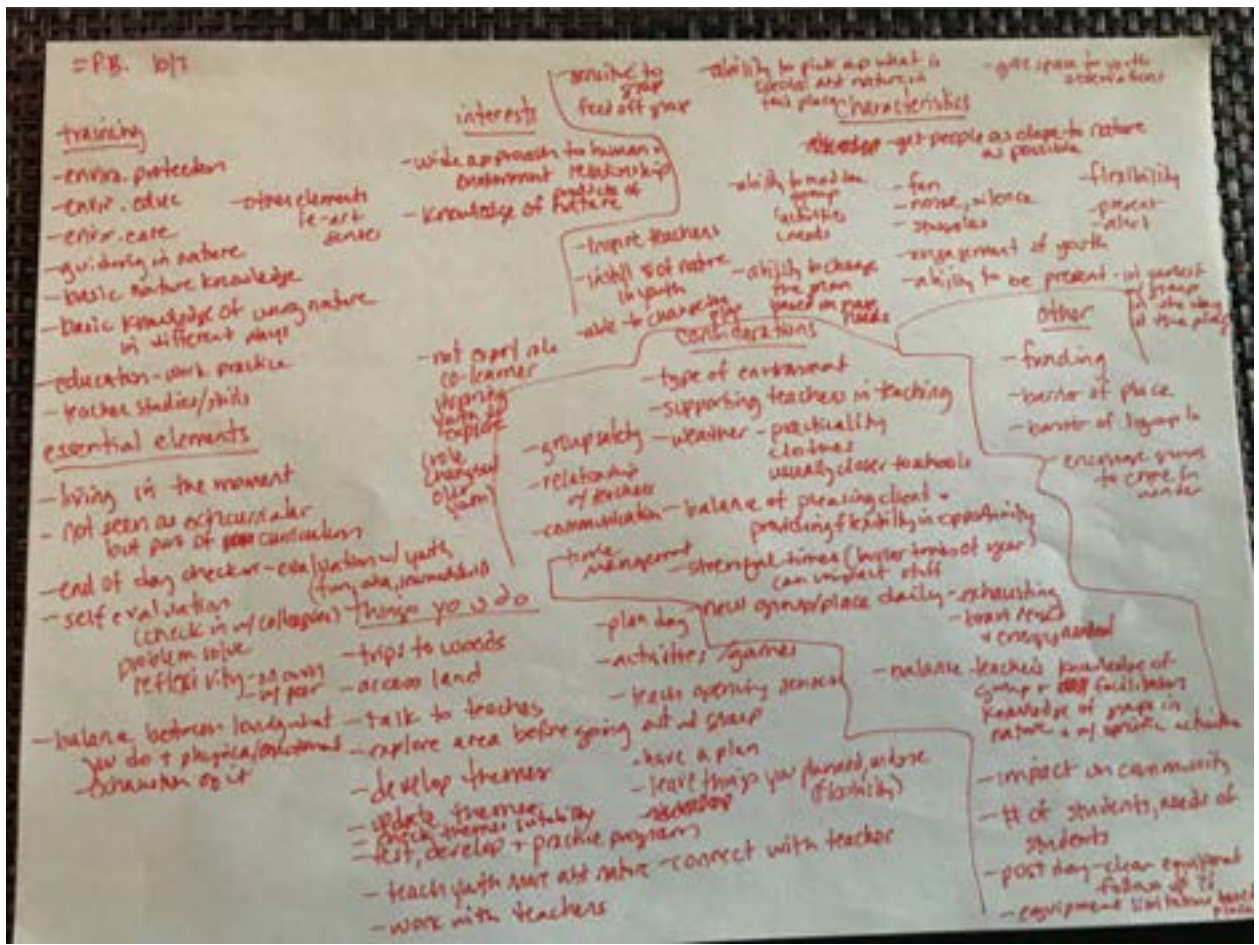go to 1 place + stay near fireplace
leave things, walk from there
may not walk as much as this nature school does.

Winter
weather
nice to have a place to gather
but also may be habit — started it or have a
  great place that works best

campfire
walk longway — just walk there + back if
  doing that here.
Walk then do something and so on

themes — more stationary

dependent on
theme + place

=P.B. 10/7

training
- envr. protection
- envr. educ — other elements (e-art senses)
- envr. care
- guiding in nature
- basic nature knowledge
- basic knowledge of using nature in different ways
- education - work practice
- teacher studies/skills

essential elements
- living in the moment
- not seen as extracurricular but part of curriculum
- end of day check-in - evaluation w/ youth
- self evaluation (check in w/ colleague) (they aka intermediate)
- problem solve
- reflexivity - as away
- balance between long what you do + physical/emotional behavior or it

interests
- wide approach to human + environment relationship
- knowledge of future
- inspire teachers
- instill s of nature in youth
- able to characterize
- not appropriate co-learner

things you do
- trips to woods
- access land
- talk to teacher
- explore area before going out w/ group
- develop themes
- update themes
- check themes
- test, develop + practice program
- teach youth more abt nature - connect with teacher
- work with teachers
- have a plan
- leave things you planned, arrive (flexibility)

considerations
- type of environment
- supporting teachers in teaching
- group safety - weather - practicality clothes usually closer to schools
- relationship of teacher
- communication - balance of pleasing client + providing flexibility in opportunity
- time management - stressful times (busier times of year can impact staff)
- plan day - new group/place daily - exhausting - brain tired + energy needed
- activities / games
- teach opening session
- sensitive to group / feed off group
- ability to pick up what is special and natural to this place

Characteristics
- get people as close to nature as possible
- ability to modify group activities needs
- fun
- noise, silence
- struggles
- ability to change the plan based on group needs
- engagement of youth
- ability to be present - in present
- flexibility
- present alert

other
- funding
- barrier of place
- barrier of logistics
- encourage space to create & wonder
- balance teacher's knowledge of group or facilitators knowledge of space in nature + w/ specific activities
- impact on community
- # of students, needs of students
- post day - clear equipment follow up
- equipment

P.6 cont'd 10/7

quotes

"They seldom get that chance to be alone in the woods."

"ability to present in yourself"

"what you see takes over the whole narrative"

"really important to be in place and make
a connection with the place you're in
and with the nature here and now and → We'll do it
not just on a theoretical level!"

Sustainability

- teaching starting a sustainable lifestyle
- community impact (research)

place

- mobility - mobile nature school
- know area/place
- need a play place
- need a meeting point
- silent trail
- to read nature + identify what is
  special in this place
- accessible
- versatile - different types of nature
  in small areas
- one place vs on the move
  (multiple places)
- have a place to gather (even if on
  the move)
- new gear/place/theme - challenge

① - help youth identify places they
pw   feel comfortable
      and places they can affect
      + impact in all ways

- build a relationship w/ place

- place as a barrier -
  if not nice area
      versatile area

- connect theme to   → connection between place +
  place   theme then settles
  (here, now, today)

characteristics 10/9

flexibility
- ability to change the plan
- to stop be in moment
- spontaneous

reflexivity
- be present in the moment

engagement
present in yourself
in group/youth
are the day
of the place
a variety of _____
connected
joy
in moments

curiosity (engaged?)
- be interested
than youth will
be

foster independence
- give space
- encourage exploration

communication
- with group/youth
parents
teacher

Insight
- ability to read the group
activities
to _____ (needs
- ability to pick up what is
special about the place/
the nature
- to focus on the feelings +
not the curriculum
- reveal beauty of nature

creativity
- out of box thinking
- exploration
- playfulness

leadership (inspire?)
- inspirational
- don't give/have all the right answers
- others
- inspires youth to ask be curious learn
- aha moments

Sensitivity
- to group + dynamics of group
- to place

Interest in nature
- instill ♥ of nature in others
- have a ♥ of nature
- enthusiasm from knowing

Knowledge (competent?) - critical thinking
- youth/teacher feel that facilitator
is competent - abt nature + plants in place
encourage - has a plan - pedagogy
questions - builds on youth knowledge/interests
of place

10/9

Things you do:

Plan - inside/outside
  - exercises/activities/tasks
  - with others (teachers, principals, youth)
  - Day/schedule   - to let youth lead
  - have one
  - to have an experience
  - time (management)

Develop - curriculum
  - themes
  - materials
  - routines

Update/check curriculum   suitability
  themes
  person

Test, develop + practice program (diversity of program)

Inspire - more time outside in youth
  - engagement in new experiences
    in new places (fire, nature)

Breathe
Laugh/have fun   Use nature's tools

Learn by doing   Slow down, be observant
                       alert

Know - place/area
  Curriculum
  1st aid/safety
  youth development
  youth plans
  what to expect
  safety

Deliver curriculum (or not)
  phenom based learning experiences

Explore - biodiversity   Evaluate - self
  - nature   youth
  - different concepts   teacher/ other
  - core experiences for learning (not artificial)

Go to places (woods, forest, land, sea, island)
  - before the group goes there
  - ground youth in these places

Set goals - enjoy outdoors   - enjoy
  - feel comfortable   - link to curriculum
  - observe   - know rules, introduce
                                  roles, follow rules

Teach - youth more about nature
  - about sounds/opening senses
  - impact of hiking

Flexibility - leave things undone

Connect - with youth
  - with teacher
  - with place
  - with nature
  - with families
    (encourage continued use)

Learn - from different people
  approaches
  places

Listen - to youth
  to nature
  from the simple
  (nature based way)