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From McDonaldization to Place-Based Experience: Revitalizing Outdoor Education in Ireland

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From McDonaldization to place-based experience: revitalizing outdoor education in Ireland

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ABSTRACT

Outdoor education in Ireland, as in many countries, takes place in a variety of physical locations ranging from urban to wilder, minimally human influenced environments. Irish public outdoor education providers have traditionally placed little emphasis on cultural understandings of the places where learning occurs. Moreover, outdoor education commonly demonstrates characteristics of a McDonaldized experience as opposed to a place-based experience. This paper explores two topics that may help to explain why place is not to the fore in teaching and learning in Irish outdoor education practice: historico-cultural relationships with the land, and the impact of the rationalisation of place on outdoor education. We approach this conversation from the belief that places, as well as people, can teach and that a more conscious pedagogical engagement with place encourages deeper, richer learning experiences. We conclude this paper by outlining how a more place-focused practice may be developed in (Irish) outdoor education.

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to critically explore place as a component of Irish outdoor education in terms of the degree to which place-based approaches are integrated into general practice. The term *outdoor education*, as it is being used in this paper, refers to the network of public Outdoor Education and Training Centres and services across the nation. Participants at these centres include primary, secondary, and tertiary students, groups from youth services and voluntary organisations such as Scouts. Although some school-age participants engage in activities that are explicitly linked to formal curricula such as biology or geography field trips, the majority of participants have attended these centres for the purpose of ‘teaching sport or technique’ (Hannon & O’Callaghan, 2020, p. 51).

However, the most recent strategic plan for public outdoor education in Ireland, under the aegis of the ETBI (Education and Training Boards Ireland), highlights four key pillars of sustainability education, health and well-being, inclusion, and enhanced learning (ETBI, 2022, p. 13) which, at a policy level, suggests a broader and more multi-faceted mission than teaching outdoor sports or activities. In considering the ETBI’s key pillars, we would like to suggest that place-based approaches would offer much to support the outcomes it is hoping to achieve through outdoor education. The tendency for outdoor education in

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anglophone Western cultures to place an increasing emphasis on adventurous activities in closely controlled environments (e.g. Beames et al., 2012, Loynes, 2002) is well documented.

Adventure, often synonymous with risk and broadly understood as the pushing of personal boundaries of vaguely-defined comfort, is conceived as the prime catalyst for learning and development. Roberts (2012) provides a clear example of how a focus on adventure, in this case through a ropes course (a series of man-made obstacles that are on or above the ground) may detract from learning. Such courses can be 'tightly bounded (in both time and space), rationally constructed, and efficiently controlled' (Roberts, 2012, p. 97) allowing for a repeatable learning *product*. This can lead to a situation where, after experiencing a number of procedural learning events, students react to the scripted nature of the experiences with similarly scripted responses to placate the educator—all they have to do is mention trust or communication and it is seen as learning and/or reflection (Roberts, 2012, p. 98). Such reductive and abstractive approaches to outdoor education tend to encourage processes of commodification and McDonaldization (Beames & Brown, 2014, Beames & Brown, 2017, Loynes, 1998, Varley, 2013) and diminish the possibility of more nuanced, generative educational outcomes (Loynes, 2002).

Place-based, or place-responsive, approaches to outdoor education provide opportunities to counteract the problematic assumptions of risk as enhancing learning (Brown, 2008, Brown & Fraser, 2009), and of abstracting learning from the surrounding social context (Fenwick, 2001, Seaman et al, 2017). Outdoor education practice with a place focus can also counter both the overlaying of a universalised approach to outdoor education which ignores the particularities and value of the past and present human, and more-than-human, inhabitants of a given place (Brookes, 2002, Lugg, 2004, Mullins et al. 2016), and rationalised processes tending towards less learner-focused and more teacher-centred practices (Hovelynck, 2001).

Hannon's (2018) interviews with pioneers of Irish outdoor education, between 1966 and 2000, led him to observe that, '[d]iscussions of "place" or making outdoor education responsive to the socio-cultural context in which it is located didn't feature strongly' (p. 203). These pioneers had an adventure sports background in the main, both in terms of their own personal experiences, and also their professional training (Hannon, 2018). However, it is interesting and, from our point of view, encouraging to note that although Hannon (2018) highlights an absence of place-focused outdoor education in Irish provision, he also remarks upon his outdoor education interviewees' strong personal connection to place. In this paper we explore the reasons specific to Ireland for the absence of place-based or place-responsive (Brown & Wattchow, 2016, Mannion & Lynch, 2016) approaches to outdoor education. In analysing this absence and in suggesting a greater role for 'place' in Irish public outdoor education we hope to encourage more outdoor educators to include aspects of place-based learning in their practice and facilitate richer, deeper learning experiences.

What is place?

Place as an intellectual concept has roots in the disciplines of geography and anthropology. The political geographer, Agnew (1987), distinguishes between place as location (geographical position), locale (physical shape and characteristics), and sense of place (affective attachment and relationship that people have to place). The notion of place can also be understood in terms of a dialectical relationship with space (Yi Fu Tuan, 1977) whereby place is characterised by specificity, familiarity, security and stability, and space connotes broad horizons, movement, freedom, and possibly threat. Space can become place through pausing to experience its particularities; through a growing familiarity. A homogenous space can transform into a 'place as we get to know it better and endow it with value' (Horton & Kraftl, 2014, p. 268).

Place and space are not dichotomous—more a nuanced co-extensive scope of relations (Lynch, 2020) within which people and places 'are not separate processes but one and the same' (Ingold, 2000, p. 149). Boundaries between the two may be blurred and graduated. A sense of place can consist of distinct yet interwoven historical, cultural, political and economic aspects (Goodman, 2023,

Gruenewald, 2003). Human culture shapes, and is shaped by, geographical context (Gruenewald, 2003), and the development of a socio-cultural relationship with place 'often occur[s] in the presence of significant others' (Kyle & Chick, 2007, p. 211). Kyle and Chick go on to show that meaning and connection attributed to a place 'are reflections of cultural and individual identity' (p. 212). To interpret either culture or place without some reference to the interwoven relationship between the two ignores the uniqueness afforded to place through culture.

The meaning of place is made more complex in contemporary society due to the global mobility available and the diminished rootedness to any particular place that can accompany such mobility (Relph, 2008). The development of a sense of place requires time and familiarity in order to develop ties of emotional, sensorial, and relational depth. Augé (1995), has suggested those living in super-modernity, are increasingly existing in 'non-places' (p. 78)—self-contained, solitudinous locales such as airports or motorways which are the antithesis of the unique particularities and human and more-than-human relational possibilities associated with place. It is now possible for more people to visit more places than at any other time in history. The repetitive 'drudgery' (Relph, 2008, p. iii) of being limited to a single place is being increasingly replaced by existence within space and non-place. If place is indeed 'relational, historical and concerned with identity' (Augé, 1995, p. 77) and is concerned not with 'locations but histories' (Ingold, 2000, p. 219) then we can see that how we interact with the spaces or places we are in, can have a profound effect on what and how we learn.

Place and outdoor education

The concept of place, and the associated historical, social, and symbolic meanings of place, has enjoyed much discussion in contemporary outdoor learning theory (Baker, 2005, Beames & Brown, 2016, Beames et al., 2012, Henderson & Vikander, 2007, Sobel, 2013, Wattchow and Brown, 2011). Outdoor education has historically sought out Romantic spaces where individuals can reimagine themselves against a backdrop of the unknown. Experiencing the 'blank canvas' (Nairn & Kraftl, 2016, p. 3) of new and unfamiliar spaces can be helpful in providing a context for imagining transitions and new beginnings. And, indeed, space becomes place through interactions that create attachments that affect us and the place through an ongoing process of becoming or development—the more we engage with and learn or work in a place, the more we may value it (Brown & Wattchow, 2016, Massey, 1999, Wattchow & Brown, 2011) and perhaps recognise the possibility of its agency as a co-teacher or co-author (Jickling et al., 2018).

The concept of place is relevant in outdoor education as doing some form of activity in place(s) is integral to learning (Ingold, 2000, Woods et al., 2021). An understanding of the complexity of place and the history of place is needed for outdoor education experiences to be considered place-focused. Both space and place are useful in outdoor education as lenses that can aid students in understanding the world around them as well as any specific, or emergent, goals stemming from an experience, educational or otherwise.

The near absence of the concept of place in Irish public outdoor education practice (Hannon, 2018, Lafferty, 2023, Pierce, 2020) is notable as nature or the environment is mentioned in the majority of Irish definitions of outdoor education (Rice, 1997, Outdoor Education Ireland, 2005, ETBI, 2015). As Relph (2008) states, place is attractive to human experiences, more so than space—if outdoor education practitioners are not intentionally creating opportunities for students to value the space/place they are learning in, then the potential learning may be reduced considerably.

The current strategic framework for Irish public outdoor education (ETBI, 2022) claims that 'learners develop a sense of place and belonging to their local, national and global community, with a deep connection to the natural world' (p. 7), though no evidence to support this claim is provided. This issue is not specific to Irish public outdoor education, with Mannion and Lynch (2016) highlighting the under-researched and often overlooked role of place in outdoor education more generally. This paper's exploration of place in Irish public outdoor education is a starting point for place to receive greater recognition as an important pedagogical tool of practice and research in Irish

outdoor education. One means of doing this would be to see nature as a co-teacher (Jickling et al., 2018). To achieve this, it may be necessary to become ‘accountable to places’ (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 641; see also Orr, 2004) in a pedagogical sense, to ‘journey towards belonging’ (Wattchow & Brown, 2011, p. 196).

Beames and Brown (2016) reason that every place offers something that can be learned, some connection(s) to curricula, and they ask educators and students alike to constantly wonder ‘*what can I learn here?*’ (p. 59, emphasis in original). One impact of not giving time to place-based education can be what Sobel (1999) termed ecophobia, or a sense of disconnection from, and powerlessness to effect positive change in, the natural world. There has been some challenge to the long-accepted disconnection hypothesis (Hickman Dunne, 2022, O’Malley, 2014, Riley, 2020). Perhaps part of this issue could be the lack of acknowledgement in the literature more generally that some people have more of a connection, or relationship, with urban landscapes than natural, rural places. Further research into whether current outdoor education practices in Ireland acknowledge learners’ differing levels of familiarity with natural/rural and urban places is recommended. This would be particularly useful for outdoor education for school groups.

Though potentially under-researched, the idea that opportunities for school-going students, internationally, to learn about the place they live is rooted in outdoor and environmental education literature (Beames & Brown, 2016, Sobel, 2013, Waite & Pratt, 2017). In the Irish curricular context, the Social, Environmental, and Scientific Education curriculum (Geography, Science, and History) for primary students includes a focus on a sense of place and space in an active and engaging manner (Department of Education and Science, 1999). For a more detailed historical analysis of environmental education in the Irish primary curriculum, see O’Malley and Pierce (2023).

Beames et al. (2012) describe four zones of outdoor education, starting in the school grounds, and moving outward to use the local neighbourhood, day excursions, and overnight trips (such as residential outdoor centre visits or expeditions). Outdoor education in Ireland relies heavily on day and overnight trips and does little in relation to engagement with students on school grounds and/or in local neighbourhoods. Perhaps it is not ecophobia, but rather an eco-unfamiliarity that affects our relationship with and use of place(s). If so, outdoor education may be missing a key learning element in not engaging with students in their local environments. This aligns with O’Malley’s (2014) finding that young people do have a connection with nature, it is just not the same as that of previous generations due, in part, to (sub)urbanisation and the more digital world that young people have grown up in more recently.

Urban outdoor education is not a new idea, with Daugs (1978) proposing numerous ways and means of learning ecology outdoors through what you might ‘expect to find on a wall or in a crack in the pavement’ (p. 319). Wals (1994) showed that inner city students in Detroit could ‘see nature in their own neighborhood, even though some of it could be called back-alley nature’ (p. 184). More recently, Monbiot (2020) decried the lack of such an ‘ecological education’ (para 13) in society and sees outdoor education as a necessary means of re-engagement with local environments, urban or rural. That is not to say that learning outside the classroom is some sort of panacea or should replace traditional indoor learning. Indeed, as Beames et al. (2012) maintain, the focus should be on ‘good teaching—wherever it takes place’ (p. 112).

Such good teaching was to the fore when, in 1966, the first Irish outdoor education project was launched. One educational avenue explored was through the local community and Trant (2007) found that the local neighbourhood was ‘increasingly being regarded as part of the educational facilities of the school’ (p. 53). Such sensitivity to place is important as an intimate connection to place has been found to be an essential aspect in accounts of valued outdoor experiences (Mannion & Lynch, 2016, Waite & Pratt, 2017). Outdoor practitioners can aid students in developing an intimate connection to place through a long-term, ongoing, and constantly developing relationship with the environment in question (Jickling et al., 2018, Wattchow & Brown, 2011).

Place and Irish culture

The sensitivity of relationship to place in Irish outdoor education is at best unrecorded beyond the initial outdoor education project started in the 1960s. Here the local places and community around the participating Dublin schools were integrated into, at least some of, the learning experiences of students (Trant, 2007). The cultural socialisation associated with such learning experiences imbues the local space with a social value, creating a place where students can learn together (Loynes, 2001). Such social and cultural place and meaning making is balanced against the value the individual attributes to a space, as each person will interact with spaces and places differently (Loynes, 1999, Loynes, 2001). The quality of any learning experience, in a space or a place is often charged positively or negatively, and can change over time (for more, see Macnaghten & Urry, 1998).

The relatively late industrialisation of Ireland, which stifled the romanticising of the Irish landscape in Irish society (Hannon, 2018) has had some impact on the interaction with and attitude towards place in Ireland. British colonisers and visiting tourists tended to see the Irish landscape through sublime eyes, yet the locals did not have the same appreciation. A lack of leisure time or interest in the landscape, as a result of not going through an industrial revolution, coupled with their colonial history, meant that the Irish people were more aware of impoverishment and oppression than sublimity (Bell, 1993). The 'intimacy with nature' (Lysaght, 1997, p. 442) that was once present in Ireland had, through famine, deprivation, and a loss of the old Gaelic vernacular, been silenced (Pearse, 1905, Coolahan, 2016).

For example, an exploration of the Irish language shows how closely connected the Irish people were to the land and that this intimacy is still 'contained within the land, and . . . the best way to access it is through the language' (Magan, 2020, p. 7). Magan goes on to show how a study of the Irish language can reveal deeper truths about the Irish people and their inter-relatedness with the landscape. Also, the natural landscape was so fundamental to Irish culture that the letters of Ogham, the first Irish alphabet (from at least 1,500 years ago), were named after the native trees (MacCoitir, 2003). Indeed, the ancient Brehon laws, which recognised the practical and environmental benefits of trees, included a number of controls on damaging or felling trees that you did not have a right to use (Kerrigan, 2020).

This highlights the cultural relativity (Beames et al., 2019, Pike & Beames, 2013) of Ireland's history compared to its close neighbours in the UK. Graham (1997) highlights the competing, socially constructed narratives of place, situated 'in particular social, historical and political contexts' (p. 7). One such context is the 'de-industrialisation and agrarianisation' (Share, Corcoran, & Conway, 2012, p. 48) of Ireland, by the British in the nineteenth century. Prior to the Act of Union, which came into force on NaN Invalid Date NaN, Ireland had industrialised and rationalised processes in linen, milling, and wool production, as well as being a global player in food markets (Share, Corcoran, & Conway, 2012, Kerrigan & Mills, 2021). The progressive and enlightened ancient Brehon laws, which recognised the need to live in harmony with animals and the land, had withstood the onslaught of colonisers and progress from Christianity, the Vikings, and the Normans (Kerrigan, 2020). The loss of control of the land and how it was used as a result of colonisation may have contributed to a loss of identity, and hence relationship, with the land. This lack of 'active engagement with the constituents of their surroundings' (Ingold, 2000, p. i) could provide some insight into why Irish public outdoor education is not overly place-focused at present (Hannon, 2018).

As a former British colony, part of the reason for this lack of sensitivity to place in Irish society could lie in the struggle out from a colonial past to connect with local places (Hannon, 2018, Lugg, 2004). Reasons put forward for this lack of engagement with place include the influence of the Catholic Church, which stepped into the void left by the British leaving after Irish independence (in 1922) and allowed for little change to the status-quo. Recreating in the countryside was, up to the time of independence, the realm of the landed gentry and British rulers (Hannon, 2018, O'Malley, 2014). As a result, when it came to promoting a national identity for the newly formed Irish Republic, interacting with the landscape, and hence knowing places, was side-lined in favour of the Irish

language, music, and Gaelic games (Graham, 1997). One result of this side-lining of place and environmental education was that whole generations of Irish citizens did not receive any formal education in terms of landscape and the environment. If it was to happen it was 'by osmosis' (O'Malley, 2014, p. 202).

This lack of engagement with place, or the environment in general, is furthered in Hannon's (2015) study where he interviewed 10 key figures in the development of Irish outdoor education. He found little emphasis or focus on place or the environment and recommended that there is a need to 'raise awareness of the unique and special "place" in which Irish outdoor education is operating' (Hannon, 2015, p. 4). One contemporary issue that may be insightful on this point is the rationalisation and commodification of the outdoors (Loynes, 1998, Beames & Brown, 2016).

The rationalisation of place in outdoor education

The links between place and the rationalisation and commodification processes of neoliberalism internationally are noteworthy as we have moved from landfull programmes (Baker, 2005), to a 'landlessness' (Leopold, 1966, p. 210) practice. Relph (2008) notes that '[t]o be oneself [and hence to learn] one has to be somewhere definite' (p. 44). In this sense, decontextualized, or ready-made outdoor education programmes may not be overly effective. As an example, a recent study (Loynes, 2020) suggests that 'mapless [and compassless] navigation is differently place responsive' (p. 13) and allows students the opportunity to engage with the landscape in a more holistic, and landfull, fashion.

Another example of a rationalised landscape, related to the previous mapping point, is how the systematic nature of the Ordnance Survey mapping in the nineteenth century 'froze the cultural landscape' (Feehan, 1997, p. 587) and took control of place names away from local populations. Crowley (2006) echoes Feehan's earlier point arguing that the protected status of specific areas such as National Heritage Areas, implicitly suggests that areas outside of those protected sites are not as valuable.

Relph (2008) also comments on the origins of his work on place stemming from rationalised and commercialised views of the landscape. A standardised and efficient approach to place and education blur any distinction between place and placelessness, allowing for rationalised and commodified practices to become more widespread (Orr, 2004, Relph, 2008). A rationalised, globalised, world, as Orr (2004) sees it, seeks 'homogenized solutions that work against cultural and ecological diversity' (p. 162)—the more we try to develop universal solutions to control environmental problems, including educational initiatives, the less likely they will be able to take into account local place(s). Applying Relph's (2008) ideas on rationalism and the landscape to outdoor education practices, if the balance between place and placelessness has been tipped towards the latter, efficient and repeatable programmes may be the result. These types of programmes can reduce the influence of place on the learner's experience. Perhaps a more subjective approach is needed, that has a distinct focus on the aims of the group and how these can be met in *this* place.

The commodification of Irish place(s) is not new, with rural Irish towns being marketed as centres for health and restoration from the mid-nineteenth century, and more recently as matchmaking centres (Foley et al., 2011). Kneafsey (1998) notes the financial ties between the east coast cities of America and the west of Ireland going back as far as the sixteenth century. These global-local narratives are a key feature of commodification and globalisation. Ritzer (2007) coined the term *globalisation* to highlight the negative effects of such cultural hybridisation. The term is an amalgam of *grow* and *globalisation*, and manifests through processes like McDonaldization. Globalisation describes the 'imperialistic ambitions of nations, corporations, organizations, and the like and their desire, indeed need, to impose themselves on various geographic locations' (Ritzer, 2007, p. 15).

McDonaldization is the adoption of the principles of a fast-food restaurant namely efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control, by other sectors of society (Ritzer, 2019). Healy and McDonagh (2009) see McDonaldization in the Irish landscape through the creation of 'pseudo-

landscapes that are efficient, calculable, predictable, and controlled: a far cry from the wild, untamed, raw beauty from which it has grown' (p. 389). There is a contradiction here in Ireland being known for its mystic landscapes and traditional way of life, yet at the same time being potentially disconnected from place, culturally and educationally.

This disconnection from place can also be seen in the 'Disney-fication' (McManus, 1997, p. 93), the sanitisation or making superficial (Bryman, 2004), of Irish culture and tradition by the 'heritage industry' (Kneafsey, 1998, p. 113). One manifestation of this can be seen in heritage sites focusing on attractive and less controversial aspects of heritage to ensure visitors stay long enough to eat in the restaurant and buy souvenirs in the gift shop (McManus, 1997). This 'selling of Ireland's culture as a commodity' (Markwick, 2001, p. 37) overlooks, for example, the famine, and resulting mass emigration, that led to the depopulation of the countryside, which allowed for the romanticising of the landscape by colonial powers and tourists (Hannon, 2018). Another potential consequence of rationalised, or McDonaldized (Ritzer, 2019), systems is that they can breed objectivity into practice, which may not allow for the subjectivity of place, and individuals or groups to be fully recognised in practice (Relph, 2008). Counter to this movement by the heritage industry, the National Museum of Ireland (2020) offers an unbiased, warts and all, view of Irish history and culture, free of charge.

Ireland's commodification entails a complex and continuous reworking of marketing myths over time' (Markwick, 2001, p. 47), where the nostalgia of the Irish diaspora is commodified and represented 'by a past that may never have existed' (p. 47). This can lead to contested social identities and a lack of connection with place (Foley et al., 2011). Hannon's (2015) finding of a lack of awareness of the landscape in the values of Irish outdoor educators is easier to understand in this context. Having no real romanticised conception of the landscape as a society, and a complex, and, at times, confused connection, through commodified media campaigns selling a fabricated product of Ireland, there is little scope for an uncontested and agreed understanding of place in Irish outdoor education. This lack of 'situationality' (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 4), or the awareness of differing significance of place (to both practitioners and students) within Irish outdoor education diminishes the opportunities for including nature as a co-teacher within practice.

The tight structural models, and centrally controlled rationalisation processes, like McDonaldization, through industrial development, media influence, and increased economic prosperity can lead, in this instance, to places becoming 'devoid of distinctive substantive content' (Ritzer, 2007, p. 36). Rationalisation can lead to less and less distinction in products, services, or places, resulting in homogenisation. One impact of this can be seen in numerous options in terms of choice, though very little, if any, discernible difference *between* choices. Bringing this back to Irish outdoor education, this would mean that although there may be a number of different centres to choose between, in distinct locations, the experience may be very similar. Ritzer (2007) defines such homogenisation, as *nothing*, as opposed to *something* that is 'rich in distinctive substantive content' (p. 38). Beal and Smith (2010) highlighted the dynamic between a rationalised *nothing* and a distinct *something* in a big wave surf company, as a part of the 'experience economy' (Varley, 2013, p. 38). The same distinction can be made for Irish places; the more rationalised each place becomes, the greater chance there is of losing the distinction between places and moving towards a homogenised, globalised nothing (Ritzer, 2007, Spillman, 2017). Such homogenisation can cause the 'death of cultures and the destruction of authenticity' (Healy & McDonagh, 2009, p. 382).

Irish society does not appear to identify with one agreed description of Ireland as a place or places; there appear to be many versions available. Grounding outdoor educational practices in local place may be essential in constructing deeper learning experiences, and a more meaningful, authentic relationship with place (Beames & Brown, 2016, Roberts, 2012, Wattchow & Brown, 2011). How can Irish outdoor education be grounded in place if the sector, and society in general, does not have an agreed appreciation for the nuanced, and distanced, relationship between the Irish people and the landscape they inhabit?

Conceptual frameworks like McDonaldization reflect the patterns of rationalisation within society (Beames & Brown, 2017, Spillman, 2017) that can lead to 'placeless standardization' (Williams & Peach, 2018, p. 425); '[a]s a society, we are less and less comfortable in our localities' (Peters, 2011, p. 16). Similar themes have been raised in Australia, another former British colony. The adoption there of universalised outdoor education has been questioned with Brookes (2002) seeing such decontextualised programmes as flawed, where places rich in culture are seen as "empty sites on which to establish social or psychological projects, or merely as examples of more abstract realities such as 'the environment'" (p. 406). Lugg (2004) argues that the predominant focus on imported, rationalised activity in such 'blinkered' (p. 10) outdoor education can leave outcomes relating to the environment as incidental.

Coming back to Ireland, comparable questions to those asked by Brookes remain unanswered. As space can become place through naming (Cresswell, 2015, Lysaght, 1997), not naming (or mentioning) place, as the interviewees in Hannon's (2015) study do, can make it a space again due to the diminished value attached to it (Horton & Kraftl, 2014, Massey, 1999). In practical terms, seeing the land as empty space, and not cultural places, can allow for confused identity and limited learning (Wattchow & Brown, 2011). If Irish practitioners are working in spaces, or empty, neutral, sites, and focused on the activity in question, any environmental, cultural, or curricular learning may cease to be effective beyond developing technical adventure sports skills.

This rationalisation and homogenisation of place can also be seen in the language we use in these adventure sports. White-water kayaking is a good example as there has been some critical examination here highlighting the sometimes arrogant, conquering focus of the nomenclature of white-water kayaking (Thomas & Thomas, 2000). Wattchow (2007) shows the 'adversarial quality of confrontation with the rapid' (p. 14) through terms such as shoot the rapid, or punch through the stopper. Such an approach may limit the possibility for a deep and caring relationship to develop between the student and the environment (Thomas & Thomas, 2000).

Such rationalised, risk and adrenaline focused, outdoor education may not have 'the social and ecological imperatives of our times' (Wattchow & Brown, 2011, p. 28) in mind. Perhaps the acceptance of marketplace language in mainstream education (Trant, 2007, Pierce, 2020) and outdoor education (Loynes, 1998) has also aided the proliferation of McDonaldized practices. More time may need to be spent questioning the role of risk and adrenaline in Irish outdoor education and exploring more authentic learning opportunities 'to avoid mistaking the thrill of taking risks with learning' (Wattchow & Brown, 2011, p. 39).

This idea of focusing on learning may be significant. Along with potentially emphasising risk in outdoor education (Brown & Fraser, 2009, Wattchow & Brown, 2011), do we also conflate teaching with learning? Lave (1996) challenges the tendency in educational research to investigate teaching when interested in learning. Seeing learning and teaching as one and the same can take the 'teacher out of teaching ... [and take] learner's learning out of the picture' (Lave, 1996, p. 158), making space for teaching to become prescriptive and a matter of 'master[ing] knowledge created by others' (Smith, 2002, p. 586). This conflation of teaching and learning could be a productive avenue for further research in outdoor education.

One example, relevant here to the discussion of place, is how the situated, social, nature of learning can be marginalised when teaching, and not learning, is the focus (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The point here is that the experience of where the learning occurs and who is learning is at least as important as the teaching itself. Being more concerned with teaching methods more so than learners and *their* learning, in outdoor education practices may lead practitioners to adopt the 'didactic teaching methods that it set out to be an alternative for' (Hovelynck, 2001, p. 4). Recognising and using place as a co-teacher may be one means of moving outdoor education away from didactic and prescriptive teaching and refocusing practice on learning and what the student needs to learn successfully.

Estes (2004) highlights a number of inconsistencies in so-called student-centred approaches to outdoor education, including the belief embedded in society that teachers are authority figures that should control learning. Outdoor education practices can be very much teacher-centred, with much

of the information processing coming from the teacher rather than the learner. This inconsistency is further developed by Stan (2009), who found that the traditional controlling or detached facilitation styles of outdoor educators are ineffective and that for teaching to be effective the practitioner must share in, as Lave (1996) would agree, a socially constructed learning process with the student group.

There appears to be a lack of student agency and autonomy in both teaching and learning experiences outdoors. That is, if student learning experiences are pre-prescribed and controlled through teacher-centred methods, there is little room for students to negotiate, or make their own decisions and to be responsible for their actions (Ord & Leather, 2018). Highly technical adventure sports activities bring with them 'externally imposed risk and the necessary management strategies [that] can undermine internal decision-making and learners' sense of agency' (Brown & Fraser, 2009, p. 70)—learners are no longer part of the decision-making process. It is possible to resist being 'controlled by an unseen puppeteer' (Beames & Brown, 2016, p. 64) through awareness of our actions, and creativity in allowing students time and freedom to learn through more emergent, and less algorithmic experiences (Loynes, 2002). We also need to be cognisant of 'whose experience it is' (Chapman et al., 1995, p. 243)—the teacher's, or the learner's?

Conclusion

In closing, place has received little focus in Irish (public) outdoor education research. There is a confused, and complex, relationship, or lack thereof, with the landscape in Irish society arising from cultural and historical issues. These issues include colonisation and famine, as well as the commodification and rationalisation of the landscape. Hannon (2015) found discussion of place and the environment absent when interviewing pioneering figures in Irish outdoor education development. Ideologically this is somewhat challenging. On paper, place and/or the environment are to the fore, though the evidence at both sectoral and societal levels suggests a lack of place-responsiveness in practice. Whilst it may be easy to assume that Irish outdoor education practice has strong connections to the landscape, the analysis here, of some larger societal issues, questions the validity of such a claim.

As Irish public outdoor education practice has been McDonaldized (Pierce & Beames, 2022), with the associated objective approach to practice, perhaps a more subjective approach is needed in Irish outdoor education. A more distinct focus on the aims of a group or individual and how they can be met in *this* place may go some way to bringing place more to the fore. 'Place and placelessness exist in a state of dynamic balance' (Relph, 2008, p. v) and positives and negatives stem from interrelations with place and space. There is potential for Irish public outdoor education to be more than a 'place of placeless parts' (Relph, 2008, p. v) and add to the experience of place for students in more positive and applicable ways. For this to happen, practitioners would have to facilitate learning 'with place in mind' (Mannion & Lynch, 2016, p. 86).

What does this mean for practitioners and programme designers in outdoor education? It may be worth considering how practitioners interact with the places they teach in. As Hannon (2015) noted, the pioneers of Irish outdoor education did have a connection with natural environments but this did not crossover into their teaching practice. Perhaps a reorientation of how place(s) are perceived may be desirable. Hickman Dunne (2022) highlights the different relationship to outdoor environments that outdoor educators and their students may have and urges us to be 'mindful of this disparity' (p. 54). Perceiving places used for outdoor education experiences as inter-related with humans and other organisms, and not just sites for adventure sports experiences, may begin to develop our understanding of place and its role in educating outdoors (Lynch, 2020, Riley, 2020).

This would mean a move away from an anthropocentric worldview, or one that sees humans as more important than other inhabitants of the world. Jickling et al. (2018) argue that change to our 'normal' (p. 51) (anthropocentric) situation is required to avoid 'catastrophic climate change' (p. 52). For outdoor education to play a role in such beneficial change, normal practice(s) may have to be

critically re-examined in terms of anthropocentric and ecocentric leanings (for a more detailed examination of this topic, see Cocks & Simpson, 2015).

There are challenges involved in any major changes to practice. Outdoor education practitioners have had limited engagement with place-based learning throughout their education, and there is an amount of work required to create a road map for implementing such practice. Time and resources to deepen practitioner's awareness of place(s), plan programmes, and meet and engage teachers would also be needed. Lastly, and possibly most importantly, students would need to be asked what they want and how this is relevant to them and their lives in a digital, globalised era.

Orr (2004) suggests that every outdoor learning experience could and should include some engagement with the natural environment beyond the activity or curricular focus. These suggestions may bring practice from being place-ambivalent, towards being more place-sensitive, and eventually place-essential (Mannion & Lynch, 2016). Ingold's (2000) complimentary idea that experience is vital in creating knowledge and that 'the acquisition of clues' (p. 9) that reveal a greater depth of perception to the learner should be to the fore in education as 'keys to meaning' (Ingold, 2000, p. 9) may also be a useful guide for place-based practice.

Mannion and Lynch (2016) also put forward a four-point *Manifesto for Place-Responsive Teaching*. This may also be useful in focusing practice on place:

- (1) I strive to gain an in-depth knowledge of places to inform what I do as an educator.
- (2) I strive to help learners respond with, in and through place-based experiences:
 - (a) Before, during and after educational excursions to places, I strive to help learners gain an understanding and appreciation of places and what is distinctive about them.
 - (b) When appropriate, I bring learners back to the same or similar place to enable a greater depth of response to place.
 - (c) I strive to get learners to make responses that are embodied, cognitive, emotional, aesthetic and ethical.
 - (d) I actively invite learners to respond to selected happenstance, contingent, and unforeseen events encountered in places.
- (3) I strive to harness the distinctiveness of places in my teaching . . .
 - (a) Whether indoors or outside, I facilitate learning in ways that could not be easily replicated in a different place.
 - (b) When teaching outdoors, I facilitate learning in ways that could not be easily replicated in a different outdoor location.
- (4) I invite learners to make their own efforts to create viable and more sustainable responses to place in ways that advances environmental and social justice and equity in their own lives and the lives of others (Mannion & Lynch, pp. 91-92).

North and Harasymchuk (2012) provide an example of how this can be accomplished in a rock-climbing context. They ask three questions that can help to operationalise Mannion and Lynch's (2016) manifesto: What is happening here? What happened here? What should happen here? Such questions can refocus an outdoor experience towards the place the experience is in and away from the technical aspects of the activity. To concentrate on *what has happened here* for a moment, Magan (2022), who notes that post-colonial societies can see the landscape as insignificant, details a multitude of links between Ireland's mythology and the landscape, along with how enriching learning about all of this emplaced knowledge can be. Schmidt (2022) brings this idea of nature as a co-teacher further to include exploring places of ecological ruin—it is not just areas of natural beauty, but all places that can be useful co-teachers. A key point here is that outdoor education should be attempting to 'cultivate new ways of relating to *place* that challenge Anthropocentric frameworks' (Schmidt, 2022, p. 67).

This paper aimed to explore the placelessness of Irish public outdoor education. It is clear that this is a complex and contested area, though developing our critical awareness of place as an essential

aspect of outdoor education practice may expand the potential benefits of outdoor education for future students.

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